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Assessing the Effectiveness of Media Literacy in Zambian Journalism: A Case Study of Feature Articles at the Daily Nations Newspaper (Lusaka)

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Abstract

Information is believed to be the main component in which people's minds and personalities are shaped. As sources of information increase so does the rate at which information is being disseminated. However, one of the most disheartening things is learning about the increase in fake news, attributed to lack of proper understanding and analysis of the context of information, an investigation this study aims to address. This study presents the findings obtained in assessing the effectiveness of media literacy in Zambian journalism, coupled with the research objectives to assess the effectiveness of critical thinking, as measured by the ability to analyze messages and identify biases and stereotypes, to investigate the effectiveness of production skills and media literacy practices in creating effective messages, using

various media tools and technologies among journalists and to examine the effectiveness of civic engagement using media to participate in civic activities, advocacy and community building among journalists. The studies under specific disposition examined the perceptions and attitudes of media literate journalists and their ability to critique and analyze fake news in Zambia. Findings suggest that formal education was less significant in explaining the variation in the identification of fake news, and that source credibility as a criterion for news trustworthiness was insignificant in Zambia. The study further revealed that other than critical thinking, production skills and civic engagement, fact-checking skill is another key factor that influences the capacity for media literacy in Zambian journalists.

Keywords: Zambia, Fake News, Critical Thinking, Production Skill, Civic Engagement in Media Literacy Activities, News Verification

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

A lack of systematic implementation of media literacy assessments is considered one of the major challenges that the field faces. Although many countries in the world require media literacy to be taught curricula, in most places there is lack of clearly assessed activities measuring the public understanding and interpretation of feature articles (Buckingham and Domaille, 2009) ^[3] Luckily, some organizations such as the Association for Media Literacy (AML) in Canada and the British Film Institute (BFI) in England have developed specifications for media literacy frameworks and a few countries like the UK, Australia, and New Zealand have developed specifications of media literacy skills and competencies in their curricula (Buckingham and Domaille, 2009) ^[3].

However, respondents of Buckingham and Domaille (2009) ^[3] international survey conducted by the UNESCO indicated that media education is often included in curriculum documents but that is not assessed by itself (or assessed at all). Overall, Buckingham and Domaille (2009) ^[3] claimed that the lack of structured assessment procedures likely contributed to a lack of status of Media Literacy (ML).

A challenge that may relate to this lack of systematic implementation of media literacy assessments across different regions is that media literacy criteria and outcomes are not always lucidly or clearly defined. For example, Christ (2004) ^[4] claims that the term "Media Literacy" should be more clearly defined and that standards and competencies need to be developed to measure the outcomes of media literacy.

He categorically states that most higher education faculty would claim that they teach media literacy. However, they may not be able to express what they mean or intend to deliver as regards to the term and much less be able to assess it with learning outcomes (Christ, 2004)^[4]. Similarly, Bergsma and Carney (2008)^[2] suggest that media literacy professionals and scholars ‘‘should be more explicit about the media literacy core concepts/skills they include in their interventions, and should more carefully address who delivered the intervention and with what fidelity, in what setting, for how long and utilizing what pedagogical approach’’.

A feature story is basically based on the principle of giving in-depth information to readers and discusses the topic to the fullest in order to enable the general public or readers appreciate and learn something from that particular article. Media literacy is generally understood as an informed, critical understanding of the prevalent mass media, and it involves examining the techniques, technologies and institutions involved in media production; being able to critically analyze media messages and recognizing the role audiences play in making meaning from those messages (Sajjad M, 2008)^[1].

It is a kind of an expanded information and communication skill that is responsive to the changing nature of information in our society. It addresses the skills students need to be taught in colleges and universities, the competencies citizens must have as they consume information in their homes and the abilities workers must have to understand the 21st century challenges of a global economy (Sajjad M, 2008)^[1]. Like traditional literacy, it includes the ability to both read (comprehend) and write (create, design and produce). Further, it moves from merely recognizing and comprehending information to the higher order critical thinking skills implicit in questioning, analyzing and evaluating the information.

According to Hassan B (2023), he noted that a feature story is believed not be written like a news item which aims at only reviewing facts or going direct to the point or just done in a summary way. A feature story is written in a format of slow beginning and a gradual process of establishing the more detailed information on any topic of discussion. Although some scholars, such as Mumba K (2003)^[6] contended in his article that a feature article should firstly ‘meander’ a bit and later comes to the main point of discussion. Indeed a feature story usually does not follow the inverted pyramid style of news story.

A feature story should give detailed information because it is so different from the news story which is being written within a few hours and may only endowed with major facts, while the feature story carries detailed information and it is always length than a news article or story. It is against this back ground that a feature story cannot be written within a few hours. This kind of stories take a lot of time such as a number of days or weeks and sometimes it can take even a month, this is because there are so many things involved in one article including subjects.

Each character in the feature story carries different aspect which needs to be fully narrated (Katherine 2010)^[7].

1.2 Statement of problem

Media literacy is a crucial aspect of journalism, as it enables journalists to critically evaluate information, identify biases and present accurate and balanced reports to the people for

them to make a good decision (Katz, 2020). However, the media landscape in Zambia faces numerous challenges, including limited media freedom, poor journalistic practices, and a lack of media literacy (Moyo, 2019). Studies have shown that, the Zambian journalists often lack the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively evaluate sources, leading to the dissemination of inaccurate information and biased reporting (Chanda, 2017). Furthermore, the increasing and spreading of propaganda, falsehood and fake news in Zambia have highlighted on the need for media literacy training for journalists (Mwewa, 2020). The Daily Nation Newspaper of Zambia’s (one of leading newspapers in Zambia), has significant impact on public opinion and policy decisions (Nation Media Group, n.d.). Nevertheless, a review of feature articles in the Daily Nation Newspaper reveals a lack of in-depth and critical analysis, raising concerns about the newspaper’s commitment to media literacy (Sichone, 2018). Generally, some of the key challenges that need to be addressed include a lack of awareness to the scribes. Journalists need to be made aware of what media literacy is and why it is important to them. There is also a need for more education outreach to help people understand the value of media literacy. There is a digital divide between those with access to technology and those without access (Taylor, 2022)^[8].

1.3 Objective

1.3.1 General Objective

The primary objective of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of media literacy in feature articles published in the Daily Nation Newspaper, a Zambian newspaper which has been in existence for many years.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

1. To assess the effectiveness of critical thinking (analysing media messages, identifying biases, and making ethical and rational decisions) among journalists.
2. To investigate the effectiveness of production skills (creating effective messages, using various media tools and technologies) among journalists.
3. To examine the effectiveness of civic engagement (using media to participate in civic activities, advocacy and community building.) among journalists.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What is the level of critical thinking skills among journalists in analyzing media messages, as measured by their ability to identify biases and stereotypes in news articles?
2. How proficient are journalists in creating effective messages for various media platforms, as measured by their ability to produce engaging and informative news stories for online and print media?
3. To what extent do journalists use media to participate in civic activities and advocacy, as measured by their involvement in investigative reporting and public interest story telling?

