

WOMEN AND BROADCAST NEWS PRESENTATION IN NIGERIA: TELEVISION AS GENDERED

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ABSTRACT

The images of women in the media have had a damaging effect on women's performance and have prevented women from having a significant impact in many key institutions. Women are often under-represented at all levels of government thereby limiting their power. The media in Nigeria have not given women the required space to operate as they should either structurally within media administration or psychologically in the representation of women's images. This study sought to find out how women news presenters have fared in News Presentation in Nigeria. It focused on identifying the factors that affect their job, reasons for the absence of older women in presentation and challenges of mentorship for women presenters. This was discussed in relation to how they have affected women's performance. Attribution theory was used and semi - structured interviews were conducted with 5 female news presenters, 2 female program managers, 3 male news presenters and 2 male program managers from two selected media organizations in Jos namely, Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) Network and Plateau Radio Television Corporation (PRTVC) to enrich the qualitative presentation of data. This study revealed that there is a need for Nigerian women presenters to show sensitivity for a wider range of topics/issues bringing to the fore the perspectives/perceptions women have. Women are also in need of more training and mentorship should not only be encouraged but sustained.

Keywords: Television, News Presentation, Women, News and Current Affairs

INTRODUCTION

The history of women in media and news dates as far back as 1930s with Pauline Frederick who was referred to as the first female anchor. She was the anchor of the controversial radio program "A woman's voice just doesn't carry authority". Another well-known woman was Katie Couric, anchor of CBS weekday network evening news broadcast. Several other women had held key positions in the field of sports reporting, sports writers and editors as well as reporters. Key managerial posts were also held by women like Juliet Joan Buck, the first and only American woman to be Editor in Chief of a French magazine (Creative Skillset, 2014).

In Nigeria, the presence of women came with the establishment of television in 1959 with notable figures like Julie Coker, Vera Ifudu, Sienna Allwell Brown and so on, all from the Nigerian Television Authority, formerly WNTV. Similarly, at the inception of Plateau Radio Television Corporation (PRTVC), faces of Ann Fom, Josephine Pamkate (Late), Vou Dabup, Zainab Khalid etc. graced the screen in continuity announcing, news and current affairs presentations. Several other women have been involved in news production and presentation over the years. While it can be said that some women were not visibly present in front line media, quite a number have taken up positions in both print and broadcast media. The questions this poses are how many women compared to men are actively involved in news presentations and what role challenges are women facing when they present the news?

With the growth in the number of media organizations today, there is a need for an increased expression of women and participation of women in the media content. This is because gender equity was an issue of global concern in the last decade. Gender gaps are evident in political, cultural and social aspects of societal development. Initially in television, for instance, there were not enough female directors, scriptwriters, camera/sound operators and women in technical roles. Also, there seemed not to be enough women on the boards of broadcast companies (Craig and Hallaq, 2019).

In the UK according to Kavanagh (2010), over the last few years, increasing numbers of women have left the main broadcasting companies to set up their own independent companies. There are an increasing number of independent companies run by women, but these are quite small, and they still need the larger broadcasting companies to agree to their programs. In Nigeria, women are yet to fully brace up to this opportunity of setting up their own private broadcast media stations. This implies that the important aspect of women's voices and expressions about their experiences is either not available or insufficient (Asigo & Ndubuisi, 2010).

The media plays an important role in society. They report on current events, provide frameworks for interpretation, mobilize citizens with regard to various issues as well as reproduction of predominant cultures, societies and entertainment (Llanos and Nina, 2011). As such, the media remains an important factor in the promotion of inclusiveness, civic participation and freedom of expression for all persons.

Studies have found that although the number of women working in the media has been increasing globally, the top positions (producers, executives, chief editors and publishers) are still very male dominated (White, 2009). This disparity is particularly evident in Africa, where cultural impediments to women fulfilling the role of the journalist remain (e.g. traveling away from home, evening work and covering issues such as politics and sports which are considered to fall within the masculine domain) (Myers, 2009).

Conceptualization of Key Terms

The media in every society is saddled with the responsibility of informing, educating or entertaining, in order to either publicize or correct society's excesses. Despite the expectations of the media, over the years it has been colored, shaped and influenced by various sentiments and other inappropriate forces at work (Gattol, Ditye, Carbon and Hutzler, 2007). These other forces determine a lot of perspectives the media puts forward. In this paper, the media will be viewed through the eyes of news presenters. The presentation of women is the core focus. The media here is the platform off of which women are made visible to society albeit the world.

