

Media Sentiment Analysis:

Unlocking stakeholder and media sentiment to de-risk projects

By Bella Fowler, Associate, Consentium

Contents

- 2 Perception shapes outcomes
- 2 What is media sentiment analysis?
- 3 Why sentiment matters in the Australian context
- 4 The value of sentiment analysis across the project lifecycle
- 5 A strategic advantage for project development
- 5 How Consentium can help

Contact

bella.fowler@consentium.com.au
+61 8 8431 7113



Perception shapes outcomes

What people believe about a company, an industry, or a project often carries as much weight as the facts themselves. It's not just about what the media reports, but how those reports are interpreted and absorbed by the community. That perception reveals priorities and trigger points that determine whether a project is welcomed, challenged, or simply misunderstood.

In Australia, projects in energy, infrastructure, resources, housing and regional development are increasingly shaped by public sentiment disseminated through media and social media. Yet many project teams rely on traditional engagement metrics such as meeting attendance, public submissions, and stakeholder mapping without analysing the broader environment in which their project operates.

Understanding how the community interprets media coverage, and how the media is framing the project is essential for project proponents to understand before they can communicate effectively to their stakeholders. You can't speak meaningfully to a community if you don't understand how they see the world, what they value, and what makes them react.

A comprehensive sentiment analysis across traditional news, social media, online comments, and local digital conversations provides that clarity quickly. It builds a real picture of the environment you're stepping into before you engage.

When applied thoughtfully, it can help project proponents move from reactive communication to informed decision-making.



What is media sentiment analysis?

Media sentiment analysis involves a thorough assessment of how a project, industry, or proponent is portrayed across:

- Traditional media (print, broadcast, online news)
- Local and regional outlets
- Industry publications
- Digital and social platforms
- Opinion pieces, commentary and editorials

Media sentiment analysis is far more than tracking headlines and marking articles as positive, neutral or negative.

It relies on a blend of data driven tools and human critical thinking: understanding the political context of a region, recognising how a community sees itself, interpreting tone, and applying knowledge of how the media sphere operates.

Headlines may appear neutral, which journalistic standards require, but neutrality on the page doesn't mean neutrality in impact.

The lean of a publication, the broader narrative surrounding a sector such as mining or renewable energy, the journalist's reputation, and the local political climate all shape how a "neutral" article is received.

Positive, neutral and negative sentiment categories are just the starting point.

Deeper analysis identifies themes, narratives, influences, patterns of amplification, and shifts over time. It also requires understanding how headlines are measured, shared and interpreted, and how tone differs subtly across outlets and platforms.

Crucially, this work must be grounded in an understanding of the community itself. How do locals feel about their council or state government? Are they active in online forums? Do they tend to mobilise quickly around local issues? These factors shape how narratives take hold.

It is about understanding how narratives form, spread and influence perception, particularly in remote regions where identity and lived experience strongly shape opinion.



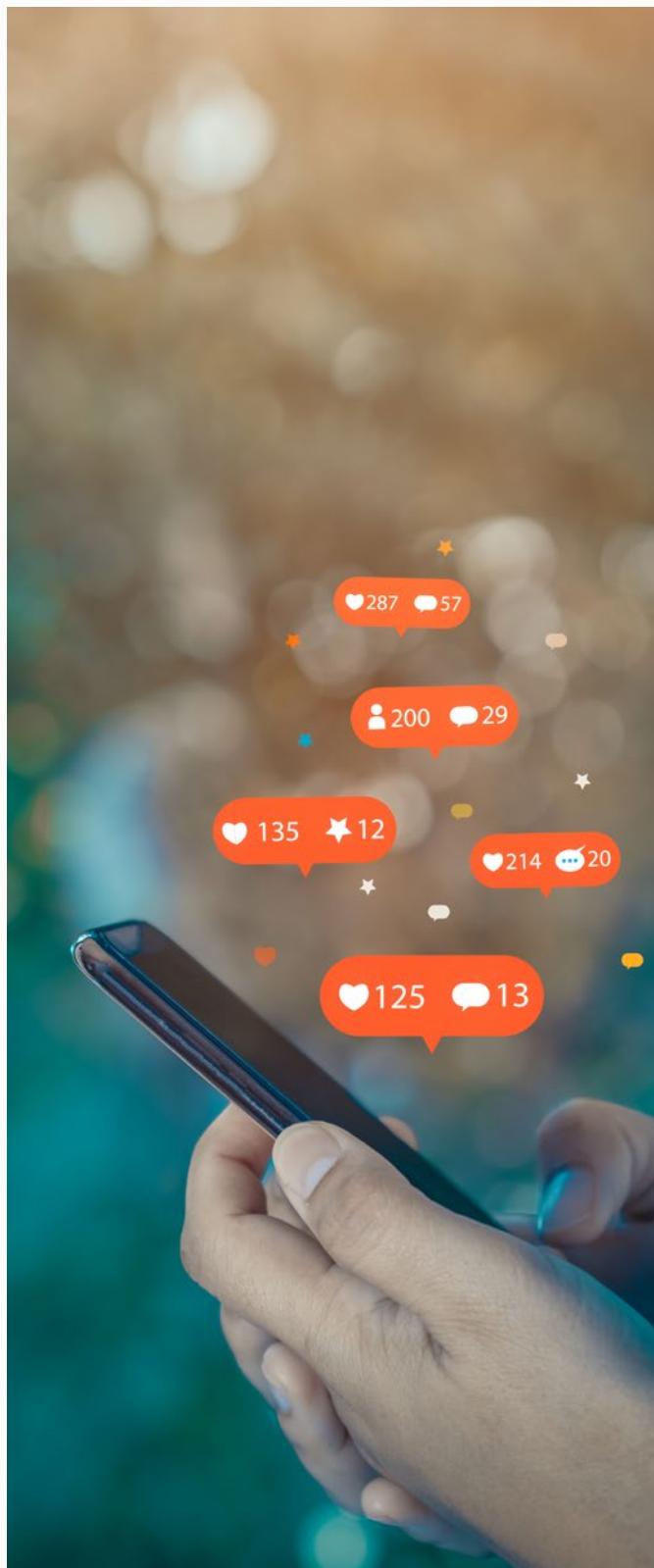
Why sentiment matters in the Australian context

