

Analysis of the Effect of Placement of News Stories about Women in Newspapers on the Reinforcement of Gender Stereotypes in Uganda

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Abstract: *Feminists argue that media houses as agents of culture serve to reinforce gender stereotypes which portray women as weak people whose duties are largely at home. The study sought to analyze the effect of placement of news stories about women in the newspapers on the reinforcement of gender stereotypes in Uganda. Previous feminist researchers argued that the print media can be used to challenge gender stereotypes and promote gender equality since it plays a vital role in influencing people's perceptions. The study was based on the hypothesis that newspapers in Uganda perpetuate gender stereotypes by not giving adequate coverage of stories about women on the front pages. The study covered three different newspapers which included 'The New Vision,' 'Daily Monitor' and 'The Observer.' The study was carried out between February and March 2018. It involved the editors-in-chief and selected female journalists from each of the selected newspapers. It also involved some female readers of the selected newspapers. It was conducted using mixed method whereby it was both qualitative and quantitative. Qualitatively, content analysis was carried out to determine the effect of placement of news stories about women in newspapers on the perpetuation of gender stereotypes in Uganda. Quantitatively, the study used Pearson correlation analysis to assess relationships between study variables. In the findings, placement of stories about women in newspapers was found to significantly contribute to reinforcement of gender stereotypes in Uganda. The study recommends among other things, that The Daily Monitor, New Vision and Weekly Observer should encourage the promotion of balanced reporting about issues which affect both men and women. It also recommends that print media houses should employ more female journalists on their reporting and editorial boards and undertake training workshops and capacity building seminars for journalists on gender sensitive reporting as suggested solutions to perpetuation of gender stereotypes against women in Uganda.*

Keywords: Perpetuate, gender, stereotype, reinforce

1. Introduction

Newspapers play a key role in informing the public about what goes on in the world and in most cases, the public believes what is published as being a true reflection of what transpires in society. According to GMMP (2015) Media are powerful forces which shape how we perceive the world and how we conduct ourselves. They are therefore expected to be exemplary in the promotion of gender equality by representing both women and men fairly. This implies that the way media represent men and women has a bearing on how society perceives the two kinds of gender.

Anyango (2009), argues that newspapers in Uganda perpetuate gender inequality by misrepresenting women in the news stories. UMW (2011 and 2016) point out that newspapers in Uganda have over the years played a big role in portraying men as being superior to women. This is reflected in the limited space which is accorded to women in the news stories and even when women feature in news stories, they are misrepresented. Most of the news stories indicate that women are not capable of playing significant roles in society which are newsworthy.

Prishtina(2012),argues that the media play a significant role in the "liberation of the mind," but often they are also more part of the problem than the solution. This seems to suggest that in some cases, media specifically newspapers contribute

to the creation of disparities between men and women in society.

According to Mishra (2015), newspapers provide adequate space to the news related to rape, crime, politics, sports and economics but serious debates and discussions on issues related to women in general are completely missing. The columnists of the newspapers are rarely females. The English press concentrates on providing snaps of hot 'babes' and erotic photo gallery of party-mania in multi star hotels. Even the photos of female sports stars are also provided in a manner that depicts their body attraction. The researcher further argues that the overall effect of the portrayal of women in media is to reinforce rather than reduce prejudices and stereotypes.

The statistics about representation of women in the media in Uganda according to the GMMP(2015) indicates that 24% of the news content focuses on women, 29% of news sources are women and 28% of the news subjects in the print media are women.

It is against this background that the researcher sought to carry out a study to establish whether the Ugandan newspapers still misrepresented women in their content such that if that was what prevailed, recommendations could be made to reverse the trend of events.

2. Statement of the problem

According to Carolyn and Byerly (2011), women journalists still face certain barriers which compromise the representation of women in the media. The study revealed that globally, women represent only a third of the full-time journalism workforce in the 522 companies surveyed. It is not surprising to realize that media houses like newspapers continue to reinforce gender stereotypes in the way stories about women are framed, the types of news stories which the few female journalists commonly write about and where stories about women are placed within the newspapers. The study also established that there is under-representation of women in journalism at the workplace and this implies that as long as women journalists are few in the media houses, it may not be possible for us to attain inclusive reporting of issues which concern both men and women in the society.

