



ELECTION REPORTING AND DEMOCRATIC DISCOURSE: A MEDIA ANALYSIS OF ACADEMIC STAFF PERCEPTIONS OF THE 2023 NIGERIAN ELECTIONS IN SELECT UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH-SOUTH NIGERIA

¹MBA, Precious Idongesit

²PHILOMENA Umoren

³PROF. MBUK Mboho

^{1,2,3} Department of Mass Communication,
Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, Akwa Ibom State University, Obio Akpa Campus.

Corresponding Author: MBA, Precious Idongesit; mbaprecious726@gmail.com.

Abstract

Elections are fundamental to democratic governance, and the media serve as a critical instrument in informing citizens, shaping opinions, and fostering political dialogue. This study investigated how academic staff in selected South-South Nigerian universities perceived media coverage of the 2023 general elections and examines the subsequent impact on democratic discourse within university communities. Employing a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 450 academic staff across the University of Uyo, University of Calabar, and University of Port Harcourt using structured questionnaire. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were applied, including descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Results indicate that academic staff had extensive exposure to election-related media, considered media coverage moderately credible, and acknowledged its significant influence on discussions regarding democracy. The study highlights the media's pivotal role in shaping political engagement while also noting concerns about bias, sensationalism, and misinformation. Recommendations include enhancing media professionalism, promoting media literacy among academic staff, and fostering collaboration between media organizations and universities to strengthen democratic participation.

Keywords: Media coverage, Academic staff, 2023 elections, Democratic discourse, South-South Nigeria

Introduction

Democracy thrives when citizens are well-informed, governance is transparent, and civic engagement is robust. Elections constitute the primary avenue through which citizens select leaders, influence public policies, and hold elected officials accountable. In Nigeria, democratic development continues to face challenges such as electoral malpractice, political apathy, and the spread of misleading information, highlighting the critical role of the media in providing accurate information during election periods (Ojebode, 2018; Asemah & Edegoh, 2019).

Media platforms—including television, radio, print, and online channels—function as sources of information, watchdogs of electoral integrity, and platforms for public discourse. By highlighting specific events, emphasising certain perspectives, and framing issues strategically, media outlets influence public perception and political engagement (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Entman, 1993). During the 2023 Nigerian general elections, traditional media worked alongside digital platforms such as social media to widely

disseminate information. While this increased access to information, it also raised challenges regarding the accuracy and impartiality of election reporting (Nwabueze & Ebeze, 2020).

University academic staff hold a unique position as intellectuals and opinion leaders. Their expertise allows them to critically assess media content and guide informed discussions on governance and electoral processes. Their perceptions are important because they shape classroom discourse, public debate, and scholarly engagement, influencing broader democratic participation (Dahlgren, 2009; Habermas, 1989).

Despite the media's importance in shaping electoral discourse, limited studies have examined academic staff perceptions of media coverage during elections, particularly in South-South Nigeria. Concerns regarding media bias, sensationalism, and misinformation underscore the need to understand how media narratives influence academic and democratic discourse within universities (Ogbonnaya, 2021; Okoro & Nwafor, 2017).

This study focused on academic staff in the University of Uyo, University of Calabar, and University of Port Harcourt in South-South Nigeria. It examined exposure to media coverage, perceptions of media credibility, and the influence of media narratives on democratic discourse. The study did not include students or the general public, and therefore findings are specific to academic staff within these universities.

This study addresses this gap by exploring academic staff perceptions of media coverage during the 2023 elections in selected universities and evaluating how these perceptions affected democratic discourse within academic communities.

Statement of the Problem

The media are central to democratic societies, providing citizens with the information necessary for informed political decision-making. During elections, media coverage is expected to foster transparency, enhance political knowledge, and encourage active participation. The 2023 Nigerian elections were accompanied by extensive media reporting across television, radio, newspapers, and social media platforms.

Nevertheless, issues such as biased reporting, sensationalism, and misinformation have cast doubt on the reliability of election coverage. Academic staff, as critical thinkers and opinion leaders, is expected to engage with media content thoughtfully and facilitate informed discussions within universities. Yet, empirical studies examining how these staff perceives media coverage during elections and the subsequent impact on democratic discourse are scarce.