Women in the media today have taken their place and space even though they face a lot of challenges especially because of the patriarchal nature of the society we live in. Although women today are in the media, their presence is still not felt in every area or sphere of the media (Mburia and Nyambala, 2016). This paper will look at the role of women in relation to men in their presentation of news and current affairs. It will also look at the role and place of women in the news room highlighting their challenges and potentials.

News presentation is about how the media plays its role of informing society on the past, current or future events. Presentation of news has the power to not only inform society of what to think, but what to think about and to change an individual's perception.

There are most certainly a handful of notable exceptions to the trend of men dominating media and it is important to note that a woman in the anchor seat is more than a symbol; she sends a message to viewers that women can lead a network broadcast – and that matters...this research is about much more than just one woman in an anchor seat, it is about making sure *who* defines the story, *who* tells the story, and *what* the story is about, represents women and men equally. Women are more than half of the population, but we do not see or hear them in equal numbers to men. It is our hope – and our work – to see those numbers reach parity (Craig, 2019).

In this paper, the focus will be on women's visibility in presentations within the media, especially news. The perceptions of women presenters and managers in news and current affairs on the challenges in news presentations vis a vis the media will be considered. The challenges of mentorship and the place for older women presenters will also be discussed.

Statement of the Problem

The media is seen as an important instrument in the promotion of many societal issues. One of these issues is gender equity and the representation of women. However, there seems to be an absence of Nigerian women representation in the presentation of news and public affairs. Although there are more women in key positions in the media today than there were in the past twenty years, it still appears that women are not visible in all areas of the media like their male counterparts. Occupationally, men appear to present and comment more than women do. This challenge forms the focus for the paper. The causal factors for the absence of women in the presentation of news and current affairs was discussed and analyzed.

Objective of the Study

This paper addresses the following objectives in line with the topic in focus.

1. To find out the perception of women in news and current affairs presentation.
2. To identify factors that affect Nigerian women's roles as news and current affairs presenters.
3. To examine if there is a decline in older women presenters versus their male counterparts.
4. To determine the effect of mentorship on women presenter's performance.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on the Attribution Theory. This theory provides a structure for understanding how people explain their behavior and that of others (Littlejohn and Foss, 2009). One important aspect of this theory is that people behave the way they do for a reason. An individual's perception is motivated by reason. Heider, one of the first researchers to write on

attribution, was interested in how one person developed an impression of another (Littlejohn and Foss, 2009). He proposed a three step process for attribution namely: “(1) observation of behavior, (2) determination of whether the behavior is deliberate, and (3) categorization of the behavior as internally or externally motivated” (Littlejohn and Foss, 2009, p.60). This theory is relevant to the paper because it will help to assess how journalists in the media explain the causes of behavior in relation to women’s visibility or presentation. The theory will also aid in discussing the internal (personal) and external (situational) attributions that affect women’s visibility in the media.

METHODOLOGY

The semi – structured interview was selected as the research design for this paper. This research design was selected in order to determine the attitudes, perception and challenges women face in the media. This selected research design was found most appropriate for understanding the knowledge, viewpoints or decision-making processes of specific employees in the broadcast industry. The semi-structured interview is useful for documenting the perceptions of presenters (male and female) and managers who have knowledge of the subject matter along with the challenges of the work process. The semi – structured interview was not restricted to specific questions but allowed room for the researcher to guide and redirect the discussion in real time as information emerged. This method was found most appropriate since it helped to eliminate the archetypal form of relationship between researchers and respondents. It was preferred to the focus group discussion because it provided the opportunity for respondents to freely express themselves devoid of any influence from colleagues or supervisors, on the subject matter. Information for this paper was gathered using the interview guide and a hand held recorder as the instruments for collection of data.

The sampling method used was purposive in nature. Respondents were purposely selected based on their (broadcast) positions (managerial or presenter) in the selected television organisations. Also respondents who cover or present news and current affairs programs were purposely sampled based on their relevance to the study. Therefore, the total population for this paper was 12 respondents. There were 5 female news presenters, 2 female program managers, 3 male news presenters and 2 male program managers in two selected media organizations in Jos namely, Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) Network and Plateau Radio Television Corporation (PRTVC).

