

MEDIA PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN GOVERNANCE: WHAT HAS CHANGED?

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ABSTRACT: The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which is now ratified by the majority of the world's governments; despite this, women's representation in governance remains abysmally poor. The media have persistently portrayed women in a low status like sex objects, wives, mothers, caregivers, victims and dependants, unlike men who are portrayed as professionals and independent leaders. Again, as men largely control means of communication and women do not have equal representation in the media, these stereotypes have shaped the minds of media consumers negatively about female gender roles in the society and have potentially excluded women from full participation in public life. Taking this into account, this study in search of the causes contends that the poor portrayal of women in governance and positions of authority remain the critical components of low political participation of women in governance. The participants were drawn from a multi-layered cluster of educated women across three cities in Anambra State spread across the three senatorial districts whose ages ranged from 26 to 57 years with a mean age of 38-50yrs. In the design, we used qualitative design which employed the uses of in-depth interview to elicit the opinion of the 19 participants on women's participation in governance while we used thematic analysis to analyze qualitative data. In the result patriarchal system, funding, domestic engagements emerged as the leading constraints which have affected media portrayal of women in governance. Also, discrimination, marginalization, low education and low levels of awareness emerged as themes when the participants were asked about the factors which increase the likelihood of unfavorable media portrayal of women in governance. Considering the consequences, the study recommends a conscientious gender mainstreaming as well as proactive legislation to deepen gender affirmation and inclusiveness in governance.

KEYWORDS: *Gender, women, media, governance, political participation, inclusiveness.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Despite the efforts of global agencies such as CEDAW, the problem of marginalization of women across all sectors abounds. In leadership and governance at all levels women are less represented. It is truism that women around the world at every socio-political level find themselves under-represented in parliament and far removed from decision-making levels (George, 2019). The above situation has been the focus of several efforts aimed at increasing gender emancipation and the reason for inclusion of gender equality as the fifth goal of United Nations' sustainable development goals (SDGs). The situation of women globally may not change except women's voices are heard and are part of the struggle; hence, women's participation in governance is seen as quickest means of catalyzing gender inclusive society.

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) contends that women's equal participation with men in governance, power and decision-making is part of their fundamental right and an index of development (United Nation [UN], 2019). To participate in political life and governance is central to realizing gender equality and women's empowerment. This parity is considered in the light that half of the world's population are women, but today women only hold 23% of all seats in parliaments and senates globally (Chalaby, 2017; Radu, 2018). Strategies to increase women's participation in politics have been advanced through conventions, protocols and international and national agreements for gender mainstreaming, but they are yet to prove effective in achieving gender parity in the highest government rankings (Morobane, 2014).

Women participation in governance is a right; to be part of decisions making which affect their lives and the lives of others (UN, 2019). The patriarchal system vested leadership on the males and relegated women to the domestic level at best, hence less women are seen aspiring to lead and those that do are stigmatized and seen as

some sort masculine with less feminine disposition deserving of a woman. This erroneous attribution of women in political arena and governance as masculine females is not only a component of our patriarchal society but also is embedded in the way the media portrays women in our world.

The media is a powerful tool and medium of communication which leaves long lasting effect on the public (Sharma & Krishnaswami, 2020). The public is vulnerable to the media; and have come to associate information and events passed down through the media as standards of measurement without understanding that these information and events are sponsored by interests. The information passed down through the media is known to exert powerful effects on the thoughts, lifestyle, beliefs, aspirations and future lives of the masses who consume the media production (Fathi & Jafari, 2017). It is not therefore surprising that the media have remarkably portrayed women in every other perspective except deserving of equal chance in governance whether in political appointments or in elected positions.

Perhaps, the many reasons why the general masses have not accepted the equality of women in governance may be because the media have continued to portray women as domestic helpers to their male counterparts, sexual objects as women nudity is more often used for advertisement and above all as weaker vessels who should be protected and be at home with the children (Maryam et al., 2021). The media ownership (private) is largely dominated by males which determine how messages are portrayed through their platform. This is disadvantageous to women and thus encourages more career women to consider media ownership in order for their voice to be heard.

Media portrayal of women especially in the third world can be said to be a misrepresentation of the potentials of female gender. This is because there is this pattern of stereotype trailing women's representation in the media as unequal to their male counterparts; portraying exploitation and marginalization (Carreon, 2017). There is a popular opinion that how the media portray women in film, television and magazines in the last few decades have also seen the growth of gender inequality. In sports and commercial, women, girls are used as sex appeals for different products and service etc. There is an outright economic interest behind the objectification and eroticization of females by media as well as efforts to counter negative stereotyping (Hasin, 2018).

Although, there are genuine concerns which challenge women's potentials such as the long period of gestation, childbirth and rearing etc; however, many women leaders such as the current Director of World Trade Center, Prof. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala have broken such temporal barriers as evidence that with good planning and support women enjoy exceptional performance in governance and public offices locally and internationally. In the light of this, the researchers are of the opinion that positive and favourable media portrayal of women will promote the cause of women especially emancipation from obnoxious cultures which hinder and reduce the potentials of women. Critically, these questions arise:

1. What image do the media portray of the female gender?
2. What are the factors of women marginalization in governance?
3. What media factors are responsible for women inequality in governance?