1.5 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is based on Media Literacy Theory, which explains how individuals critically engage with media messages, analyze content, and develop informed perspectives on the information they consume. Media literacy, as defined by Potter (2018), is the ability to

access, analyze, evaluate, and create media in various forms. This theory is particularly relevant to journalism, as it emphasizes the skills necessary for journalists to distinguish between factual and misleading information, recognize biases, and uphold ethical reporting standards. The theory asserts that media literacy is not merely about understanding media content but also about actively engaging with media in a way that fosters critical thinking and informed decision-making (Buckingham, 2003).

In the context of this study, Media Literacy Theory provides a framework for assessing the effectiveness of journalists at the Daily Nation Newspaper in applying critical thinking, verifying sources, and producing accurate feature articles. The theory identifies key competencies such as the ability to detect misinformation, understand the role of media institutions, and assess the credibility of sources (Hobbs, 2010). According to Livingstone and Van der Graaf (2010), media literacy is essential for navigating the rapidly changing digital landscape, where misinformation spreads easily. Journalists who lack media literacy skills risk contributing to the dissemination of false or biased narratives, undermining public trust in the media. This study applies Media Literacy Theory to evaluate how well journalists are equipped to critically engage with news content, apply ethical reporting practices, and foster public awareness of credible journalism.

Additionally, Media Literacy Theory underscores the importance of continuous learning and adaptation in journalism. Given the rise of digital media and user-generated content, journalists must be proficient in assessing the reliability of online sources and differentiating between factual reporting and disinformation (Silverblatt, 2014). This study will investigate whether journalists at the Daily Nation Newspaper possess these competencies and how their level of media literacy influences the quality of their reporting. By using this theory as a guiding framework, the study aims to identify gaps in media literacy skills and propose strategies for improving journalism education and training programs in Zambia. Strengthening media literacy among journalists will not only enhance the credibility of news reporting but also empower the public to make informed decisions based on reliable information.

1.6 Significance of study

This study is significant as it provides an in-depth assessment of the effectiveness of media literacy among Zambian journalists, particularly those working at the *Daily Nation Newspaper*. In an era of widespread misinformation and disinformation, media literacy has become a crucial skill for journalists to critically analyze news content, verify sources, and ensure accurate reporting (Buckingham, 2003). The study will help identify the gaps in journalists' media literacy skills, including their ability to assess biases, engage in fact-checking, and use ethical reporting practices. By highlighting these gaps, the study aims to contribute to the development of targeted training programs that enhance journalists' capacity to produce credible and balanced news. This will, in turn, improve the quality of journalism in Zambia, ensuring that the public has access to well-researched and factual news reports (Hobbs, 2010).

Furthermore, this study has policy implications, as it will provide insights that can be used by media institutions, government bodies, and journalism training programs to strengthen media literacy education in Zambia. The study's

findings can inform curriculum development in journalism schools and training workshops, ensuring that journalists are well-equipped to navigate the evolving media landscape (Potter, 2018). Policymakers and media regulatory bodies can also use the findings to implement guidelines that promote responsible journalism and combat the spread of fake news. Additionally, the study can serve as a reference for media houses seeking to develop editorial policies that encourage critical thinking, fact-checking, and ethical reporting. Given that the media plays a fundamental role in shaping public opinion and policy decisions, improving media literacy among journalists will have a broader societal impact, fostering an informed and discerning public (Silverblatt, 2014).

Finally, this study is significant for media consumers, as it highlights the role of media literacy in promoting informed citizenship and public engagement. The proliferation of digital platforms has led to an increase in user-generated content, making it more challenging for audiences to differentiate between credible news and misinformation (Livingstone & Van der Graaf, 2010). By addressing media literacy challenges among journalists, this study indirectly contributes to enhancing the overall media literacy of the public, as journalists serve as gatekeepers of information. A well-informed public is better equipped to engage in democratic processes, hold leaders accountable, and make decisions based on accurate information (Koltay, 2011). Ultimately, the study contributes to the broader discourse on media literacy in Africa, providing valuable insights that can be applied in similar contexts beyond Zambia.

1.7 Scope of Study

This study focuses on assessing the effectiveness of media literacy among Zambian journalists, with a specific emphasis on feature articles published in the *Daily Nation Newspaper*. The study examines how journalists apply media literacy skills, including critical thinking, source verification, and ethical reporting, in their work. The scope is limited to print and digital feature articles, as these provide a more detailed and analytical perspective on news compared to traditional news reports. The study evaluates the journalists' ability to identify biases, detect misinformation, and engage in fact-checking to ensure the credibility of their published work.

Geographically, the study is confined to Zambia, with a particular focus on the *Daily Nation Newspaper*, a major privately owned newspaper headquartered in Lusaka. The selection of this newspaper as a case study is based on its influence in shaping public opinion and the need to assess how well journalists working for a leading media institution apply media literacy principles in their reporting. The study does not extend to other media organizations, such as broadcast or online-only news platforms, though the findings may have broader implications for the Zambian media landscape.

In terms of methodology, the study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. Structured questionnaires, interviews, and content analysis of selected feature articles are used to gather data from journalists and editors at the *Daily Nation Newspaper*. The study is time-bound, covering articles published over a defined period to ensure relevance to the current media environment. While the study primarily focuses on journalists' skills and

practices, it also considers external factors such as newsroom policies, training opportunities, and technological advancements that influence media literacy levels. The findings are expected to contribute to media literacy training programs and policy recommendations aimed at improving journalistic standards in Zambia.

1.8 Operational Definitions of Concepts

Media Literacy – The ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media in various forms. It involves critical thinking skills that enable individuals, particularly journalists, to distinguish credible information from misinformation and make informed judgments about media content (Potter, 2018).

Journalism – The practice of gathering, assessing, creating, and presenting news and information to the public. It includes various forms of media, such as newspapers, television, radio, and online platforms, and is guided by principles of accuracy, objectivity, and fairness (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014).

Feature Articles – In-depth, detailed, and narrative-style news stories that provide background, analysis, and human interest perspectives on a particular issue. Unlike hard news, feature articles focus on storytelling, context, and depth in reporting (Hassan, 2022)^[5].

Critical Thinking – The process of actively analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating information to make reasoned judgments. In journalism, critical thinking is essential for assessing news sources, identifying biases, and ensuring ethical reporting (Paul & Elder, 2006).