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Perception of Women in News Presentation

News presentation is one of the key components of any media organization. It is an oral delivery sometimes supported by visuals. Among the many people who carry out this function are women. They are news reporters, correspondents or newscasters. As news correspondents, they appear in the evening news broadcasts along their male counterparts. But how far have women fared in news presentation over the years?

Despite the widespread movement towards democratization in most countries, it seems like fewer women hold key positions in the media. Okunna (2005) cited in Amobi (2013), asserts

that women are made invisible through the non-representation of their points of view or perspectives of the world. She further submits that even when women do achieve visibility in media content, the manner of their representation reflects the biases and assumptions of those who define the public. Therefore resulting in media agenda, a phenomenon she described as mediated invisibility (Amobi, 2013).

Thomas (2010) while commenting on the BBC's Today Programme, claims that, there are actually more women in presenting because presentations are slightly easier jobs, and women do not need such a thick skin to do them. "I think that presenting Today's Programme is a more difficult job whether you're a man or a woman, and that the program demands a thicker skin of journalists of both genders" (Thomas 2010, p. 1). He further states that the idea of a dearth in the visibility of senior women in news means we struggle to find more than one female presenter in Today's Programme. This was viewed as being worth the debate.

Key findings at a conference on a research which examined 123 programs between November 2013 and March 2014, revealed that, 71% of expert women surveyed said they lacked self-confidence, feared criticism and were worried about being assertive - the 'pushy' syndrome and only 39% of expert women surveyed were concerned about their appearance. Research by media scholars reveal that in Nigeria, for instance, men present an overwhelming majority of the messages in the mass media. Ninety-five per cent of the journalists who reported the news on radio, television and newspapers were male at the beginning of the 21st Century. According to Asigo and Ndubuisi (2010, p.1),

four broadcast stations in Nigeria revealed that, despite some growth in female employment in areas such as programming, the status of women in the broadcast industry in Nigeria reproduces women's subordinate status in the broader society. For every one woman employed in the state radio stations and state and federal television stations, there would be seven male employees. Female journalists are concentrated on the lowest status positions and tend to be relegated to coverage of women and social issues rather than news and current affairs. In terms of people in the news, women are equally invisible, as findings show a very low participation of women in news making.

Implicit in this statement is that women are irreplaceable in the news and even at the point of news making.

Age, Appearance and Women in News Presentation

The issue about the age of women news presenters has been commented on widely. For example in the United States of America, women comprise 43 percent of speaking parts in prime-time TV (Women's Media Center on the status of women in the US media 2014) and those women, were said to be much younger than their male acting counterparts. In the UK, a research done by Creative Skillset shows (2014, p.1)

that more women than men enter the TV industry in their twenties, the women are better qualified academically, work longer hours, do more in-service courses, earn an average £6 700 per year less than men in equivalent jobs, yet they have a 50% chance of being out of the industry by the age of 35. Thus, there is a problem of ageism in the industry – women tend not to get to the very top levels of management because half of them have left the industry by the time they are 35.

On the other hand, in Nigeria, Ghose and Yaya (2018) in their research observed that many Nigerian women at certain ages begin to struggle with obesity and being overweight. This has an effect on their media use. The implication here could be that women in the media who experience similar body changes, could withdraw from the limelight of news and current affairs presentations. The self-image and presentation of a woman is a top priority for many women – women in the media are not excluded from this perception. A report by Nairaland Forum (2015) indicates that although the television industry has improved over the years from the effect of innovation and creativity, there is still a glamorous effect that talented, intelligent, elegant and sexy women have on their viewers. It was observed that most of the women presenters fell within the ages of 30-47 with only three as news presenters, implying an obvious decline of older women presenters in news. Martinson (2014, p.1), in a UK report, raises a similar concern about the whereabouts of older women in news and current affairs as reporters and anchors. She wondered if it was,

something about the way women are expected to continue to look young and glam while men who look like walruses ...somehow gain sagacity and experience? Or is the industry, like so many others, putting up barriers to women and their careers both on screen and off long before they reach the seemingly magical age of 50?

