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The News We Do Not See: AI, Representation, and Media Literacy in the Digital Age

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Abstract

Digital news consumers encounter hundreds of individual stories yet rarely gain visibility into the broader patterns that shape public discourse. Questions of representation, visibility, and framing often emerge across thousands of articles and over extended periods, making them difficult to identify through ordinary news consumption. This creates a form of media blind spot in which systemic patterns remain largely invisible to readers. This paper explores how artificial intelligence can support media literacy by helping citizens investigate news ecosystems rather than simply consume news content. Using a corpus of more than 73,000 articles published by eight Maltese online news outlets between 2023 and 2025, we developed an AI-assisted framework that analyses representation and sentiment at scale. The system combines large language models, interactive visualisations, and a conversational interface to allow users to explore how individuals and groups are represented across different news sources, topics, and time periods. The analysis reveals persistent gender disparities across the Maltese news landscape. Male figures account for approximately three-quarters of all identified individuals, particularly within politics, crime, and sport, while female figures receive substantially less visibility despite often being framed more positively. These patterns remain relatively stable across the three-year period examined. The paper argues that AI can play an important role in supporting critical media engagement by exposing structural trends that would otherwise remain hidden from individual readers. Rather than replacing human judgment, AI is positioned as a tool for investigation, reflection, and informed participation in contemporary digital news environments.

Keywords: Digital News, Gender, Large Language Models, Media Literacy, Sentiment