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Gender Inequality and Call for Gender Emancipation

The marginalization and exclusion of women is a critical civilization problem which grew out from several unbalanced cultural practices which relegated women and their positions in the society and subsumed their roles in those of the males (Kumar, 2018). Globally, more women are facing obstacles in actualizing their dreams and pursuing their careers; for example, women are grossly misrepresented in political participation worldwide (Chalaby, 2017).

In the third world and developing countries such as Nigeria, the situation is worse with more women being vulnerable to male patriarchal dominance (Cheeseman & Dodsworth, 2019). The consequences of women dominance are grave in consideration of the population of women globally; which has actually reduced global potential by almost a half. Sequel to this and in pursuant to an inclusive society, global efforts have been in gazette to help tackle the problem. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women is one of such notable efforts. For example, in the seventh and eighth periodic reports CEDAW decried low political participation of Nigerian women in politics (CEDAW/C/NGA/7-8, 2016). CEDAW's efforts and those of other agencies have been instrumental to the sensitization of women equality in socio-economic-political participation.

Causes of Gender Inequality in Nigeria

Our patriarchal culture is not deniable albeit several efforts to engender equity and equality into our socio-cultural system. In Nigeria, like other third world countries, the antecedents of gender inequality are not limited to low literacy level of women as parents invest less in girl education (Aghauche et al., 2019) and high poverty

index which have seen the sponsoring of women in their chosen careers as a waste of scarce resources (Ozoh et al., 2020). Previously, the developing countries did not place a premium on girl education. Its consequences such as early marriage were grave and devastating as it reduced the potential future women (Ugboha&Namo et al., 2019). Many women at the time only took to petty business and farming which they used to support their families without any clear cut careers (Efobi et al., 2021).

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on the muted group theory. This theory emerged from Edwin Ardener's short essay entitled "Belief and the Problem of Women", in which Ardener explores the problem of women. Cheris Kramarae is one of the main theorists who investigated the muted theory. Cherish Kramarae propounded the muted theory in 1974. According to the muted group, every custom, norm, value, etc. in all societies tends to be to the advantage of men and to the disadvantage of women. We are in a world today where masculinity has an advantage (Asemah et al, 2017). The theory postulated that the mutedness of women in several aspects of life, such as politics, is due to the lack of power; people with little power (women) have trouble giving voice to their perceptions. As a result, they are overlooked, muffled and rendered invisible in governance. According to the theory, women are not always regarded when they find themselves in the midst of men because they are seen as weaker sex. In line with the above assertion, Griffin (2000) noted that when women try to overcome this inequality, the masculine control of communication and governance places them at a great disadvantage. This theory is relevant to this study due to the fact that it helps to explain how women are portrayed in society, giving reason why women's inclusiveness in governance is difficult because of the fact that we live in a male-dominated society where women are muted and are not regarded at all because they are seen as weaker sex.

Method

The participants were drawn from a multi-layered cluster of educated women across three cities in Anambra State spread across the three senatorial districts whose ages ranged from 26 to 57 years with a mean age of 38-50yrs. In the design, we used qualitative design which employed the uses of in-depth interview to elicit the opinion of the 19 participants on women's participation in governance while we used thematic analysis to analyze qualitative data. The researchers ensured that each of the participant have a knowledgeable idea of what media effects are and women participation in governance. This was ascertained by asking some preceding questions before the interview started. Participants responses on these preceding questions determined whether their responses will be used for analysis or not. The participants were informed that it is not mandatory that they give their opinion regarding the topic especially where they feel biased or ill-disposed for it. Their responses were recorded using an audio recording device which was later transmitted into text for qualitative data analysis.

Result

Research Question 1: What image do the media portray of the female gender?

Table 1: Themes from participants' response to media portrayal of the female gender

Interview Guide	Respondents	Emerging themes	Remarks
What image do the media portray of the female gender?	MPW1, MPW4, MPW5, MPW10, MPW11, MPW12, MPW19	Weak, sexual, second class	
	MPW2, MPW3, MPW6, MPW8, MPW13, MPW14,	Pity, lesser than men, sex related	
	MPW7, MPW9, MPW15, MPW16, MPW17, MPW18,	Domestic, dependants, cared for, not strong	

MPW = MMPW = meMMPW= media portrayal of women

Data from Table 1 reveal that themes which emerged from answering research question 1 indicated that overall women's image as presented by the media is not comparable to those of their counterpart males. For instance participants' responses indicated that the media portrays women as depicting sexual property and exploitation whereas other media see women as the weaker vessel to be protected, cared and seen as dependents as weaker beings than their male counterparts. Considering the findings, themes raised are indicative that the media portrayal of women is not favourable for the emancipation of the women gender which is in negation to the encouraging women's participation in governance.