Misinformation – False or misleading information that is spread regardless of intent to deceive. It can result from errors in reporting, lack of fact-checking, or misinterpretation of facts (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

Disinformation – Deliberately false or manipulated information spread with the intent to mislead or deceive the public. It is often used as a tool for propaganda, political manipulation, or financial gain (Tandoc, Lim, & Ling, 2018).

Bias – A tendency to present information in a way that is partial or unfair. In journalism, bias can influence the selection, framing, and presentation of news stories, affecting objectivity and credibility (Entman, 1993).

Fact-Checking – The process of verifying the accuracy of claims, statements, or published content to ensure credibility and truthfulness. It is a key practice in media literacy and responsible journalism (Graves, 2016).

Civic Engagement – The active participation of individuals in social and political processes to influence decision-making and bring about change. In journalism, civic engagement includes investigative reporting, advocacy, and using media to promote democratic values (Putnam, 2000).

Digital Divide – The gap between individuals or groups in accessing and using digital technologies, including the internet and media tools. This divide affects journalists' ability to acquire media literacy skills and produce high-quality, fact-based content (Norris, 2001).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Media Literacy Knowledge, Critical Thinking and Understanding

The effectiveness of media literacy in Zambia is often viewed as pragmatic, having a broader share of consumers with different motives. One of the primary major concern is

that the public especially the students are faced with wrong information and as a result, perceptions are ruined with so much negativity. According to Mukamba Clifford (2020), he stressed that the main reason why people find it extremely difficult to read a feature article is due to lack of ability to read, understand, critically analyse and identify biases in the news report before dissemination. Because of the nature of feature articles and their long detailed contents, people often find it boring to read it, and as a result information is not properly disseminated.

In modern society, people depend on the media for information on what is happening in their city, their country and the world. But we are bombarded with information like never before, through conventional news outlets, social media and the internet (University of Manitoba, 2020). Citizens need the skills to read carefully, to assess sources, to look for reliable evidence, and to spot disinformation. This course will teach participants the basics of detecting spin and disinformation, of assessing the validity of news and social media reports, of sorting out the difference between truth and fiction. This will be an introduction to media literacy and a primer on how to identify fake news. It will also discuss the three key ways journalists find out information, and show how these can be employed by ordinary citizens (University of Manitoba, 2020).

The formation of digital literacy among the population is a long-standing problem facing society. The vulnerability of the individual to the World Wide Web is growing along with the Internet development, and the emergence of new Internet media and communication channels. Statistics show the growing number of Internet fraud (Lindel *et al.*, 2020), fake information in the network (Interfax.ru, 2021), deliberate leaks of confidential data via the Internet (Barabanova, 2021). UNESCO claims that media literacy is the most important competence in the modern world and calls for its integration into curricula and the educational process (UNESCO). A lot of modern research is devoted to teaching digital literacy in schools and universities (Shesterkina *et al.*, 2021). For several decades there has been an opportunity to get a higher education in the field of journalism in Russia, which implies the formation of media literacy among students. The research questions are as follows: Does getting a higher education in journalism always mean the development of media literacy and what is the quality of its formation?

Magnus Frostenson and Maria Grefström, analyzing the role of media in representing business in the mass consciousness, came to the conclusion that "the media play an active role in paving the way for changing the predicament of being a company in an environmentally sensitive field of business. The actors – the media but also all others that are taking active part of creating the story over time – are involved through an ongoing and complex interplay. The conditions for how this interaction plays out are shaped by the media logic and the techniques of storytelling" (Frostenson, 2021). Media culture, as (Shakirova, 2020) notes, forms media consciousness. A person with such consciousness lives and acts on the basis of the experience received from the media. We can say that such a person lives by faith; everything that happens around him is seen as the media report about it. Media consciousness is an attribute of the modern post-truth society, in which the media sets the agenda that is trusted. Under such conditions, the issues of media literacy and the skill of critical thinking acquire undeniable relevance.

Media consciousness is supplemented by mosaic thinking, fragmentary knowledge (Kolychev, Simbirtseva, 2016). The semantic links between the streams of different information formats are weak or not established at all. Media literacy is one of the tasks of media education. Thanks to media education, people understand how mass media and information are arranged, how media can be used, how to check published information.

Fedorov (2019), considers media education as a process of personality development with the help and on the material of mass communication (media) in order to form a culture of communication with the media, creative, communicative abilities, critical thinking, skills of full perception, interpretation, analysis and evaluation of media texts, teaching various forms of self-expression using media technology (Fedorov, 2015). Media education can be part of both professional journalism education and any other. In the classroom, you can explain the basics of journalism, the principles of media functioning, the genre system, format features and other issues. Based on Vartanova's definition, media education in the professional field can be understood as the process of teaching future journalists in order to study the organization of the media, their essence, function and typology; as well as the development of media creativity skills (creation, editing of texts and programs for the media) for active participation in media culture (Vartanova, Zasursky, 2003).

2.2 Production Skills and media literacy Practices

Media literacy skills such as production skills and practices in Zambia are recognized as the most significant element in elevating the media literacy level among journalists (Chomba, 2013), as it covers a wide spectrum of consumers. Media literacy often makes people contribute more to the growing concerns of the society by offering knowledge and ideas based on their ability to test the authenticity of information, which according to John K (1999) describes as an information incentive responsibility.

Information is powerful, and if not consumed or disseminated in a more appropriate manner may jeopardize the social interaction among journalists and the society (John K, 1999) and therefore, a need for a more fact-checking skill or media literacy practices is considered to be of paramount importance in the effectiveness of media literacy among journalists. In Zambia, the extent of media literacy is believed to be less than a normal rate.

According to the World Bank Open Data (2024), literacy level stands at 55.3%, with illiteracy much more pronounced in females than males. And further it was revealed that, literacy levels is more associated with education, an ideal incentive that this study further recommends as a policy tool that would help enhance the capacity building on information fact-checking in Zambia. Researchers who have attempted to assess media literacy come from various fields in which a variety of approaches towards assessment are applied. Media literacy generally appears to be assessed in three different ways by media literacy scholars. First, ML is occasionally assessed by measuring separate constructs or outcomes that do not directly relate to media literacy knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The examples include measuring the effectiveness of ML by assessing consumer willingness to use aggression (Byrne 2005), risk factors of eating disorders (Wade, Davidson, and O'Dea 2003), or by measuring constructs such as children's food and vegetable

intake (Evans *et al.* 2006). Second, media literacy is at times measured by assessing selective components, such as perception bias (Vraga *et al.* 2009), perceived realism (Austin and Johnson 1995; Irving and Berel 2001; Kusel 1999; Pinkleton *et al.* 2007; Vooijs and van der Voort 1993), or response to media messages related to smoking (Primack *et al.* 2006; Primack *et al.* 2009). Some researchers and organizations have developed instruments to assess media literacy more holistically (e.g. Arke and Primack 2009)^[15].