This study seeks to address this research gap by assessing academic staff exposure to media, their perceptions of media credibility, and how media narratives influenced democratic engagement within select South-South Nigerian universities.

Objectives of the Study

To examine the influence of election reporting on democratic discourse and the perceptions of academic staff regarding the 2023 Nigerian elections in select universities in south- south Nigeria. The specific objectives were to:

1. examine media reporting influence on democratic discourse among academic staff in selected south-south universities

2. determine the extent of academic staff exposure to media coverage during the 2023 elections.
3. evaluate academic staff perceptions regarding the credibility and impartiality of media coverage.
4. explore the influence of media narratives in shaping political discussions within university communities.

Literature Review

Conceptual Review

Media Analysis: Refers to the systematic assessment of media content, production processes, and communication strategies. In the context of elections, media analysis evaluates how coverage informs citizens, shapes political awareness, and affects participation (Folarin, 2005; Asemah & Edegoh, 2019).

Academic Staff Perception: Describes how lecturers and researchers interpret, evaluate, and respond to media content based on their knowledge and professional expertise. Academic staff act as opinion leaders who influence discourse within university communities and beyond (Dahlgren, 2009).

Media Coverage of Elections: Involves the dissemination and framing of election-related information through multiple channels. Effective coverage informs citizens, encourages accountability, and fosters democratic participation, whereas biased or inaccurate reporting can distort perceptions (Nwabueze & Ebeze, 2020).

Democratic Discourse: Entails rational discussion on governance, policies, and political processes. Universities and media institutions provide platforms for such discourse, fostering informed civic engagement (Habermas, 1989).

Empirical Review

A considerable number of empirical studies have explored the influence of the media on political awareness, electoral participation, and democratic dialogue. These studies provide valuable understanding of how media messages shape citizens' perceptions and their involvement in political processes.

Research findings generally indicate that media coverage plays a vital role in educating citizens about electoral activities and influencing their political attitudes. For example, (Okoro & Nwafor 2017) examined how media coverage affects public perception of elections in Nigeria. Using a survey method, the researchers discovered that exposure to media reports significantly improved citizens' awareness of political issues and encouraged them to participate in electoral processes. However, the study also revealed that the level of trust audiences placed in election-related information depended largely on the perceived credibility of the media sources. While the study highlighted the relevance of the media in electoral communication, its focus was mainly on the general population and did not specifically consider the views of academic staff.

In a related study, Ojebode (2018) investigated the role of political communication and media reporting during election periods in Nigeria. The findings showed that the media functioned as an important platform for disseminating information about political parties, candidates, and electoral developments. Both traditional media and digital platforms contributed to shaping public opinion and promoting discussions about governance and democratic practices. Nevertheless, the study also pointed out that issues such as biased reporting and sensationalized news sometimes weakened public confidence in the media. Although the study provided useful insights, it did not pay particular attention to university environments or the perspectives of academic staff.

Furthermore, Asemah and Edegoh (2019) conducted a study on how Nigerian media frame political issues during election periods. Through content analysis of newspaper reports, the researchers observed that the manner in which journalists present and emphasize certain aspects of political events influences how audiences interpret political developments and evaluate political actors. Their findings suggested that media framing has the capacity to shape citizens' understanding of democratic processes and influence their political judgments. However, the study focused mainly on analyzing media content rather than investigating how audiences perceive and interpret such coverage, especially among highly educated groups.

Similarly, Nwabueze and Ebeze (2020) examined the influence of social media on political participation during elections in Nigeria. The study used survey data to show that social media platforms have increasingly become important sources of political information and spaces for public debate. According to the researchers, these platforms encourage users to engage in political discussions and exchange ideas about governance and electoral matters. Despite these advantages, the study also identified problems such as the spread of false information and politically motivated propaganda on social media. Although the research highlighted the significance of digital media in modern political communication, it did not explore how academic professionals assess the reliability of such information or how it affects intellectual discussions within universities.

