INFLUENCE OF MEDIA ON GENDER EQUALITY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: A CONCEPTUAL PAPER

BY

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Abstract

The mass media has been widely recognised for its significant capacity to influence, control, and bring about profound societal transformations. It possesses the capacity to both impede and accelerate advancement. There is an increasing recognition of the significance of tackling antiquated and detrimental gender stereotypes and traditions in order to facilitate societal and cultural development through individual, attitudinal, and behavioural modifications in light of on-going endeavours to attain gender parity. This study paper critically examines the interventions implemented in Nigeria through media to address gendered stereotypes and norms, as well as the various implications of gender inequality, such as violence against women and women's empowerment. The objective is to advance the principles of sustainable development within the context of Nigeria. This correspondence presents an argument asserting that women are subject to a higher frequency of underrepresentation, misrepresentation, and stereotyping within the media, supported by secondary sources. This phenomenon not only sustains the existing bias and disparity in society based on prejudice and gender, but it also hinders the advancement towards achieving gender equality and promoting women's empowerment. It unavoidably has an impact on their capacity to fully contribute to national growth that is sustainable. The letter continues by arguing that the same medium can be utilised effectively to advance gender equality and provide the essential recommendations to do so.

Keywords: Media, Gendered stereotypes, Influence, Women Empowerment, Gender Inequality

INTRODUCTION

The role of gender as a significant social predictor of health is well-acknowledged in academic literature (Kagesten & Chandra-Mouli, 2020; Levy et al., 2020). This recognition is further exemplified by the United Nations' inclusion of Gender Equality as an independent objective within the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations Goal 5). Given these circumstances, there is a growing momentum to allocate resources towards gender-transformative programmes and initiatives that aim to address detrimental power dynamics and gender imbalances. This aligns with the increasing recognition that restrictive gender norms have adverse effects on health and restrict life choices for individuals, as highlighted by Levy et al. (2020).

Gender-transformative programmes and interventions aim to engage in a critical analysis of the expectations and standards of gender, with the intention of fostering behaviours and perspectives that are more equitable in terms of gender. These initiatives frequently place particular emphasis on exploring and challenging traditional notions of masculinity (Baker, Ricardo & Nascimento, 2007; Gupta, 2000). One of the techniques outlined by Gupta (2000) is described as belonging to a continuum that seeks to promote societal transformation by addressing power imbalances connected to gender, preventing violence, and advocating for sexual and reproductive health rights. The sequential progression of approaches begins with the promotion of gender (and sexuality) stereotypes that are detrimental, followed by the adoption of a gender-neutral perspective. Subsequently, a gender-sensitive approach is embraced, leading to the implementation of a gender-transformative strategy. Ultimately, a gender-empowering approach is employed. The available evidence regarding the efficacy of gender-transformative interventions highlights the significance of interventions that challenge the gender binary and associated norms, rather than solely targeting particular behaviours or attitudes (Kagesten, Chandra-Mouli, 2020; Schwenke, O'Brien-

Milne, Farley, 2018; Dworkin, Treves-Kagan, Lippman, 2013). This understanding is partially based on a growing acknowledgment of the need to address outdated and detrimental stereotypes based on gender and traditions in order to promote cultural and social transformation in relation to this issue. (Costenbader et al., 2019; Heise et al., 2019; McCook & Powell, 2021). In addition, there is an increasing demand for the inclusion of males in gender equality endeavours, not alone as supporters, but also as engaged contributors, collaborators, and agents of transformation (Dworkin, Fleming, Colvin, 2015; Jewkes, Flood, Lang, 2015).

Women under-representation, misrepresentation, and stereotyping

Women comprise approximately 50% of the population in Nigeria and fulfil crucial reproductive and productive functions within both domestic and communal spheres. However, women are consistently marginalised and overlooked throughout several aspects of societal existence. The significance of individuals' participation in both formal and informal society institutions, particularly in decision-making processes related to the distribution of resources in society, has been found to be mostly limited (Makama, 2013; Yusuf & Yusufu, 2014). The prevalence of gender-based discrimination in Nigerian society has resulted in significant gender inequality, leading to the subjugation of women and their relegation to a lower social standing. Women experience many forms of discrimination, marginalisation, oppression, and exploitation due to their gender.

The mainstream media perpetuates gender discrimination and inequality by consistently under-representing, misrepresenting, and stereotyping women. This hinders progress towards attaining gender equality and empowerment. Based on the findings of the Gender Equality Index (GNR, 2012), Nigeria ranks 118th out of 134 countries. There remains a substantial body of work that must be undertaken to improve the societal standing of women in Nigeria. The primary focus of this endeavour revolves around the efficient execution of all global mechanisms aimed at protecting and promoting gender rights and equality. The promotion of gender equality has a crucial role in facilitating development and acts as a fundamental requirement for achieving long-term national advancement. Research indicates that there exists a positive correlation between a nation's gender development index and its overall level of development, as demonstrated by Okonofua (2016). Conversely, nations with lower gender development indices tend to exhibit lower levels of overall development.

Theoretical Ideology

This study is based on the Hegemony Marxist idea. As per the concept, a prevailing ruling elite exercises social and cultural power or influence by impacting the subordinate classes in the domains of politics, economics, and culture, with the objective of establishing their own perspective as the predominant cultural standard. Therefore, it may be argued that the media is subject to control by the prevailing social class and serves as a tool for the exertion of power by this class over the remainder of society. Put differently, the concepts and beliefs of the dominant social group tend to hold sway as the prevailing ideology. According to this argument, the media fails to accurately portray the evolving societal position of women. The production of news is predominantly carried out by men, who also hold a significant majority in the uppermost ranks of the media industry. Consequently, they exercise the authority to determine the content of news coverage. The representation of women in the media is frequently lacking, resulting in their marginalisation and invisibility. Women exhibit much lower rates of participation and representation in news stories pertaining to political, business, and news-making domains, as well as a notably diminished likelihood of being interviewed as experts to provide their perspectives.