Most of the instruments used in assessing media literacy are quantitative in nature, though some researchers also employ qualitative measures. Even though in most cases media literacy is assessed as a whole, researchers usually target specific populations (such as high school students, adults, or teachers) and specific types of media messages (like advertisements or the news). Many of the quantitative measures include self-assessment measures (Chang and Lui 2011^[17], Inan and Temur 2012). In these types of assessments, the participants or respondents were asked to rate their own knowledge and skills. ML is not only assessed by researchers and organizations. It has also been assessed in educational systems, states, and countries across the globe. In many different countries, ML has been integrated in the curriculum or taught as a separate subject in formal school systems. Although it is taught in many different school systems across the world, it is only a substantial and assessed part of the school system in a few countries (Buckingham and Domaille 2009)^[3].

It is assessed on a national level in countries such as New Zealand (Lealand 2009) and the United Kingdom (British Film Institute 2013). In some countries such as the United States, Canada, and Australia it may be measured on a state or province-wide level. In these countries there are wide differences to the extent media literacy is part of the curriculum; this affects the extent to which it is assessed. For example, although Australia is possibly the most developed when it comes to ML, it is assessed differently in different states. In addition, while ML is assessed in a few provinces and states in Canada and the US, it is not taught and assessed in all provinces or states in these countries.

The European ML Study (EMEDUS 2014) recently published 27 reports on formal ML and assessment for 27 European countries. According to EMEDUS (2014), in most countries media literacy is integrated into different subject areas in a cross-curricular way, rather than treated as a separate subject. Examples of countries that have integrated media literacy in a cross-curricular way are: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxemburg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain, and Sweden. Although some of these countries, such as Bulgaria, Slovenia and Slovakia, treat media literacy as a compulsory cross-disciplinary subject, others such as France and Sweden only loosely refer to media literacy in their curriculum (EMEDUS 2014). Interestingly, while many countries teach media literacy in a cross-curricular way, media literacy outcomes are not assessed at all in most of these countries (EMEDUS 2014).

2.3 Civic Engagement in media literacy activities

With mainstream media perpetuating partisan politics and populist rhetoric, there is an increase in vitriolic hate online, spread of sensationalism, and easy dissemination of

misinformation in what has been referred to as an era of “spreadable spectacle” in “post-fact” societies (Mihailidis & Viotty, 2017; Silverman, 2015). In this chapter, we argue that there is an urgent need to counter these divisive forces and toxicity by refocusing media literacy pedagogy and praxis towards social justice and civic empowerment. Going beyond traditional definitions of media literacy as the ability to access, evaluate, and produce media, we expand the notion of media literacy to incorporate social responsibility, critical civic consciousness, and anti-oppression pedagogy. We argue that without a critical media literacy approach that is explicitly aimed at dismantling social injustices and structural inequalities through civic engagement, the participatory power of digital media could be left untouched, or worse, used for furthering fascism, imperialism, patriarchy, and other systems of domination. We end the chapter with some recommendations and guidelines for consideration by media literacy scholars and practitioners.

Contemporary educational paradigms have moved towards active experiential learning through collaboration and mutual respect, using the resources available to them. Critical approaches to literacy place emphasis on legitimizing the cultural and social capital that learners bring to their learning spaces. Instead of passively consuming dominant texts that reproduce mainstream ideologies, this approach focuses less on comprehension and analysis and more on the potential for social transformation and socio-political change (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

Expanding the concept of literacy, digital and media literacies offer opportunities in both formal and informal ways to contribute to fostering the competencies, skills, and knowledge needed for civic engagement. Critical pedagogy helps us reimagine the relationships among media, popular culture, education, and power. Media culture can serve as a learning space for fostering critical awareness, civic consciousness, and identity development. Media literate people are able to identify different agendas including personal, corporate, and political ones and also use media as a tool for civic actions. In identifying the core competencies of media literacy, beyond the traditional definition of media literacy as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and create messages (Aufderheide, 1993), Hobbs (2010) includes the ability to engage in reflection and being active in community. Reflection is defined as “applying social responsibility and ethical principles to one’s own identity and lived experience, communication behavior and conduct” while action is defined as “working individually and collaboratively to share knowledge and solve problems in the family, the workplace and the community, and participating as a member of a community at local, regional, national and international levels” (Hobbs, 2010, p. 19).

These last two aspects of media literacy - reflection and action - emphasize that media literacy should include social responsibility, collaborative work, and ethical considerations in the service of one’s family, workplace, and community at various levels beyond simply for the sake of gratifying individual needs and personal growth. Similarly, Mihailidis (2014) presents the 5A’s framework incorporating access, awareness, assessment, appreciation, and action where civic engagement is emphasized especially in the “action” aspect of the framework. The notion of engaged citizenship is central to civic participation. Traditionally, citizenship has been conceptualized as legal members of a nation-state (see Choi, 2016 for a detailed analysis). However, citizenship is

much more than just a legal or administrative definition in terms of an individual’s relationship to a nation or state. It is about identity and a sense of community. It is a certain mindset and approach to life where one acts in ethical and socially responsible ways towards social justice.

Gozálvez & Contreras-Pulido (2014) discuss various types of citizenship: political citizenship as active participation in public affairs, social citizenship as working towards social welfare of all in a society, economic citizenship as responsible consumption and business activities, ecological citizenship as fostering civic values of environmental sustainability, and global/cosmopolitan citizenship as appreciation for cultural diversity. In today’s ubiquitous mediated contexts, to be a fully active citizen, one should also incorporate media citizenship, where citizens not only have access to media technologies but are provided the skillsets and means to process information and produce content effectively. Digital citizenship has been conceptualized as the ability to use digital media technologies to their full potential through creative expression, economic attainment, political participation, and civic engagement, especially in the context of older adults (Mossberger, Tolbert & Stansbury, 2003).

More recently, Choi (2016) has conducted content analysis about the concept of digital citizenship to uncover the various elements associated with this concept within participatory spreadable convergence media cultures. They delineate four different ways in which digital citizenship is understood and practiced: ethics, media and information literacy, participation/engagement, and critical resistance. Ethical approaches to digital citizenship emphasize how to use digital media in safe, ethical, and responsible ways. The media and information literacy perspective focuses on critical competencies needed to access, analyze, evaluate, and produce media in online contexts. The participation/engagement aspects of digital citizenship includes political participation such as online petitions, deliberations on public policies, and e-voting but also non-traditional micro-forms of civic engagement in everyday activities. Finally, digital citizenship as resistance takes a more critical and radical perspective that challenges existing power structures in online spaces. Within the context of the proliferation of new media technologies in the participatory convergence culture, contemporary critical literacy scholars have to contend with the fact that how individuals learn from media has changed dramatically. Digital citizens today are reading, producing, curating, archiving, repurposing, and recirculating media content, often doing all of these several times a day (Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013).