In another study, Ogonnaya (2021) explored the relationship between media credibility and public trust during election periods in Nigeria. Using a survey approach, the study revealed that audiences tend to rely more on media organizations that demonstrate professionalism and credibility in their reporting. The research emphasized that public trust in the media is a crucial factor in strengthening democratic participation and encouraging informed political decisions. However, the study mainly concentrated on the general public and did not consider the perceptions of intellectual groups such as university academics.

Taken together, these empirical studies underscore the significant role the media play in enhancing political awareness, stimulating civic engagement, and shaping democratic discussions during elections. They also highlight the importance of media credibility, framing strategies, and accessibility in influencing audience interpretation of political events. Nevertheless, most of the existing studies have focused largely on the general public, social media users, or the analysis of media content itself. There is relatively little empirical research that specifically examines academic staff in Nigerian universities, who often function as influential opinion leaders and contributors to intellectual debates on political issues.

Consequently, this study aims to address this gap by examining academic staff perceptions of media coverage of the 2023 elections in selected South-South Nigerian universities and its implications for democratic discourse. By concentrating on this group, the study provides deeper insights into how media narratives shape political discussions within academic settings and contribute to broader democratic engagement.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by three relevant communication theories that help explain how media messages influence public perception and democratic discussions. These theories are Agenda-Setting Theory, Framing Theory, and Public Sphere Theory. Together, they provide a useful framework for understanding how media coverage of elections can shape the perceptions of academic staff and influence democratic discourse within university communities.

Agenda-Setting Theory

Agenda-Setting Theory was introduced by McCombs and Shaw (1972) to explain the media’s ability to influence the importance that audiences attach to certain issues. The main idea of the theory is that the media may not necessarily dictate what people should think, but they strongly influence what people think about. By giving more attention to certain issues and less attention to others, the media shape the topics that dominate public discussion.

During election periods, media organizations decide which political issues, candidates, and campaign activities receive more attention in news reports. Issues that are frequently highlighted in the media tend to attract greater public interest and become central topics of discussion among audiences. Folarin (1998) posits that the media, through their agenda setting function, determine the issues the public considers important, thereby influencing political awareness and participation. He further argues that a participatory media system enhances citizens’ involvement in democratic processes.

Anyadike (2009) contributes to agenda setting by emphasizing the power of the media to shape how people think about issues, not just what they know. He stated that “the basic principle in agenda setting theory is the ability of the mass media to restructure the audience thinking and perception of events.

Within the university environment, academic staff who regularly follows media coverage of elections may direct their attention and discussions toward the issues emphasized in media reports. For example, if the media focus heavily on electoral malpractice, campaign strategies, or political debates, these topics are likely to become prominent in academic conversations and intellectual debates. Therefore, Agenda-Setting Theory helps to explain how media coverage of the 2023 Nigerian elections could influence the focus and direction of democratic discourse among academic staff in South-South Nigerian universities.

Framing Theory

Framing Theory explains how the media shape the interpretation of events by presenting information from particular perspectives. The theory was further developed by Entman (1993), who explained that framing involves selecting certain aspects of reality and highlighting them in a way that promotes a specific interpretation of an issue.

Media framing determines how news stories are presented, the angles from which issues are discussed, and the aspects of events that are emphasized. During elections, journalists may frame political stories around issues such as electoral transparency, political rivalry, corruption, or democratic accountability. These framing patterns influence how audiences interpret political developments and form opinions about political actors. Further contributions by Gamson and Modigliani (1989) emphasized that the media frames serve as interpretive packages that give meaning to political issues. Similarly, Iyengar (1991) distinguished between episodic and thematic framing, noting that the type of frame used can shape how audiences attribute responsibility for political events.

According to H. de Vreese (2005) framing has both individual-level effects (shaping perceptions and opinions) and societal-level effects (influencing public discourse and democratic engagement). This particularly relevant in analyzing how election reporting affects democratic conversations within academic environments.

In relation to this study, the way the media framed reports about the 2023 elections could shape how academic staff interpret electoral events, campaign messages, and election outcomes. For instance, if election reports are framed around allegations of irregularities, academic discussions may focus more on issues related to electoral credibility and democratic accountability. On the other hand, if media coverage

highlights campaign promises and policy debates, academic discourse may concentrate on governance and development issues. Consequently, Framing Theory helps explain how media narratives influence the interpretations and perceptions of academic staff regarding electoral processes.

