

A Comparative Study of Radio and Television Stations in Rivers State Coverage of Gender Related Issues

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ABSTRACT

The global call for gender equality requires the contribution from everybody, especially broadcasters, because it is their responsibility. The study examines the extent of broadcast media sensitivity to gender issues with particular emphasis on number of programmes, type, frequency and direction of programmes, and the challenges of broadcasting gender-based issues. The study was underpinned on the gate-keeping theory. Survey research design was employed, and NTA, AIT, Treasure FM (Radio Nigeria) and Nigeria Info FM – were purposively selected based on their ownership. Findings reveal that broadcasting in Nigeria is not sensitive enough to gender-based issues seeing that the number of gender-related programmes broadcast in all four stations of study was relatively small compared to the overall number of programmes broadcast. The major challenge encountered in the broadcast of gender-based issues in the stations include a dearth of funds for the production and sponsorship of such programmes and the cultural inclination of Africans in general. The study strongly recommends the enactment of gender specific laws mandating broadcast media to be sensitive in their programming.

Keywords: Media, Broadcast, Gender, Balance, Sensitivity, Issues

Introduction

Gender and gender balance (equality) is apparently one of the most controversial and provocative discourse in the society. The equal treatment of people, regardless of gender, has proven to be an issue for debate and concern. Some group of people, especially human rights activists believe that everyone deserves the right to be treated equally. Promoting the rights of people, who are perceived to be weak, is the ultimate concern of human rights activists.

It is common knowledge that each time the topic of gender is raised, minds quickly turn and people immediately swing the pendulum towards women as the most marginalised and affected. While that may not be correct (or not entirely wrong), it is important to note that men, in more ways than one, also suffer from gender-based issues (Kolbe and Buttner 2020). It is

imperative to add that cases abound where women's cruelty to men is trivialised by either being underreported by the media or not reported at all because of the obvious gender stereotypes placed on men as being superior, more powerful or incapable of exhibiting any form of weakness. They however concluded by stating that most of the men who were manhandled had at one point been violent against their partner. As a matter of fact, it is safe to imply that people generally believe that women are the only ones suffering injustice in the hands of men in the society. This may not be the case because in recent times, social media has been flooded with videos of women manhandling men as a result of previous violent experience. A study conducted by Kolbe and Buttner in 2020 confirmed that the men who suffered from domestic violence were those who were guilty of abusing their partners before the table turned on them.

Nigeria, as one of the African countries, is largely patriarchal and culturally male chauvinistic. The excessive emphasis on male being the superior and more important of genders has existed for a very long time. It is the belief of many writers that patriarchy succeeded matriarchal system. According to Engels (1962), the emergence of male domination can be traced to the society since antiquity when mother-right was overthrown and patriarchy instituted in its place. An article published by Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) in May, 2018 cited an instance:

“A woman is physically assaulted by her husband following an argument. She reports the incident to the Gender and Development Action (GADA) office in Rivers State which invites both of them for mediation. The husband signs a declaration that he will never assault her again. A few weeks pass and the woman is back again at GADA. Her husband has now cut off her access to money and she cannot maintain the household”.

Cases like this are an everyday occurrence for many women in Rivers State and across Nigeria. Physical violence and sexual assault are often perpetrated against women in both private and public life, but so too are other forms of gender issues such as financial disempowerment, unequal access to employment, education, etc. It was stated by Benebo, Schumann and Vaezghasemi (2018) that over 35 percent of women have experienced physical, sexual or emotional domestic abuse during their lifetime. In the context of Rivers State, data on the *Partners for Peace (P4P) Peace Map* suggests that in the first quarter of 2018, the most prevalent forms of domestic violence reported were physical abuse and economic disempowerment of women by spouses. These cases are all a result of the issue of gender imbalance.

During the International Women's Day 2019, women in Rivers State embarked on a march for peace and justice as part of the activities marking the day. The theme of the march led by Victoria Wobo was “Balance for Better” suggesting the lamentation of Rivers women for gender balance as against what is obtainable in the state (Sahara Reporters – March 8, 2019). These instances show that Rivers State is not left out in the issues of gender and adequate attention should be channeled to curbing it.

The agenda setting function of the media enables them to play a vital role in how people understand certain issues. Media is capable of addressing gender issues and enlightening the audience, mobilising the audience and affecting the actions and reactions of people towards gender

issues confronting the state and indeed, the country. It is on this note that Scheufele and Tewskbury (2007) stated that there is a strong correlation between the emphasis that the mass media place on certain issues and the importance attributed to these issues by the mass audiences. This study focuses on finding out the portrayal of gender-related issues by the (broadcast) media operating in Rivers State.