This participatory media culture within digital contexts is shaping identities, social relationships, collaboration, and community building. Social media platforms have created what is referred to as networked publics (Castells, 2012) that have facilitated both large-scale socio-political movements such as Arab Spring and, but also created a sense of more personal agency in everyday engagement with social causes. Beyond access to digital technologies, media literacy education focuses on overcoming the participation gap (Jenkins, 2006) so that digital citizens can participate fully and engage freely the various aspects of media and technology. As we work to promote active citizenship within the shifting digital environments, we need to use a critical lens to examine how power, privilege, and social

capital continue to be renegotiated in these digital spaces. One of the concerns has been the rapid homogenization of mainstream content and a focus on neoliberal capitalism where trans media digital storytelling has focused much more on global brands rather than on promoting civic empowerment for social justice (Ramasubramanian, 2016). Another issue is the focus on self-promotion and branding at the individual level without using the transformative power of digital new media technologies to foster social change. Media literacy education without a clear civic focus has often facilitated what has been referred to as mecosystem (Interbrand, 2013), which focuses on the individual level of creative expression, self-branding, and self-discovery through media rather than on social justice, political participation, and civic engagement. We argue that from a critical digital media literacy perspective, media and technology should be used as tools to create safe spaces for meaningful dialogue, for re-negotiating and affirming the identities of stigmatized groups, and fostering social transformation.

2.4 Personal critique of literature review

The importance of media literacy in journalism cannot be overstated. As a crucial aspect of democracy, a well-informed and critically thinking public relies on journalists to provide accurate and unbiased information. In Zambia, the media landscape has evolved significantly, with the daily nation being a prominent player. However, concerns about the effectiveness of media literacy among Zambian journalists have raised questions about the quality of reporting.

Research has shown that media literacy is essential for journalists to navigate the complexities of modern journalism. A study by Nyenwda (2019) highlighted the importance of media literacy in identifying biases and stereotypes in reporting. Another study by Mumba (2003)^[6] emphasized the need for critical thinking skills in journalists to combat misinformation. However, limited research has been conducted on the specific challenges faced by Zambian journalists in this regard.

The daily nation, as a leading newspaper in Zambia, has a significant impact on public opinion. A review of their reporting practices and media literacy standards is essential to understanding the broader landscape of Zambian journalism. By assessing the effectiveness of media literacy among Daily Nation journalists, this research aims to contribute to the development of strategies that enhance the quality of reporting and promote a more informed public.

2.5 Establishment of research gaps

While various studies have investigated media literacy among journalists in general (Kingsley, 2010), there is a significant lack of research focusing specifically on the Zambian context. Moreover, few studies have examined the effectiveness of media literacy among journalists in Zambia, particularly in relation to the daily Nation newspaper. This research aims to address this gap by exploring the media literacy skills and practices of Daily Nation journalists, providing insights into the strengths and weaknesses of media literacy in this context. The study purposed on assessing the effectiveness of media literacy on Zambian journalism.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This study will be a descriptive design. Descriptive research is a design used to describe characteristics of a population or phenomenon being studied. Research designs are types of inquiry within qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches that provide specific direction for procedures in a research design. Denzin & Lincoln (2011) have called them strategies of inquiry.

Qualitative research approach will provide an enquiry for understanding a social or human problem based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of information and conducting it in a natural environment.

3.2 Target population

According to Saunders (2007) population refers to full set of groups from which a sample is taken. According (Central Statistical Office of Zambia, 2012), there are about 50 media companies in Zambia and due to cost implications, only one was selected from the entire population for data collection in Lusaka. The Research has selected 60 media journalists and editors.

3.3 Sampling design

The sampling design for this study employed a stratified random sampling technique (Bryman, 2016) to select a representative sample of Zambian journalists. The population of interest consisted of all journalists working at the Zambia's Daily Nation Newspaper and the sampling frame was obtained from the Zambian Media Council's database (ZMC, 2022). The journalists were stratified by media type (print, online, broadcast) and location was centred on urban areas to ensure representation from diverse groups (Creswell, 2014). A random sample of 150 journalists and editors was then stratified from each stratum using a random number generator (SPSS, 2020), resulting in a total sample size of 65 journalists and editors.

3.4 Sample size determination

A total sample of 60 participants was selected for this study, comprising journalists and feature article writers from Daily Nation Newspaper in Zambia. This sample size was deemed sufficient to provide reliable insights into the effectiveness of media literacy in Zambian journalism (Creswell, 2014). The sample size represents approximately 20% of the total number of journalists working at the Daily Nation Newspaper, ensuring a representative cross-section of the population (Bryman, 2016).

3.5 Data collection methods

The researcher will employ questionnaires as instruments of data collection. Semi structured questionnaires will be framed according to the objectives of the research, which will be used as major themes. Each theme will have a number of constructs that will be designed as a way of obtaining primary data so that measurable concepts/variables can be captured. The questionnaires for this study will include both open-ended and closed ended questions. The traditional parts of the questionnaires such as demographic details will be included.

3.6 Data analysis

A mixed research approach of quantitative and qualitative will be used in this study. Creswell (2005) states that mixed methods approach: is a pragmatic worldview, collection of both quantitative and qualitative data sequentially in the design. A qualitative research aims at describing, making sense of, interpreting or reconstructing in terms of the meanings that the subjects express (Thyer, 2001). This method is most suitable for this study to capture stories of respondent's experiences.

3.7 Triangulation

In addition, the study will carry out triangulation which is a process of checking the data collected whether it is correct. Basically, triangulation is a technique that is common in non-quantitative studies. The researcher normally bases their research on a variety of origins of the data (Creswell, 2014). The approach of triangulation is widely accepted in qualitative studies because it strengthens the investigation because of its application of numerous approaches and theories. In this study the researcher will apply triangulation by employing a variety sources in data collection. Firstly, the researcher will employ questionnaires to collect primary data from the respondents. Secondly, the researcher will employ phone call and make some relevant review of literature to ensure that proper triangulation is achieved.

3.8 Limitations of the study

The findings of this study may have to be reviewed in line with some limitations. The first is the size of the sample. The research could go for a larger sample size but because of limited resources, the constraint grew significantly. Therefore, the empirical results reported in this study may not represent a true reflection of the assessment of the effectiveness of media literacy in Zambia. The researcher may experience some difficulties in data collection because of the unwillingness attitude from the respondents to answer certain questions that may seem embarrassing to them. COVID-19 pandemic may also be another limitation that the study may experience because respondents may have mixed feelings in welcoming the researcher for interviews for fear of contracting COVID-19.

3.9 Ethical considerations

Ethical practice is often defined as 'doing no harm.' In this chapter we take the view that we should also aspire to do 'good', in other words to conduct research that benefits participants in positive ways. The ethical considerations in a study are of significance especially the information regarding the participants being key for informed consent White (2003). The study will consider ethics in order to respect the rights and opinions of the research participants. The research will seek prior consent from the Area Councillor. A letter of authorization for data collection will also be sought from Information and Communication University.