Public Sphere Theory

Public Sphere Theory was proposed by Habermas (1989) to describe a social space where citizens can freely engage in discussions about matters of public concern. According to Habermas, the public sphere provides an avenue for rational debate, exchange of ideas, and the formation of public opinion in democratic societies. The media play an important role in sustaining this space by providing information and facilitating communication among members of society.

For Abubakar (2011) this theory holds that the media (old and new) are components of the various avenues where citizens freely participate, communicate and share political ideas and information in a democratic forum. He further adds that other platforms where citizens can participate are clubs, coffee and saloon joints, assemblies and so forth. With the advent of new media technology, political participation and deliberation are now mediated online. Grossman (1996) argues that this development will give rise to “Electronic Republic” where new media technologies are used widely to increase people’s power and influence on the decision of the state.

In democratic systems, the media serve as a bridge between government institutions and the public by supplying information that enables citizens to evaluate political actions and participate in debates about governance. Universities also function as important arenas within the public sphere because they provide an environment where intellectual discussions on political, social, and economic issues can take place.

In the context of this research, academic staff represent a key group within the public sphere because they often engage in critical examination of political events and contribute to informed public discussions. Media coverage of elections provides the information that stimulates these debates within university communities. Therefore, Public Sphere Theory helps explain how media reports on the 2023 elections encourage democratic dialogue among academic staff and influence their participation in political discussions.

Relevance of the Theories to the Study

These three theories collectively offer a strong theoretical foundation for understanding the relationship between media coverage and democratic discourse. Agenda-Setting Theory explains how the media influence the issues that dominate public discussions during election periods. Framing Theory clarifies how the manner in which news is presented affects how audiences interpret political events. Public Sphere Theory emphasizes the importance of open debate and communication in democratic societies and highlights the role of the media in facilitating such discussions.

By applying these theories, this study provides a clearer understanding of how media coverage of the 2023 Nigerian elections shapes the perceptions of academic staff and influences democratic discussions in selected universities in South-South Nigeria.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. This design was considered appropriate because it enables the researcher to collect data from a large number of respondents in order to describe their

opinions, perceptions, and attitudes regarding a particular issue. The descriptive survey approach was suitable for this study as it allowed the researcher to examine academic staff perceptions of media coverage of the 2023 elections and determine how such coverage influenced democratic discourse within university communities.

Population of the Study

The population of the study consisted of academic staff in selected universities in South-South Nigeria. For the purpose of this research, the selected universities included the University of Uyo, University of Calabar, and University of Port Harcourt. These institutions were chosen because they are prominent federal universities within the South-South region and have a large population of academic staff actively engaged in teaching, research, and public discourse. The population therefore comprised all lecturers across various faculties and academic ranks within the selected universities.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A total sample size of 450 academic staff was selected for the study. The sample was drawn using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure fair representation of academic staff across faculties and academic ranks. The stratification helped to ensure that lecturers from different departments and levels such as Lecturer I, Senior Lecturer, Associate Professor, and Professor were adequately represented in the study.

From each university, 150 respondents were selected, making a total of 450 respondents across the three universities. This sample size was considered adequate to generate reliable data for the study.

Instrument for Data Collection

The primary instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher. The questionnaire contained both closed-ended and open-ended questions designed to obtain information on respondents' exposure to media coverage of the 2023 elections, their perceptions of media credibility, and the influence of media coverage on democratic discussions.

The questionnaire was divided into two main sections. Section A collected demographic information such as age, gender, academic rank, and university affiliation. Section B contained questions related to media exposure, perception of media credibility, and the influence of media coverage on democratic discourse.

Validity of the Instrument

To ensure the validity of the research instrument, the questionnaire was subjected to expert review by scholars in the field of mass communication and political communication. Their feedback helped to refine the structure, clarity, and relevance of the questions to ensure that the instrument effectively measured the variables under investigation.