Roles of Women

The traditional gender roles assign distinct responsibilities to men and women, with women primarily engaged in domestic tasks such as homemaking and caregiving, while males assume the roles of providers and leaders. The idea of patriarchy delineates the conditions for the intrinsically unequal relationship between males and females, as well as the disadvantaged status of females within both the familial and economic domains. The aforementioned outcomes are realised by means of the validation of gender-based discrepancies in inheritance rights and legal adulthood, the tacit approval of domestic and sexual abuse, and the validation of inequitable remuneration for work that is equivalent or analogous in its characteristics (Salaam, 2003). A patriarchal culture becomes institutionalised through a rigorous process of socialisation. This practise guarantees that all individuals within the community has knowledge regarding their prescribed obligations, roles, and responsibilities. The framework in question is often regarded as a crucial element in the preservation of harmony between families and communities (Igbelina-Igbokwe, 2013). The presence of patriarchal control in Nigeria has led to the oppression and vulnerability of women, subjecting them to various manifestations of gender-based discrimination. Furthermore, scholars such as Makama (2013), Yusuf et al. (2014), and Akpotor (2016) have argued that patriarchy not only perpetuates these discriminatory practises but also provides justifications for them. As per Article 1 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), gender discrimination is defined as,

> Any distinction, exclusion, or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of man and woman, of human rights and fundamental freedoms on the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.

Influence of Media on the portrayal of Women

Undoubtedly, the media plays a significant influence in the contemporary globalised society. The media possesses significant influence, control, and the capacity to facilitate transformative change. In addition to disseminating information, facilitating communication, providing entertainment, mobilising individuals, and shaping public discourse on diverse topics, the media actively

engage in the construction of reality. The media, through the images and information they disseminate, construct particular representations of reality, so establishing a cognitive framework that facilitates individuals' comprehension and interpretation of the social realm. Van Dijk (2000:33) posits that the media plays a crucial role in facilitating the acquisition of knowledge, the formation of attitudes, and the development of ideologies by individuals.

The representation and portrayal of women in the media has consistently been a subject of controversy. According to Wood (2007), there are three overarching elements that delineate the portrayal of gender in media. Firstly, it is evident that women are disproportionately represented. Secondly, the portrayal of both men and women in conventional manners serves to perpetuate and reinforce socially sanctioned perceptions of gender. Additionally, the portrayals of the interactions between men and women often prioritise traditional gender roles and contribute to the normalisation of violence against women.

The news industry has a key role in the promotion of equality between men and women, as highlighted in the Beijing Declaration for Action, which identifies it as one of the twelve fundamental areas of concern. However, it is apparent that the media often plays a role in reinforcing stereotypes regarding gender, namely by portraying women in a negative light. The Beijing Declaration for Action pushed for the promotion and expansion of women's participation and opportunities in the media and developing communication technologies. Furthermore, it underscored the importance of ensuring a fair and impartial representation of both genders in media depictions. The GMMP study reveals a moderate progress in the participation of women in the media. However, there remains a substantial amount of work to be undertaken in order to improve women's opportunities for entry into and portrayal within this field. Modifying the cognitive framework of individuals, which has been firmly embedded through extensive socialisation processes and further reinforced by established practises, cultural norms, and religious beliefs, poses a substantial barrier (Morna, 2002).

The way forward

This write-up is a wake-up call for the media to generate awareness and educate the people on gender equality. According to Yingqun (2017) and Joof (2013), the use of technology has the potential to enable individuals to question and contest societal expectations around gender, while simultaneously fostering gender equity and fostering healthy connections across all genders. The media may significantly contribute to altering societal perceptions of women by consistently portraying them in good pictures and frequently showcasing them in non-traditional roles. The media has the capacity to advance gender equality through its agenda-shaping function. Casserly (2016) concurs, emphasising the media's ability to bring attention to 'gender' by shifting gender-related matters from the domain of personal affairs to the arena of political discourse, so treating all gender concerns as political in nature. Various strategies have been proposed to augment media engagement in matters pertaining to gender. The strategies

encompassed in this approach are the empowerment of women journalists, the establishment of alternative media platforms to amplify women's perspectives, and the pursuit of gender balances both within the media industry and in the material they produce (Morna, 2002).

Conclusion

Base on this conceptual paper, the matter of women's underrepresentation, distortion, and stereotyping in the media poses a substantial obstacle to the attainment of sustainable development in Nigeria. Not only does it promote gender bias and injustice, but it also serves as an impediment to women's capacity to make a complete contribution to the advancement of the nation. Nevertheless, via the utilisation of the aforementioned medium, it is possible to efficiently advocate for gender equality and enhance the empowerment of women. The recognition of media outlets' responsibility in moulding society opinions and their active efforts to eradicate gender stereotypes and promote diverse and accurate depictions of women are of utmost importance. Furthermore, it is imperative to enact government laws and initiatives that are aimed at guaranteeing equitable opportunity for women within the media business. The advancement of sustainable development principles and the establishment of a more equal and inclusive society in Nigeria can only be achieved through the resolution of this issue.

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