Johannessen (2009) observed that as Tanzania transits from socialism to capitalism, there is increased coverage of sensational stories of women as victims of gender violence and sexual abuse and they are also portrayed as prostitutes and gold diggers. Such frames of women by the media perpetuate gender stereotypes in the society given the fact that media influence ways through which people perceive certain aspects of life.

Kari and Hillevi (2011), argued that print media is still dominated by men, both as news makers and news subjects. Only 16 per cent of the stories published have women's voices. The study also established that women are positioned unfairly in newspapers. This unfair portrayal of women in newspapers perpetuates gender stereotypes in the society whereby by men are perceived as being superior to women basing on the way they are framed in the media texts.

Prishtina (2012) indicated that there is evidence to the effect that progress in the media portrayal of women is not satisfactory and this compromises the efforts being made by several countries to reduce the gender gap. Prishtina (2012) further argues that in Kosovo, men dominate the majority of newspaper stories at 63%. Women only have 10% space. With this small percentage in terms of coverage of women's issues, chances are higher that stories about women which appear on the front pages of newspapers are insignificant. Likewise, UMWA (2016) indicated that little progress has been made in the way women are portrayed in newspapers in Uganda. The research findings of UMWA (2016) and other media researchers in Uganda do not clearly indicate the root cause of framing of women in newspapers in Uganda yet, it is evident that several women are now empowered and they have been contributing greatly to the social, political and economic transformation of the country. One wonders why such women do not make news worth appearing on the front pages of newspapers.

The previous media researchers in Uganda like UMWA (2016) did not involve female readers of newspapers in their studies so as to find out their perceptions about framing of women in newspapers. There is need to establish whether female readers get affected by the way women are framed in the newspapers. Some women may not consider the newspaper frames of women as gender stereotypes. The

researcher wanted to analyze the effect of such frames on women who read newspapers in Uganda.

Uganda has six prominent newspapers which include The New Vision, Daily Monitor, The Observer, Red Pepper, The Independent and Bukedde. The Researcher sought to base on three of the prominent newspapers which included The New Vision, Daily Monitor and The Observer to analyze the framing of women in newspapers in the reinforcement of gender stereotypes in Uganda and make the necessary recommendations to change the trend of events in case it was found out that the placement of news stories in newspapers reinforce gender stereotypes.

2.1 Research objective and hypothesis

The study was aimed at analyzing the effect of the placement of news stories about women in the newspapers on the reinforcement of gender stereotypes in Uganda. The study was based on the hypothesis that newspapers in Uganda perpetuate gender stereotypes by not giving adequate coverage of stories about women on the front pages. Usually, stories which appear on the front page are the ones that are considered to be more prominent than those which appear in the inside pages. The study covered three different newspapers which included 'The New Vision,' 'Daily Monitor' and 'The Observer.'

2.2 Research question

What is the effect of the placement of news stories about women in the newspapers on the reinforcement of gender stereotypes in Uganda?

3. Literature Review

3.1 Placement of news stories about women in newspapers

Ross and Carter (2011) argue that journalists' daily decisions about what is newsworthy remain firmly based on masculine news values whereby issues and topics which are relevant to women are usually pushed to the margin basing on the assumption that they are not as important as those which are of interest to men. If this is how newsworthiness is determined, chances are high that news stories about women can hardly appear on the front pages of the newspapers. This in itself is gender stereotyping. The researcher intended to determine whether the placement of news stories about women in newspapers has an effect on the way women are perceived in society.