Statement of the Problem

The worldwide call on gender equality has gained global drive. It is now the belief of many that all humans should be treated equally regardless of superficial differences, such as gender. The media in all its power ought to serve as agent that should champion this course and propagate positive images of men and women. Unfortunately, the images media present about women sometimes help to cement the stereotype of women as victims, defenseless groups of physical objects. Anyanwu (2001) asserts to the fact that women are largely seen and not heard. Their faces adorn newspapers. However, on important national and international issues, they fade out, even when the news is about them, the story only gains prominence if there is a male authority figure or newsmaker on the scene” (pp. 6-8).

The issue of gender reportage in the media has always been dicey. On many occasions, cases such as rape, sexual assault and other forms of gender-based violence receive attention in media, but such reportage are only on cases against women as though there are no cases where boys (men) suffer from gender-based violence. On another hand, when criminal cases such as cultism, armed robbery, kidnapping, etc. are given attention in the media, the reportage usually peg men as the perpetrators of these crimes as though there are no women involved in these crimes. Unequal representations of men and women have been prevalent even in the media, and so, it is doubtful that the (broadcast) media in Rivers state are sensitive enough to gender-related issues. As the voice of the society and by extension, the world, media are expected to set social agenda and lead the campaign. The problem, therefore, is to ascertain how gender-related issues are reported by broadcast media operating in Rivers State.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives the study sets out to achieve include to:

1. determine the number of gender-related programmes in select television and radio stations in Rivers State.
2. find out the types of gender-related programmes in select television and radio stations in Rivers State.
3. examine the challenges faced by select television and radio stations in Rivers State in reporting gender-related issues

Research Questions

The following questions are pertinent with regards to this subject matter:

1. How much of gender-related programmes are broadcast in select television and radio stations in Rivers State?
2. What type of gender-related programmes are broadcast in radio and television stations in Rivers State?
3. What challenges do broadcast media in Rivers State face in reporting gender-related messages?

LITERATURE

Gate keeping theory underpinned this study. This is because media determines the information to transmit; through screening, shaping, modifying and editing news in order to come out with good news. The information they disseminate shapes the public, influences the society and therefore play major roles in changing the behaviour and attitude of audience members. The Gate-keeping theory was propounded by Kurt Lewin in 1947. The theory has been widely used as a metaphor to describe the process by which selections are made in media works, especially decisions regarding, whether or not, to allow a particular news report to pass through the gates of a news medium into the news channels. Gate-keeping is not only accepting and rejecting information but involves other things – like modifying, editing, and shaping news stories. A gatekeeper is any person (or group) who has control over what material eventually reaches the public. Each day, editors and news directors – the gatekeepers in news media systems decide which items to pass and which to reject. The effect of gatekeepers’ decisions on the audience is that the audience learns how much importance to attach to a news item from the emphasis the media place on it.

Role of media in society

Media inform the public on matters relating to their wellbeing and warn them against any danger. Dominick (2002) notes that, “the media perform the watchdog role in our society. They alert the public to possible threat and new trends”. Audience generally use the media to get information about the interpretation of public affairs, it serves as tool for daily living and for social contacts. The media help shape audience understanding of themselves and the world; they tell the audience what is significant and meaningful and what is not through the prominence given to stories during broadcast.

McNamara (1996) is of the opinion that the role of the media vary widely around the world. In a number of developing countries such as South East Asia, the media perform a role described as ‘agent of development’. He goes on to say that the role the media performs relates to the political system and the state of development of the country. The media therefore help in the development of a country socially, economically and politically. They play a crucial role in most countries in spreading information. The media are channels by which social changes are given direction and impetus. They have become a dominant source of definition and image of social reality for individuals, but also collectively for groups and societies.

Gever and Nwabuzor (2013) define broadcasting as “transmission of radio and television signals for reception by the mass audience” (p. 5). This audience is often separated by space and

is heterogeneous, anonymous and widely dispersed, receiving the message at the same time; provided they have the appropriate gadgets for receiving signals. Broadcast media has the responsibility to deploy its strength to create awareness on the need for gender equality in society, as it is expected of it. It is required of the media as the fourth estate of the realm to ensure that people are not discriminated against on the basis of gender, because this would result to injustice and hindrance to the exercise of their fundamental human rights. The European Institute for Gender Equality (2007) outlines the following roles for broadcast stations to perform in order to avoid gender bias:

- Broadcasts should ensure that the portrayal, reporting and representation of men and women respect their dignity.
- Television and radio programming should promote equal opportunities for men and women.
- Men and women should be portrayed in a wide range of roles, traditional and non-traditional, in paid work, social, family and leisure activities.
- Men and women should both be seen as taking decisions, supporting the family and household tasks and home management.
- Broadcasters should ensure diversity in portrayal of men and women, with diversity in age, abilities, physical appearance, occupation and family status. Broadcasters should emphasise gender equality and non-stereotyped gender roles of men and women within the family.
- Broadcasters are encouraged to refrain from presenting women as inferior and exploiting them as sexual objects, as it is illegal to do so etc.