Reliability of the Instrument

The reliability of the questionnaire was tested through a pilot study conducted among a small group of academic staff who were not part of the main study sample. The responses obtained from the pilot test were analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient, which produced a reliability value of 0.82. This value indicated that the instrument had a high level of internal consistency and was reliable for data collection.

Method of Data Collection

Data for the study were collected through the administration of questionnaires to the selected academic staff across the three universities. The researcher personally distributed the questionnaires with the assistance of trained research assistants. Respondents were given adequate time to complete the questionnaires, after which the completed copies were retrieved for analysis.

Participation in the study was voluntary, and respondents were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of the information they provided.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected from questionnaire forms were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques. These included frequency counts, percentages, and tables to summarize and interpret the responses obtained from the respondents. The descriptive statistics helped to present the findings in a clear and organized manner.

In addition, responses from the open-ended questions were analyzed using thematic analysis in order to identify common patterns and themes relating to academic staff perceptions of media coverage and its influence on democratic discourse.

The results obtained from the analysis formed the basis for the presentation and discussion of findings in the subsequent sections of the study.

The data collected from 450 academic staff drawn from three universities in South-South Nigeria: University of Uyo, University of Calabar, and University of Port Harcourt, are presented and analyzed according to the four research objectives of this study using frequency counts and percentages.

Table 1: Influence of Media Reporting on Democratic Discussions

Level of Exposure	Frequency	Percentage
Very High	181	40
High	145	32
Moderate	88	20
Low	36	8
Total	450	100

The findings demonstrate that media reporting of the 2023 Nigerian elections had a strong impact on democratic discussions among academic staff. The overall pattern reflects a high level of influence, suggesting that media content served as a major driver of political engagement within the university environment. This outcome highlights the central role of the media as catalyst for intellectual discourse, particularly among academics who are predisposed to critical analysis of socio-political issues. The prominence of strong influence levels indicates that election reporting did not merely inform but actively stimulated debates, reflections and exchanges of ideas on democratic processes.

Again, the relatively low level of minimal influence suggests that disengagement from media driven discussions was limited. This reinforces the idea that media reporting and coverage functioned as an important platform for shaping conversations, contributing to the development of informed opinions, and enhancing participation in democratic dialogue within the academic community. Therefore, the results

imply that media played a significant role in deepening democratic discourse, aligning with the expectation that informed audiences are more likely to engage in meaningful political discussions.

Table 2: Academic Staff Exposure to Media Coverage

Credibility Level	Frequency	Percentage
Very Credible	92	20
Credible	213	47
Less Credible	104	24
Not Credible	41	9
Total	450	100

The findings indicate a generally high level of engagement with media coverage of the 2023 Nigerian elections among academic staff in the select universities. The dominance of the ‘very high’ and ‘high exposure’ categories suggests that a substantial proportion of respondents were actively following election-related information through various media platforms.

This pattern reflects the intellectual and professional disposition of academic staff, who are typically more inclined to seek information on national issues, particularly those related to governance and democratic processes. The overall trend implies that media content on the elections likely had significant reach and visibility among academics, positioning the media as a key source of political information. Consequently, this high exposure level creates a strong basis for media influence on perceptions, opinions, and the quality of democratic discourse within the university community.

Table 3: Perception of Media Credibility on Election Coverage

Level of Influence	Frequency	Percentage
Very High	175	39
High	142	32
Moderate	95	21
Low	38	8
Total	450	100

The findings reveal that media coverage played an important role in shaping democratic discourse among academic staff. The results suggest that media coverage of the 2023 Nigerian elections was generally perceived as credible among academic staff, as a clear majority expressed confidence in the media to some extent. This indicates that the media maintained a reasonable level of trustworthiness within this intellectually critical audience.

However, the presence of a notable proportion of respondents who expressed reservations about media credibility points to underlying concerns regarding the quality and objectivity of election reporting. This suggests that while the media were largely relied upon for information, they were not entirely free from skepticism, particularly in relation to issues such as bias, accuracy and balanced reporting. This pattern reflects a critical engagement with media content rather than blind acceptance, which is characteristic of academic environments. It also implies that credibility is not absolute but conditional, meaning that the

influence of the media on democratic discourse may be moderated by how trustworthy the information is perceived to be.