The second common assumption in ethical social science

practice is confidentiality in the process of conducting the research and the anonymization of individuals in reporting. These are often linked as though the second, that is to say using pseudonyms in reporting, justifies the reporting of information obtained in confidence.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings obtained were collected through interview and focus group. The questions were developed from the research questions such as (i) what is the level of critical thinking (in analyzing media messages, identifying biases and stereotypes) among journalists? (ii) How proficient are journalists in creating messages using various media platforms, as measured by the ability to produce engaging and informative news stories for online and print media? And (iii) to what extent do journalists use media to participate in civic activities and advocacy, as measured by their involvement in investigate reporting and public interest story telling?

Background characteristics of the respondents

(A case study: of the Daily Nations Newspaper)

This section of the study provides the background characteristics of the respondents based on Gender, Age, years of experience, highest level of Education and the current role at the Zambia's Daily Nation Newspaper.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by Gender

S. No	People by Gender	%
1.	Male	59
2.	Female	41

Source: Field Data by Mulenga (2024)

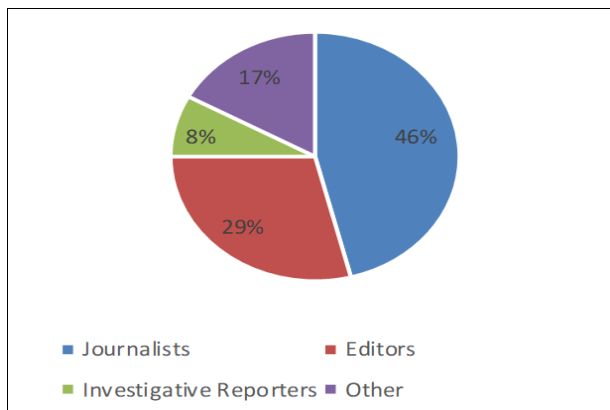
Table 1 above shows the distribution of respondents by Gender. According to the table, 59% represents the number of female respondents while 41% representing the number of male respondents. This shows that the number of female respondents was higher than that of male respondents.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by Ag

Age Range (years)	%
Below 20	13
Between 20 to 40	37
Above 50	50

Source: Field Data by Mulenga 2024

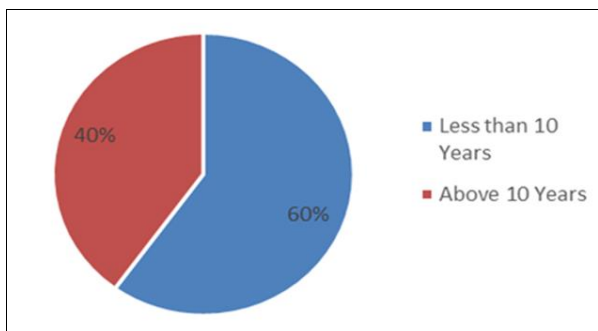
Table 2 above shows the distribution of respondents by Age. According to the table above, it indicates that 13% of the respondents were below the age of 20 years while 50% represents the number of respondents that were between the age of 20 years and 40 years and 37% representing the number of respondents that were above 40 years. This shows that most of the respondents were between the ages of 20 and 40 years. Based on the findings, it can be stated that age was a significant factor explaining the variation of media literacy among journalists at the Daily Nation Newspaper.



Source: Field Data by Bilke Mulenga 2024

Fig 1: Distribution of the respondents by the current role at Daily Nation

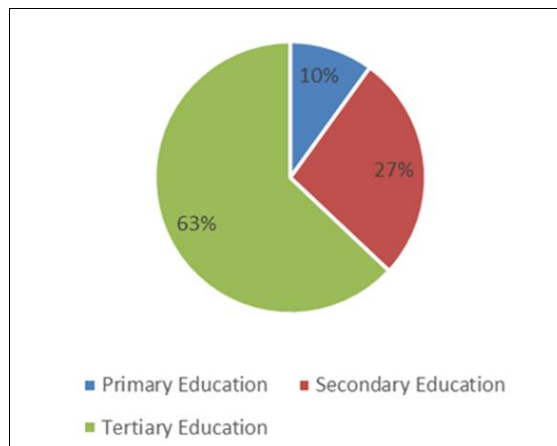
According to Fig 1, 46% represents the number of journalists, 29% representing the number of editors, 17% representing other roles and 8% representing the number of respondents who are investigative reporters. It was observed from the findings that most of the respondents were journalists followed by the editors.



Source: Field Data by Bilke Mulenga

Fig 2: Distribution of respondents by the years of experience

According to Fig 2 above, 60% of the respondents have less than 10 years' experience in journalism while 40% representing the number of respondents with more than 10 years' experience. It was observed during the findings that most of the respondents have less than 10 years' experience, and the level of experience is considered to be statistically significant in explaining the variation in media literacy among Zambian journalists.



Source: Field Data by Bilke Mulenga 2024

Fig 3: Distribution of respondents by the highest level of Education

Fig 3 above shows the distribution of respondents by the highest level of education.

According to the figure, 63% represents the number of respondents that have obtained tertiary education, 27% representing the number of respondents that have obtained secondary education and 10% representing the number of respondents that have only obtained primary education. This shows that the number of respondents with tertiary education was much higher than that of secondary and primary education.

Table 3: Demographics of the respondents

Age (%)	Gender (%)	Occupation (%)	Years of experience (%)	Highest level of education (%)
Below 20 years (13%)	Male (41%)	Journalists (46%)	Less than 10 years of experience (60%)	Primary education (10%)
Between 20 years and 40 years (50%)	Female (59%)	Editors (29%)	Above 10 years (40%)	Secondary Education (27%)
Above 40 years (37%)	-	Investigative reporters (8%)	-	Tertiary education (63%)

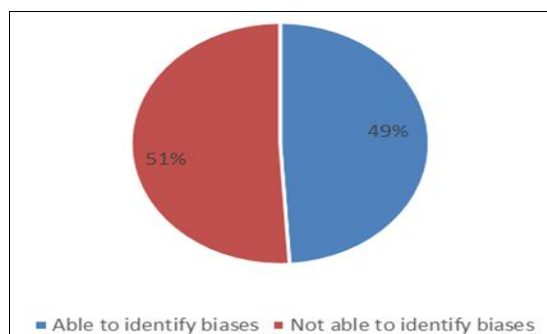
According to Table 3, the data shows that based on the age of the respondents, a large number of them were between the age of 20 and 40 years representing 50% of the total population sample.

It is also observed from the findings that the number of female respondents was slightly higher than that of male representing 18% of the variation in explaining gender and the effectiveness of media literacy in Zambian journalism. Another variable was occupation in which 46% represented the number of respondents that are journalists, 29% representing the number of editors and 8% representing the number of investigative reporters.