Australia's project landscape has several features that make sentiment analysis particularly valuable:

- **Strong regional identities** where projects are personal to community members, viewed through local history and experience and underpinned by regional pride
- **High media interest and digital amplification** where narratives with wide human interest are shared quickly, and far beyond the region
- **Active community advocacy**, where community members unite and engage with local media to have their voices heard
- **Politicised project environments**, even when projects are privately led, large-scale developments are prone to attracting headlines
- **Growing expectations of transparency and social licence**, where communities expect to be involved in the process

In this context, sentiment does not simply reflect opinion. It can actively shape approvals, political positioning, investor confidence and long-term operations.

Projects rarely fail because of a single adverse article; they falter when negative narratives go unchecked, gather momentum and take on a life of their own within the community. That accepted “truth” isn’t necessarily the result of a media outlet misrepresenting a project. It is shaped by how people interpret and internalise information based on the context of their own lived experience.





The value of sentiment analysis across the project lifecycle

When embedded early and revisited regularly, media sentiment analysis can add value across various stages of a project including the following.

1. Risk identification

Before formal engagement begins, sentiment analysis can reveal:

- Pre-existing attitudes to similar projects or proponents
- Historical grievances or unresolved issues in a region
- Trusted voices and influential commentators
- Language that triggers resistance

This allows teams to enter a community informed, not surprised, and to design engagement strategies that acknowledge context.

2. Supporting stakeholder and community engagement

Sentiment insights can complement traditional engagement by:

- Identifying gaps between official engagement feedback and public discourse
- Detecting emerging concerns before they appear in formal submissions
- Understanding how messages are being interpreted outside the room
- Uncovering interested stakeholders or groups that had not yet been identified
- Revealing where public interest naturally concentrates, and what issues and topics are attracting readers in traditional media

Some project types attract attention because they are politicised, heavily debated and consistently draw an audience, regardless of the specifics of the proposal. Others highlight emerging areas of curiosity or concern, signalling opportunities for proponents to emphasise certain messages or clarify aspects of their project.

This isn't about suggesting that media creates negativity; media reflects and amplifies the information available to it: project descriptions, public statements, websites, spokespeople and community commentary.

3. Informing communications and messaging

Sentiment analysis helps refine communication by showing:

- How information is landing and forming narratives
- Where interpretation may diverge from intent
- When it's time to pivot, adjust tone, highlight a new area of value or step back from one that isn't resonating

In Australia, where scepticism of "corporate spin" is high, this insight is critical. It allows communications to be responsive rather than defensive.

4. Managing political and reputational risk

Public sentiment can influence political behaviour. Elected representatives need to stay on top of local media narratives, particularly in regional and marginal seats.

Regular sentiment analysis can support early identification of politically sensitive issues and enable clients to proactively engage early with government on potentially emerging issues.

Used well, it strengthens relationships with regulators and decision-makers by demonstrating awareness of the broader social environment in which decisions are made.

5. Measuring change over time

Sentiment analysis provides an additional metric of tracking over an extended period of time and allows projects to gain insight into:

- Whether sentiment improved or deteriorated after key milestones
- If a project consultation phase shifted narratives
- If concerns are growing or decreasing

This helps teams assess whether engagement strategies are working or need to adjust.

Sentiment analysis is most valuable when treated as listening, not surveillance, and when insights are used to inform genuine responses, not just better messaging.



A strategic advantage for project development

As projects become more visible and communities more vocal, the ability to understand sentiment in real time is becoming a strategic capability rather than a “nice to have”.

In Australia’s evolving project development environment, success increasingly depends on recognising that approval is not only granted by regulators but earned, reinforced and defended in the public domain.

How Consentium can help

At Consentium, media sentiment analysis is embedded within our broader engagement and risk mitigation approach for development projects. We combine structured data analysis with deep understanding of the Australian media landscape, local communities and regulatory environments.

Get in touch with our team to learn more about how we help our clients use sentiment analysis in the development of the project’s engagement and communication strategy.

Need more help?

Contact us if you’d like to talk about Media Sentiment Analysis in the context of your organisation, via bella.fowler@consentium.com.au or call +61 8 8431 7113.