According to a study carried out by the UMWA (2016), only 19% of the stories that were about women were placed in the first five pages. The majority of the stories about women which constituted 81% were placed deep inside the newspapers surveyed. This implied that stories which had women as subjects were considered as being less significant because they did not feature as front page or lead stories. Moreover, UMWA (2016) argued that the views and opinions of the female candidates who were involved in the 2016 presidential and parliamentary campaigns in Uganda

were at a disadvantage because their views, opinions and policy guidelines were not given prominence. The study further indicated that the stories about women which appeared on the front pages were about sensational news which portrayed women as being emotional. This indicates that the more the newspapers continue to under represent women most especially during critical situations like political campaigns when many people are expected to read newspapers so as to know the views of the various candidates before they can make choices on who to vote for, the more the gap between men and women continues to widen. The researcher wanted to establish how the placement of stories about women in newspapers perpetuated gender stereotypes.

According to UMWA (2014), 'hard news' stories are largely written by men. The findings of the study indicated that the percentage of news stories written by women in the selected newspapers was very low compared to that of men yet, in most cases 'hard' news stories are the ones which usually dominate the front page of the newspaper. Daily Monitor had 13%, The Observer 11% and The New Vision 9%. The study also indicated that women wrote the highest percentage of 'soft' news stories yet such stories rarely appear on the front pages of the newspapers. The researcher sought to establish whether news stories written by women are still largely considered for the inside pages of the newspapers.

3.2 Theoretical Review

One of the theories which informed the research study is the Feminist Media Theory. According to Thornham (2007), feminism emerged in the 1970s as a reaction to women's liberation movements to obtain justice for women in the United States of America and Europe. Byerly and Ross (2006) argued that some women movements were inspired by national development whereas others were inspired by real life experiences. Feminism was aimed at advocating for the end of all forms of injustices against women in the society Thornham (2007).

Feminists consider media as powerful institutions which shape people's identities. Creedon and Cramer (2007) argue that media messages are capable of reinforcing or challenging gender stereotypes in society. Since media are communication channels they can put women's rights and gender equality on the agenda of public policymakers and as institutions that practice sex based discrimination, they are also platforms where the struggle for gender equality must be confronted.

Feminist media theorists also argue that media under represent women by focusing on stereotypes without putting into consideration the changes that have occurred in the society over the years which have led to the emergence of several women as leaders and experts. Feminists accuse the media of maintaining the status quo by reinforcing sexism and patriarchy whereby female role models are deliberately ignored by the media and this creates the impression that there are no women who are impacting positively on the society through their skills and abilities. They also consider

patriarchy as controlling influences on the status of women in mass communication Creedon and Cramer (2007).

Feminists use the concept of hegemony to show how media and other cultural products perpetuate male dominance in society. Ross and Byerly (2007) describe hegemony as a process by which powerful men maintain power over social institutions in society. Ross and Byerly (2007) further argue that women need to have a voice so as to put an end to subordination.

Byerly and Ross (2006) argue that women are disadvantaged in certain ways and therefore not given the same rights as men.

According to Creedon and Cramer (2007), the feminist theory offers critical explanations which challenge women subordination by analyzing the causes of gender inequality and what needs to be done to bring about gender equality in the society. According to Lorber(2005), the Feminist Theory takes into account the absence of women in the media profession and images of women in media content with an aim of promoting gender equality. It theorizes media systems of ownership and control over public discourse.

According to Creedon and Cramer (2007), feminism theorizes identity and investigates the meaning people have about their own experiences. It also theorizes the nature of society by challenging structures which are created by patriarchy, capitalism and liberal democracy. It further theorizes media systems of ownership and control over public discourse. Feminists argue that access to the public sphere and means of communication remain widely dominated by men. This gives them abilities to have their voices and ideas heard more than those of women. As a result, dominant male ideology is reinforced and women are kept in a lower position.

Against this background, feminist theory is aimed at making an understanding of the nature of inequality and it focuses on gender politics, power relations and sexuality. Since the study was about women and the media, it was prudent for the researcher to consider feminist perspectives on women and media.