Table 4: Influence of Media Narratives on Political Discussions

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Weighted Total	Weighted Score
Influence of Media Narratives on political discussion	186	161	70	33	450	1,410	3.13

In this table, likert scale was adopted to measure respondents' perceptions regarding the influence of media narratives on political discussions within the university environment. This format was deliberately chosen to eliminate a neutral option and encourage respondents to express a definite opinion. The weighted mean score indicate that Strongly Agree (1.69) and (1.07) contributed the most to the overall mean, showing that positive responses dominated. While the Disagree (0.31) and Strongly Disagree (0.06) indicated that fewer respondents held opposing views.

Based on the overall weighted mean score of 3.13, which falls within the decision range of 2.50–3.49, the table concludes that respondents agree that media narratives influence political discussions. This implies that media platforms remain significant drivers of political awareness and discourse within the university environment examined in this study.

Discussion of Findings

The discussion focuses on academic staff exposure to media coverage of the 2023 elections, their perceptions of the credibility of such coverage, and the extent to which media narratives influenced democratic discourse within university communities.

The findings of the study indicated that academic staff in the selected universities demonstrated a high level of exposure to media coverage of the 2023 elections. A considerable number of respondents reported that they regularly followed election-related information through various media platforms. This outcome suggests that academic staff actively engage with political information disseminated through the media, particularly during election periods when political activities attract widespread public attention. The high level of exposure may be attributed to the intellectual orientation of academic staff and their professional responsibility to remain informed about socio-political developments within the country. As members of the academic community, lecturers often participate in analytical discussions on national issues, making them more inclined to seek information about electoral processes and political events. This finding is consistent with earlier studies which emphasize the role of the media as a major source of political information during election periods. It also supports the assumptions of the Agenda-Setting Theory, which posits that the media influence the issues that receive public attention by consistently highlighting certain topics and events.

The study further revealed that most academic staff perceived media coverage of the 2023 elections as largely credible, although a number of respondents expressed concerns regarding bias and sensationalism in some reports. While a substantial proportion of respondents indicated confidence in the information provided by the media, others questioned the objectivity of certain media outlets. This result suggests that although the media continue to serve as an important channel for disseminating political information, perceptions of partiality and inaccurate reporting may affect the level of trust placed in election coverage.

The finding aligns with existing research which indicates that media credibility significantly influences how audiences interpret political information and whether they rely on such information when forming political opinions. The result can also be understood within the context of Framing Theory, which explains that the way media organizations present and emphasize particular aspects of events can shape audience interpretation and evaluation of political issues.

In addition, the findings showed that media coverage of the 2023 elections had a substantial influence on democratic discourse among academic staff in the selected universities. Many respondents agreed that media reports about the elections stimulated discussions and debates on governance, electoral integrity, and democratic values within their academic environments. This outcome suggests that the media not only serve as sources of information but also act as catalysts for intellectual engagement and critical dialogue. Within university settings where academic staff frequently examines national issues, media reports often provide the foundation for discussions that analyze political developments and evaluate democratic practices. This finding reinforces the argument that the media contribute significantly to democratic development by encouraging informed discussions and civic engagement among citizens.

Furthermore, the study established that media narratives played a significant role in shaping political discussions within university communities. The majority of respondents indicated that the issues emphasized in media reports during the election period influenced the direction and content of political debates among academic staff. This implies that media narratives not only inform audiences but also shape the way political issues are interpreted and discussed. When certain topics are repeatedly highlighted in media coverage, they tend to dominate conversations and intellectual discourse within academic circles. This observation supports the propositions of both Agenda-Setting Theory and Framing Theory, which explain how media institutions influence the topics that audiences consider important and the perspectives through which those topics are understood.

The findings also reflect the relevance of Public Sphere Theory, which underscores the importance of open dialogue and the exchange of ideas in democratic societies. Universities function as important arenas within the public sphere where intellectual debates about governance and social issues take place. Media reports provide the information that stimulates these discussions and enables academic staff to critically evaluate political developments. Through such engagement, academic staff contributes to democratic discourse by examining political events and encouraging thoughtful reflection on issues of governance and electoral accountability.