The background characteristics of the study included the years of experience in which the respondents with less than 10 years were 60% and 40% represented the number of respondents with more than 10 years of experience. It was further revealed that 10% of the respondents represented the number of respondents that have only attained primary

education, with 27% representing the number of respondents that have attained secondary education and 63% of respondents represented the number of those that attained tertiary education.

Critical Thinking and Understanding of Media Literacy



Source: Field Data by Mulenga 2024

Fig 4: Distribution of respondents by the level of critical thinking and understanding of media literacy

Fig 4 above shows the distribution of respondents by the level of critical thinking and understanding of media literacy among journalists at Daily Nation Newspaper, as measured by the ability to identify biases and stereotypes. According to the data, 49% represents the number of respondents that are able to identify biases and stereotypes, while 51% shows the number of respondents that are not able to identify biases and stereotypes. This shows that the effectiveness of critical thinking and understanding of media literacy is slightly less than what would be required, as the variation increases.

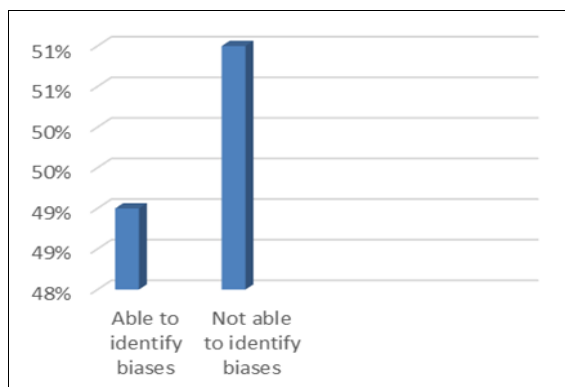


Fig 5: Distribution of respondents by the level of critical thinking and understanding of media literacy.

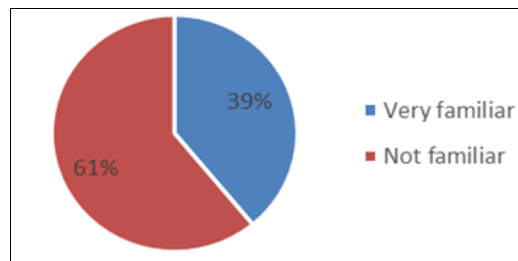
According to the figure above, 49% of the respondents have the ability to identify biases whilst 50% of the respondents at Daily Nation are not able to identify biases and stereotypes in news articles.

Based on the information above, it can be concluded that a large number of respondents are not able to critically think, understand and identify biases. This shows that most people in journalism find it difficult or perhaps do not really understand the concept of media literacy, calling for a robust and deeper understanding of media literacy concepts in order to enable journalists critically think, analyze media messages and identify biases.

Table 4: Distribution of critical thinking and media literacy skills among Zambian Journalists

Age	Frequency	Percentage	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Below 20 Years	12	20%	50	10
Between 20 years and 40 Years	30	68%	55	15
Above 40 years	23	35%	65	13
Gender	Frequency	Percentage	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Male	40	40%	60	12
Female	60	60%	55	10
Level of Education	Frequency	Percentage	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Diploma	20	20%	50	10
Degree	40	40%	55	15
Post-Graduate	40	40%	60	12
Bias Identification		60%	15	
Stereotype identification		55%	12	

The study on assessing the effectiveness of critical thinking among journalists showed that the majority of the respondents for female was 60%, and 45% of these respondents have a degree and post graduate certificates possessing a high skill in identification of biases and stereotypes. Journalists between the age of 20 years and 40 years tend to perform better in bias identification with a mean score=65.



Source: Field Data by Bilke Mulenga 2024

Fig 6: Distribution of respondents by the familiarity of media literacy concepts

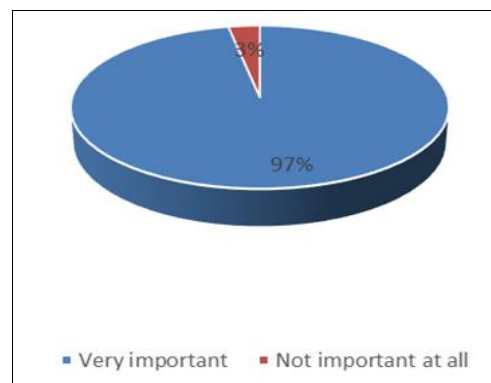
According to Fig 6 above, the data shows the distribution of respondents by the familiarity of media literacy concepts. According to the information above, 61% represents the number of respondents with a strong familiarity on media literacy concepts while 39% represents the number of respondents with lack of familiarity on media literacy concepts.

It was observed from the findings that a large number of respondents are familiar with media literacy concepts, while a smaller proportion shows that a number of respondents have no familiarity with media literacy concepts. This indicates that, journalists that are familiar with media literacy concepts are more inclined in identifying biases and stereotypes.

Table 5: Distribution of respondents by the familiarity of media literacy concepts

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Very familiar with media literacy concepts	25	39%
Not very familiar with media literacy concepts	40	61%

According to Table 5 the data shows that 25 features articles (39%) demonstrated the level of familiarity of media literacy concepts, while 40 feature articles (61%) did not. We therefore, concluded that media literacy concepts familiarity is statistically significant in explaining the variation in the effectiveness of media literacy in Zambian journalism.

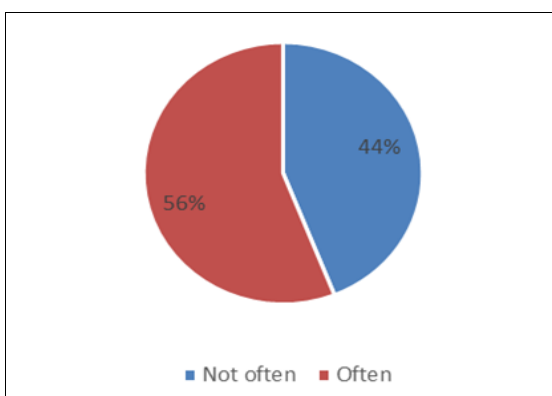


Source: Field Data by Bilke Mulenga 2024

Fig 7: Distribution of respondents by the importance of media literacy in journalism

Fig 7 above shows the distribution of respondents based on the importance of media literacy in journalism. According to the figure above, 97% of the respondents believe that media literacy is very important in the media (journalistic) industry while only 3% of the respondents are of the view that media literacy is not important in Zambian journalism. Based on the findings, we concluded that journalists need to be more equipped and taught the value of media literacy which could help in enhancing media literacy levels, thereby increasing the level of authenticity of information. It is therefore, believed that most journalists understand the importance of media literacy. However, consistence in the ability challenge and identify fake news will help journalists enhance their media literacy levels.