Some of these guidelines provide direction on how broadcast media can play a crucial role in discouraging imbalance on gender representation. However, it is doubtful whether or not broadcast stations in Nigeria have lived up to these guidelines.

Gender Relations in Nigeria: The Prevalent Status quo.

Gender relations are part of social relations referring to the ways in which the social categories of men and women, male and female, relate over the whole range of social organisation, not just interactions between individual men and women in the sphere of personal relationships, or in terms of biological reproduction. In all aspects of social activity including access to information, resources for production, rewards or remuneration for work, distribution of consumption, income or goods, exercise of authority and power, and participation in cultural, political and religious activity, gender is important in establishing people's behaviour and the outcome of any social interaction. Gender relations describe the social meaning of being male and female, and thus what is considered appropriate behaviour or activity for men and women (Pearson, 2000).

Okunna (2000) observes that gender relations in Nigeria are characterised by a lot of imbalance, mostly to the disadvantage of women. This is the twenty-first century yet tradition, culture, religion and a host of factors continue to contribute to widening disparity between men and women by keeping women in subordinate position to men, and by objectifying both men and

women. The larger society and the male subculture still see women and their aspirations as subordinate, resulting in a situation in which marginalisation, trivialization and stereotyping of women are glaring aspects of the Nigerian life. It is the thinking of many scholars that women have not been given their pride of place. Agboh (2012) laments: the place of a woman appears to be defined by the society as only fit for the kitchen, born and raised with a sole objective to be a man's property... (p. 105).

Discrimination against women on the basis of gender roles has been a prevalent practice in Nigeria. Udegbe (2004) specifically explained that male and female go along with a number of stereo-type that virtually imposes both role performances, possibilities of different kinds. The girl-child in the Nigerian society is so relegated to the background in many aspects of human endeavor, so much so, that she sees herself as a "second class" citizen, and she has come to accept and adapt to the saying that "women are supposed to be seen and not heard". She has also come to accept the saying that "women's education end in the kitchen". To Agbalajobi (2010) the key point that lead to discrimination against women has its roots in the nature of our societies which celebrate men as being unique, stronger and fit for the public space, while women are feeble and weak meant to stay within the confluence of the private space. He also adds that in Nigeria, the cultures of many societies are based on subjugating women to men, and undermining their self-esteem. The end of this struggle is apparently not in sight. Obviously, because culture, tradition and religion have continued to exert overbearing influences on gender and hinder the exercise of fundamental human rights.

Ajibuo, Oladitan, Oyerinde and Beweji conducted a study in 2013 on "The Status of Gender Media Coverage of Sports in Nigeria: A Case Study of Print Media". The aim of their study was to establish the status of print media coverage of male and female athletes in Nigeria. Their study monitored the frequency of occurrence of print media reporting on male and female athletes. Articles and photographs of athletes in print media within a period of a year were analysed. The result of the study confirms that male athletes were more frequently reported in national daily newspapers in Nigeria than female athletes. According to the researchers, the situation gives more visibility to male than female athletes.

In 2014, Gever and Nwabuzor conducted a study on "Who Makes the News? An Appraisal of Broadcast Media Sensitivity to Gender Balance in Nigeria". Part of the specific aims of their study was to determine the extent of gender distribution in the sources of news in broadcast media in Nigeria. Broadcast media programmes were analysed to monitor the frequency of occurrence of equal sourcing of news. The result of the research revealed that out of 243 news sources at NTA, 167 (69%) were from the male gender, while 76 (31%) were from the female gender. AIT had 69% news sources from male and 31% from female, FRCN had 72% from male and 28% from female; while Dream FM had 78% male sources and 22% female sources. This infers that broadcast media news sources in Nigeria are male dominated. According to the researchers, the finding suggests that in a male dominated industry, the proclivity towards chauvinism is high.

Albeit slightly different from this study, results from the above researches are in line with the overall observation of this study that broadcast media contents are monotonously stereotyped and gender insensitive.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the survey research design and personal observation of the programme schedule of the selected broadcast stations.. The population for the study were the twenty (20) broadcast stations in Rivers state, which comprised of 14 radio stations and 6 television stations, out of which sample of four broadcast stations operating in Obi-Akpor Local Council were purposively selected. They are: Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), African Independent Television (AIT), Treasure FM and Nigerian Info FM, Port Harcourt, Rivers state. The choice of these stations also reflects their ownership pattern, while NTA and Treasure FM are government owned broadcast stations, AIT and Nigerian Info FM are private media stations. Data collected were analyzed using simple percentages.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Table 1: Number of gender-related programmes in select television and radio stations in Rivers State

| Select Broadcast Stations in Rivers State | Other Programmes | Gender-related Programmes | Total | % |
|---|------------------|---------------------------|-------|------|
| Television NTA | 31(88.6%) | 4(11.5%) | 35 | 100% |
| AIT | 86(95.5%) | 4(4.5%) | 90 | 100% |
| Radio Treasure FM | 27(90%) | 3 (10%) | 30 | 100% |
| Nigeria Info FM | 8(80%) | 2(20%) | 10 | 100% |
| Total | 152 | 13 | | |

Source: Field work, 2019.