Similarly, research by Harman (2013), the deputy labour leader of the Labour party in the UK, showed that 82% of broadcast presenters over the age of 50 are men. It also showed even though the majority of over 50s in the UK were women, the overwhelming majority of TV presenters over that age were men. This suggests, according to Harman (2013, p.2), that “once female presenters hit 50, their days are numbered”. Although Harman (2013) does believe that the production of these statistics from the broadcasters shows promise and is “encouraging”, she also thinks there is “a combination of ageism and sexism that hits women on TV that doesn't apply to men” (2013, p.2).

Gutgold (2010) cited in Martinson (2014) opines that many newswomen have asserted that their careers have been cut short because of their advancing age. Their male counterparts (anchors) are more than a decade older than their female counterparts and tend to feature longer than women do. Ageism and women in broadcasting is a problem that is still very much alive. A 1998 study in six northern European countries found a similar pattern. It was observed that only 4% of those seen in prime time television were aged 65 and women's share of appearances decreased dramatically in the older age groups. Even in the 35-49 age range, women were less than a third of those who appeared, while just 20% of those aged 50+ were women (Eie, 1998 cited in Gallagher 2002). This pattern seems universal. The 2000 Global Media Monitoring Project covering 70 countries world-wide found that in the 50-64 age group, men were six times more likely than women to appear in the news on television, radio and the press.

According to Irvin (2013), women are still far from equality as they face professional barriers of appearance and age. One study found that although female reporters presenting news stories were perceived as being more credible than male reporters presenting similar stories, male reporters were seen as being more credible persons overall. Another noticeable finding from this study was that although young reporters' credibility was not influenced by age, the older, male reporters were considered to be the most credible reporters (Weibel, Wissmath, and Groner, 2008). Other research found that age impacts the length of news segments: younger

women are often in shorter news segments than other, more experienced female journalists. When comparing older women reporters to their male counterparts in the same age range, one can see the trend that men are able to have longer careers because women become “too old, too unattractive . . . Not sufficiently deferential to men” (Armstrong, Wood and Nelson, 2010, p. 83).

Another disparity between male and female journalists is the level of sexuality they must display in order to be a featured newscaster. A study of cable news programs found that 62% of segments analyzed contained predominately female journalists with high sex appeal. “Specifically, these journalists were physically attractive, suggestively dressed (open blouses, tight-fitting skirts), and filmed in ways that accentuated these features” (Nitz, Reichert, Aune, and Velde, 2007, p. 14).

Perspective of Women in the Media

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Implications of the Study

This paper, having investigated and discussed the set objectives has the following implications for the study. These implications are in line with the perceptions of women in news and current affairs presentations, factors affecting their roles, the decline of older women presenters and the effects of mentorship. Therefore:

1. Women are not faring as well as they should in the presentation of news and current affairs presentation. The implication here is that women journalists be given specific training that will help them plan and organize their roles for maximum output.
2. Although there are more women in news and current affairs program presentations today, than there were five or more years ago, there is still a need to encourage women to take on presentation roles outside society's stigmatized positions. This should be evidently seen when they are hosts and when their opinions are sampled. This encouragement from both society and family will help to reduce gender disparity.
3. Media organizations need to create groups or a forum where older women journalists can train and groom younger women journalists. Training should feature both older and younger women working together which bridges the age divide and builds a rapport of understanding and continuity of standards. Existing policies should be reviewed for applicability and sustained implementation.

CONCLUSION

The presence of women in news presentation in the 21st century Nigeria is very key for development. The media is a pervasive tool for how society views women in the media and society as a whole. Society and culture have effects on women's expression of thoughts. Although the number of women in the media has increased in Nigeria, there are still areas in the media (like news and current affairs presentations) where women are seen to be absent or invisible. There is a need for women to show sensitivity to a wider range of issues/topics. They need to bring more meaningful insights and perspectives from women on the topics discussed. Training of women holds great potential for improving their presentation skills and self-worth.

In Nigeria, over the past five years, more women are reporting on news and current affairs. This is happening amidst the social challenges women face both within and outside the media. This calls for a cultural move in society which would result in the establishment of policies and traditions to encourage women to effectively communicate and express their thoughts.

Mentorship, which was revealed as practically non-existent in the media needs to be revitalized and encouraged. Women in the media need older women to train and encourage them. Presentations in the media could be better handled when in-house training and mentorship is developed. The fact that the media is a pervasive tool for how society views women in the media and the society as a whole, cannot be downplayed but rather needs to be kept within perspective in order to help women in the media overcome the challenges within.

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