4.3 Production Skills and media literacy practices



Source: Field Data by Bilke Mulenga 2024

Fig 8: Distribution of respondents by media literacy production skills and practices

Fig 8 above shows the distribution of respondents by media literacy production skills and practices. According to the data, 56% of the respondents engage themselves in media literacy practices such as verifying sources, evaluating information bias or other multiple sources, while 44% of the respondents do not get actively engaged in media literacy practices. It was observed from the findings that most journalists do not get involved in production skills and practices, calling for more active participation in media literacy activities and a lot of media activities that would contribute to the enhancement of media literacy among journalists.

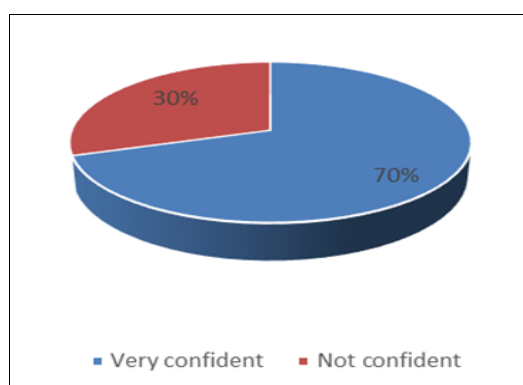
Table 6: Distribution of respondents on production skills and media literacy practice in enhancing media literacy in Zambian journalism

Production Skill	Media Literacy Practice	Frequency	Level of proficiency
Video production	Critical thinking	75%	Intermediate
Audio Editing	Source evaluation	40%	Beginner
Writing media messages	Representation and diversity	60%	Advanced
Graphic design	Visual literacy	50%	Intermediate

The table above shows the distribution of respondents on the production skills and media literacy practice in enhancing media literacy in Zambian journalism.

According to Table 6, journalists that have the ability to produce video production through critical thinking at the frequency of 75% was observed to be intermediate. The other observation was on audio editing taken as a determinant factor in explaining the level of proficiency being a beginner using media literacy practice i.e. source valuation at a frequency of 40%. This indicates that only 40% of the populations of the respondents have the ability to produce audio messages that are effective.

The findings further reveal that journalists skilled in writing media messages giving representation and diversity of various sources as a mean for media literacy practice was observed to be at an advanced level of proficiency collected at 60% frequency level. This showed a quite impressive observation of the level of media literacy in Zambian journalism. While the other skills showed different level of proficiency, the skilled journalists in graphic design produced content that represented an intermediate level of proficiency among journalists in which visual literacy was taken as a significant factor in explaining the level of media literacy in Zambian journalism.



Source: Field Data by Bilke Mulenga

Fig 9: Distribution of respondents by the ability to identify and challenge misinformation with confidence

Fig 9 shows the distribution of respondents by the ability to identify and challenge misinformation with confidence. According to the figure above, 70% of the respondents are confident in identifying biases while 30% of the respondents are not able to identify biases such as verifying sources, evaluation information bias, and fact-checking. It was therefore concluded that a larger population sample of the respondents are confident in identifying and biases and challenge misinformation with confidence.

4.5 Discussion of the research findings

This section of the study presents the findings obtained from the respondents. The section begins by describing the background characteristics of the respondents by Gender, Age, current role at the Daily Nation Newspaper and the highest level of education, following up with the findings generated from the thematic areas such as media literacy knowledge, critical thinking and understanding, production skills and media practices in enhancing media literacy among journalists and civic engagement in media activities, advocacy in enhancing media literacy. A Case study of

Feature Articles at, the Daily Nations Newspaper (Lusaka office.)

The section of the study discussed the findings of the study by providing information based on the questions developed from the research questions and objectives. These have been divided into sub-headings for ease and systematic discussion of the findings. The study interviewed a total of 55 respondents from the Daily Nations Newspaper and the Times of Zambia Newspaper in order to increase the level of validity in the data. However, from the total sample of 55 questionnaires, six were returned, representing 89% success in the data collection. From the findings of the study, it was observed that the majority of the respondents were between the age of 20 and 40 years with the majority of the respondents being males, representing 58% of the total population.

The study reveals that critical thinking and deeper understanding of media literacy among journalists plays a significant role in explaining the effectiveness of media literacy in Zambian journalism. However, the findings reveal that there is lack of clear understanding of media literacy and often journalists do not prioritize critical thinking by analyzing media messages, identifying biases, and making ethical and rational decisions among journalists, calling for an in-depth and proper understanding of media literacy in Zambia.

The study further reveals that production skills and media literacy practices contribute to the effectiveness of media literacy among Zambian journalists, as measured by the ability to create effective messages, using various media tools and technologies among journalists. The study shows that there is a greater need to enhance production skills and media literacy practices among journalists in order to increase media literacy in Zambia, as there is a correlation between production skills and media literacy in Zambian's media fraternity.

The conclusion of the study reveals that civic engagement i.e. using media to participate in civic activities, advocacy and community building among journalists play a crucial role in explaining the variation in media literacy. It was observed from the findings that civic engagement is not statistically significant in explaining the variation on media literacy. Nonetheless, based on the findings, it was revealed that there is little engagement in civic engagement, showing the need for more civic engagement.

5. Conclusions

This chapter presents the conclusion and recommendations of the study. The data collection process generated information that effectively answered the research questions. The study was premised on assessing the effectiveness of media literacy in Zambian journalism. The following were the specific objectives: To assess the effectiveness of critical thinking by analyzing media messages, identifying biases, and making ethical and rational decisions among journalists, to investigate the effectiveness of production skills as measured by the ability to create effective messages, using various media tools and technologies among journalists and to examine the effectiveness of civic engagement using media to participate in media activities, advocacy and community building among journalists.

From the study conducted it was concluded that the age of the respondents was a significant factor in explaining the

variation of media literacy among journalists. Because most journalists are not much familiar with the importance of media literacy in the journalism industry, critical thinking is often not put to action. The study also revealed that critical thinking, production skills and civic engagement among journalists is considered as an important factor in enhancing the level of media literacy in the Zambian journalism industry.

The study further concluded that there is a positive correlation between critical thinking, production skills and practices and civic engagement among journalists in enhancing media literacy in the Zambian journalism. In order for an increase in media literacy rate, journalists need to critically think i.e. be able to analyze media messages, identify biases and make ethical and rational decisions, practice production skills i.e. be able to create effective messages using various media tools and technologies among journalist and engage themselves in civic activities, advocacy and community building.

6. Recommendations

1. The Government should invest more in the education sector to provide better information that will serve the marginalized Zambian journalists to increase their media literacy levels.
2. There must be a deliberate policy of advocacy for media fraternity's literacy education.
3. Sensitization programs to educate the citizens on the importance of media literacy in our society.

7. Acknowledgments

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