From the table above it is obvious that gender related issues are not given adequate coverage by all the broadcast media studied. However, the government owned broadcast stations, that is NTA and Treasures 98.5 FM gave more time to such issues. Analysis also reveals that, in comparison with radio stations, television stations (NTA AND AIT) in Rivers state have more gender-related programmes. Based on this result, it is safe to conclude that attention paid to gender-related issues in broadcast station in Rivers state is not sufficient enough, although television stations have more gender-related programmes than radio stations. This finding is supported in literature in Adam's (2002) assertion that "the increasingly global and commercial structures of media institutions do not sit easily with gender sensitive measures". Also, Oyinade, Daramola and Lamidi (2013) posit that "leaders in the media industry pay little or no attention to this cancerous problem that continues to erode the road to modernisation"

Table 2: Type of gender-related programmes in broadcast stations in Rivers State

| Media type | Stations | Live/Phone-in | Interview | Talk Show | Feature/Documentary | Drama | Total |
|------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------|-----------|---------------------|---------|-----------|
| Television | NTA | 1 (25%) | -- | -- | 2 (50%) | 1 (25%) | 4 (100%) |
| | AIT | -- | 2 (50%) | 1 (25%) | 1 (25%) | -- | 4 (100%) |
| Radio | TREASURE FM | 3 (100%) | -- | -- | -- | -- | 3 (100%) |
| | NIGERIA INFO FM | 2 (100%) | -- | -- | -- | -- | 2 (100%) |
| Total | | | | | | | 13 (100%) |

Source: Field work, 2019.

Table 2 reveals the type of gender-related programmes broadcast by the stations. On NTA, one out of four gender-related is a live/phone-in programme ; out of the remaining three, two are feature/documentary programme, while one is drama. AIT on the other hand does not broadcast any live gender-related programme. They however have two interview programmes: a talk show and a feature/documentary. On *Treasure FM*, all three gender-related programmes are live programmes. Same is obtainable in *Nigeria Info FM* where both gender-related programmes are live and phone-in programmes. This is a reflection of the fact that they do not spend money on production of any programme or have sponsored ones.

Based on this finding, it is evident that broadcast stations in Rivers state handle gender issues in live/phone-in programmes. This appears to be a positive approach because it affords audience the opportunity to share in the topics discussed, and allows for a variety of opinions, suggestions and experiences to be shared

Table 3: The challenges faced by broadcast media in Rivers state in reporting gender-related messages

| Media type | Stations | Finance/Sponsorship | Resource Persons | Details on Issues |
|------------|-----------------|---------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Television | NTA | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | AIT | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Radio | TREASURE FM | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | NIGERIA INFO FM | | ✓ | ✓ |

Source: Field work

Data in table 3, reveals that three major challenges confronting radio and television stations in Rivers state are difficulty accessing funds for production and sponsorship for such programmes; their inability to get resource persons for the discussion of gender-related issues; difficulty getting details on gender issues that come up. Among these challenges, AIT identify finance/sponsorship and getting details on issues as top on their list, while Nigeria Info FM identify difficulty in getting resource persons and details on issues as top on their list. NTA and TREASURE FM identify all three challenges as major roadblocks in reporting gender-based issues.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it is safe to conclude that broadcasting in Nigeria is not sensitive enough to gender-based issues. That is, gender issues are not given adequate coverage in the media seeing that the number of gender-related programmes broadcast in all four stations of study are relatively small compared to the overall number of programmes broadcast in these stations, Perhaps, this may be responsible for the increase in incidents of gender inequality and gender-based violence because the mass media have not devoted enough attention to the issue in their agenda to make it an issue of concern to the public in keeping with the agenda – setting function of the media.

As gatekeepers, the study has revealed that the challenge of getting details on issues cut across all broadcast media in Rivers State. While issues with funding and sponsorship are peculiar to television stations, radio stations on the hand grapple with the challenge of getting resource persons for the gender-related programmes.

Over and above this, it is also observed that broadcasting in Nigeria is monotonously stereotype in content. There are, however, identified challenges that hinge on effective and efficient broadcasting of gender-based issues in Nigeria. Attention has to be paid to the resolution of such challenges to make for better reportage on gender issues in the state, and indeed, country. These are major conclusions of the study.

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