Another theory which informed the research study is the Cultivation Theory. According to Gerbner (1998), media have the ability to cultivate a certain reality of a person's environment. The theory enables us to understand the relationship between media portrayal of women and the effect of such portrayal on the audiences. It is believed that in cases where the media portray women in less significant roles like homemaker and represent them with less prominence than men, the potential of women in society is greatly undermined by the audiences. Further still, the theory indicates that the misrepresentation of women as opinion givers, victims and hardly as experts can influence young girls to internalize such symbols and thereby define their abilities in very narrow scopes.

The researcher used Feminist media theories and Gerbners' Cultivation Theory to put the research study into a clear perspective.

4. Methodology

The researcher carried out surveys in the three selected newspaper companies using questionnaires to collect data from the editor-in-chief and eight female journalists for each of the selected newspapers. The researcher also carried out content analysis using checklists to collect data from the newspapers about placement of news stories about women. The researcher based on newspaper editions covering a period of two months from February to March 2018. According to Yang (2008), content analysis is the systematization of text analysis and it analyses the form and substance of communication. Yang further states that underlying meanings and ideas are revealed through analyzing patterns in elements of the text, such as words or phrases. The researcher believed that this method of data collection would provide an opportunity for carrying out in-depth analysis of news stories to determine whether they perpetuate gender inequality as other researchers have indicated. Weber (1990) argues that content analysis has several advantages over the other methods of data collection because it is applied directly to texts which are the products of human communication and they cater for both qualitative and quantitative analysis of texts. Weber further states that mixing methods is generally acknowledged as an effective way to ensure validity and reliability.

5. Findings

Table 4.1 shows descriptive analysis on categorical attributes on placement of news stories covering women.

Table 4.1: Descriptive analysis on placement of news stories about women

		F	P
How often do women stories appear on the front page?	Very regularly	3	15
	Regularly	7	35
	Irregularly	5	25
	Very irregularly	3	15
	Total	18	90
	Missing	2	10
Total		20	100

What hinders or affects appearance of women stories on front page?	Male dominance of the media	5	25
	Women don't think they are newsworthy.	1	5
	Women have special pullouts and coverage.	2	10
	Limited opportunity for news making by women.	4	20
	Set guidelines and policies.	3	15
	Other	3	15
	Total	18	90
	Missing	2	10
Total		20	100

As portrayed in the Table, 35% of the respondents agree that women stories appear regularly on the front page as compared to 25 % who say they appear irregularly. With regard to what hinders or affects the appearance of women stories on the front page, content analysis revealed 5 common themes. Among them, 25% of respondents point to male dominance of the media, while 20 % say there is

limited opportunity for women to make news stories that deserve to appear on the front page.

The objective of the study was to analyze the effect of the placement of news stories about women in the newspapers on the reinforcement of gender stereotypes in Uganda. The researcher used Pearson correlation analysis as depicted in Table 4.3 for answering the objective. According to the findings, placement of news stories about women in the newspapers positively and significantly affects the reinforcement of gender stereotypes in Uganda given the strong and significant P value obtained from analysis at ($r = 0.465^{**}p \leq 0.01$) obtained. This implies that not placing women stories on the front pages of newspapers, denying consideration to women stories as newsworthy and not presenting women photographs on front pages of newspapers with accompanying stories strongly and significantly reinforce gender stereotypes against women in Uganda.

6. Conclusions

The major aim of the study was to analyze the effect of placement of news stories about women in newspapers on the reinforcement of gender stereotypes in Uganda. Placement of women stories was found to significantly contribute to reinforcement of gender stereotypes in Uganda.

6.1 Recommendation

Based on the above findings from the study, the researcher proposes the following as recommendations.

- 1) There should be training workshops and capacity building seminars for journalists on gender sensitive reporting in Uganda.
- 2) There is need to ensure that journalists adhere to editorial policies concerning gender as results of descriptive analysis reveal that 25% of the female journalists do not think there is total adherence to the editorial policies.
- 3) Newspaper editors and journalists should promote balanced reporting about issues which affect both men and women so as to bridge the gap between the two forms of gender.

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