The finding is supported by the findings of Maryam et al. (2021) that the over use of women in media for fashion and beauty has negative consequences on women empowerment. Such usages make women inferior and less deserving of man as they may be seen as sex objects and the weaker sex. Considering that contentions of Sharma and Krishnaswami' s (2020) that media is a powerful tool of communication, the findings as supported by Maryam et al (2021) is accepted because the media presents an illusion of women's potentials as tools for advertisement without establishing that women are also as competitive as their male counterparts. Thus negative media effects on women gender equally affect their participation, selection and appointment in governance psychologically. This assertion is also supported by Carreon (2017) who found that the use of women for corporate advertising amounted to exploitation and misrepresentation of potentials of women.

Research Question 2: What are the factors of women marginalization in governance?

Table 2: Themes from participants' response to factors of women marginalization in governance

Interview Guide	Respondents	Emerging themes	Remarks
What are the factors of women marginalization in governance?	MPW1, MPW4, MPW5, MPW10, MPW11, MPW12, MPW19	Uneven finance, low physical energy, low level of education, domestic engagement	
	MPW2, MPW3, MPW6, MPW8, MPW13, MPW14,	Domination in socioeconomics, early marriage, cultural constraints	
	MPW7, MPW9, MPW15, MPW16, MPW17, MPW18,	Household management, child bearing, poor social influence, financial problems, qualification problems	

MPW = M

MPW = Media portrayal of women

Data from Table 2 reveal that themes which emerged from answering research question 2 include uneven finance which is orchestrated by lack of means income. Earning livelihood may also depend on the one' s education and educational level. There are more chances that educated women are most likely to succeed than their counterparts with little or no education. Problems associated with home management including periods of gestation were also among the themes which were identified as factors of women marginalization in governance. Other themes include cultural constraints and poor social influence.

Findings are in line with the findings of Ugboha and Namu (2019) which established that early marriage has a negative effect on the girl-child's further education which invariably limits the potentials of such child including her future participation in governance and political activity. Also the problems associated with early child marriage such as poverty, cultural constraints and low socioeconomic life was identified by the current study as symptoms of low participation of women in governance. In views of Efobi et al. (2021), these reduce the entrepreneurial capacity and potentials of women including the capacity to participate in governance. In the women empowerment model of Hasin (2018), these challenges must be overcome so that women can reach and actualized their potentials.

Research Question 3: What media factors are responsible for women inequality in governance?

Table 3: Themes from participants' response to media factors are responsible for women inequality in governance

Interview Guide	Respondents	Emerging themes	Remarks
What media factors are responsible for women inequality in governance?	MPW1, MPW4, MPW5, MPW10, MPW11, MPW12, MPW19	Misrepresentation, lack of voice, media ownership problems, unbalanced reportage	
	MPW2, MPW3, MPW6, MPW8, MPW13, MPW14,	Low participation of women in mainstream media, male dominated media, poor coverage of women activities	
	MPW7, MPW9, MPW15, MPW16, MPW17, MPW18,	Poor appraisal of women, lack of funding to sponsor programmes, inequality in media personnel	

MPW = Media portrayal MPW = Media Portrayal of women

Data from Table 3 reveal that themes which emerged from answering research question 3 include; misrepresentation of facts, low participation of women in mainstream media, poor appraisal of women, lack of voice, male dominated media, and lack of funding to sponsor programmes. The finding is indicative that the running of the media platforms has equally contributed in to the problems of marginalization of women which in one way or another have negatively affected the participation of women in governance. Notably, finance, male dominance of media, lack of voice, poor coverage of women activities and male dominated media ownership characterize and influence the typical portrayal of women in governance.

Findings above are supported by Brown-Iannuzzi et al. (2017) which found that socioeconomic status influenced political attitudes and engagements. In the case of women with status affected by socio-cultural practices, the impacts may be higher. Also, social networks, mobility and level of participation in media are correlated of political participation in line with the findings of Kumar et al. (2019) which found that these limit women's potentials especially if there are no self-help groups to increase access and use of public media platforms. In this instance, political participation of women is negatively affected.

Implications of the Study

The current study evaluated media portrayal of women in governance and explored how the image portrayed by media, factors of women marginalization and media factors of exclusion are responsible for low participation of women in governance. Findings indicated that women were portrayed as weaker sex with less abilities and objects of commercial advertisement. Also socio-economic factors and cultural constraints were also highlighted as factors affecting women's participation in governance. The findings imply that low participation of women in governance is both a socio-cultural problem as well as a perceptual problem among the public.

Limitations of the Study

The study focused on media portrayal of women in governance and utilized qualitative method to elicit responses from the participants which were analyzed using thematic method. One of the limitations of this method is its inherent lack of definitive response precision and inherent respondents' bias. The study ensured that the effects of the limitation were controlled to the barest minimum. As per lack of definitive response precision, the researcher asked categorical questions requiring affirmative responses and further asked confirmatory questions to support respondents' answers.

Recommendations

Given the inherent dangers of uneven gender participation in governance which limits the potentials for national development, the study recommends continual revision of national legislation on inclusion of women in governance. There is also the need for women to build robust unions for the actualization of increased participation in governance and political participation.

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