Overall, the findings of the study demonstrate that the media play a crucial role in shaping political awareness and democratic dialogue within academic environments. Academic staff depends on media platforms for information about electoral processes, assess the credibility of election reporting, and utilize media narratives as a basis for scholarly discussions about governance and democratic practices. Consequently, the study highlights the importance of responsible, accurate, and professional media reporting in promoting informed political engagement and strengthening democratic discourse within society.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that the media play a crucial role in shaping political awareness and democratic discourse within academic environments. Academic staff in the selected universities relied heavily on media platforms for information about the 2023 elections and used such information as a basis for intellectual discussions on governance and democratic processes.

The study also shows that although the media remain an important source of political information, there are still concerns regarding the credibility and objectivity of election coverage. These concerns

highlight the need for media organizations to maintain high standards of professionalism and ethical reporting, particularly during election periods.

Furthermore, the study confirms that media narratives significantly influence the nature of political conversations within universities. By determining the issues that receive prominence and the way those issues are presented, the media shape the direction of democratic discourse among academic staff.

The study demonstrates that the media remain an essential component of democratic communication in Nigeria. However, the effectiveness of this role depends largely on the credibility, responsibility, and professionalism of media institutions.

Recommendations

1. Since the study revealed that academic staff rely heavily on the media for election information, media organizations should expand their coverage of electoral processes and provide more in-depth political analysis. This will enable academic audiences to access comprehensive and balanced information that supports informed democratic discussions.
2. Given that some respondents expressed concerns about bias and sensationalism in media coverage, media organizations should strengthen professional and ethical standards in election reporting. Journalists should prioritize accuracy, objectivity, and balanced reporting in order to maintain public trust in the media.
3. Universities should promote media literacy among academic staff to enhance their ability to critically evaluate political information obtained from the media. Media literacy programs, seminars, and workshops can help members of the academic community identify misinformation and engage more effectively in democratic discourse.
4. There should be increased collaboration between media organizations and universities through public lectures, academic conferences, and policy discussions. Such collaborations can encourage deeper analysis of political events and contribute to more informed democratic debates within society.

References

- Abubakar, A.A. (2011). Political Participation and Discourse in Social Media during the 2011 Presidential Electioneering. Paper presented at the *African Council for Communication Education (ACCE) Conference*, Covenant University, Ota, Nigeria.
- Anyadike, R.N.C.(2009). As cited in Uffot, E. (2010). An international journal of language, literature and communication studies, 8(5), 55-67.
- Asemah, E. S., & Edegoh, L. O. N. (2019). Media framing of political issues and its implication for democratic development in Nigeria. *Journal of Communication and Media Research*, 11(2), 45–56.
- Dahlgren, P. (2009). *Media and political engagement: Citizens, communication, and democracy*. Cambridge University Press.
- de Vreese, C. H. (2005). News framing: Theory and typology. *Information Design Journal+ Document Design*, 13(1), 51-62
- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51–58.
- Folarin, B. (2005). *Theories of mass communication: An introductory text* (3rd ed.). Stirling-Horden Publishers Ltd.

- Gamson, W. A., & Modigliani, A. (1989). Media discourse and public opinion on nuclear power: A constructionist approach. *American Journal of Sociology*, 95(1), 1-37.
- Habermas, J. (1989). *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*. MIT Press.
- Iyengar, S. (1991). *Is anyone responsible? How television frames political issues*. University of Chicago Press.
- McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2), 176–187.
- Nwabueze, C., & Ebeze, E. (2020). Social media and political participation in Nigeria: Implications for democratic governance. *Journal of African Media Studies*, 12(1), 89–102.
- Ojebode, A. (2018). Political communication and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. *African Journalism Studies*, 39(2), 67–83.
- Ogbonnaya, L. U. (2021). Media credibility and public trust during elections in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Communication Studies*, 18(1), 112–125.
- Okoro, N., & Nwafor, K. (2017). Media coverage of elections and public perception in Nigeria. *International Journal of Communication and Media Studies*, 7(3), 25–36.
- Wang, X. (2009). Assessing public participation in US cities. *Public Performance & Management Review*, 32(3), 441-462.