

MEDIA PROMOTION OF WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN CONTESTING FOR PUBLIC OFFICES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The reduction of women to mere agents of procreation, sex objects, care-givers among others have been identified as factors deterring active participation of women in present day politics. In addition recent studies have also identified some unhealthy cultural, social or religious factors that have continuously relegated women to the background in political system instead of offering them an opportunity to engage their physical and intellectual prowess. This paper therefore looked at the culmination of factors hindering women from actively participating in politics and contesting for public, elective and appointive, offices in Nigeria. The conceptual paper reviewed relevant literatures on media promotion of women participation in contesting for public offices in Nigeria and hinged its discourse on the agenda-setting theory of the mass media. The paper adopted a qualitative design as interviews were conducted to gather the opinion of women who were randomly selected at the APC and PDP secretariats in Ede North Local Government Area of Osun State. The study concluded that despite the numerical strength of the female gender in Nigeria

amounting to half of the population, they are not in any way near the attainment of the 35% affirmative action for women in politics as contained in the extant National Gender Policy of Nigeria. It was recommended that the media must increase the tempo of its education and sensitization of the populace for there to be a positive development.

Key words: Media, Elections, Promotion, Participation, Public offices

Introduction

Nigerian women constitute about half of the population of the country and are known for their roles as mothers, and care givers as well as a political and humanitarian activist at times. But in spite of these roles, the society has not given due recognition to women but has rather discriminated against women. This is as a result of certain stereotypes, religion, traditional practices and patriarchal societal structures. The low turnout in participation by women has always been a concern to several government and civil society organisations since the era of democratic governance in Nigeria. In recent times, several efforts have been made to address the low participation of women in politics for elective and appointive positions in Nigeria. Most notable of such efforts was the establishment of women political empowerment office and Women Trust Funds, the institution of INEC gender policy and the convening of the Nigerian Women Strategy Conference (Oluyemi, 2013).

Over the years, Nigerian women particularly have become targets of violence of diverse forms based on their positions in promoting transformative politics (Agbalajob, 2010). This is against the backdrop of the declaration made at the fourth World Conference on women in Beijing, which advocated 30% affirmative action. In Nigeria, the extant National Gender Policy (NGP) recommended 35% affirmative action instead and sought for a more inclusive representation of women with at least 35% of both elective political and appointive public service positions respectively (Eyongi, 2019).

The mass media over the years has continued to feature the elites and men in particular in articles newspapers stories across the continent. Stories about elite men in places of power become more of interest to the people making them newsworthy while those of women fall short of the categorical indices of the media. Most times, women in politics are only seen and not heard. They are framed into elegant fashion icons and celebrity gist (Ponterotto, 2014). Even when she carries out a political function/activity, it is her beauty, carriage and elegance that is appreciated by the public not her intelligence or political prowess and experience.

Research has shown that women are not given adequate mass media coverage like their male counterparts during electioneering campaigns and this has affected women's visibility in the political space (Oyesomi & Oyero, 2012; Ugbede, 2013; Ottah, 2018). When they become visible to the world via the media they are most times portrayed as sex stereotypes and this has worsened the situation. Other times, traditional and religious beliefs make these women seeking political participation and power, seem too exposed as most religion deter women from becoming publicly 'popular' than their male counterparts. It is all these

shortcomings that the media seek to up its game in promoting the plight of women seeking public offices in politics. The mass media remains an indispensable tool in mobilizing people for participation in an election. Its promotion of female participating in politics will yield unequivocal results and reduce gender inequality that could make the women contesting public offices gain the support of the masses.

Statement of the problem

The role of women participation in Nigeria no doubt is comparably lower than that of some African countries like Cameroun and Ethiopia. The history of women participation in politics can be traced to pre-colonial era when we had women leaders like queen Amina of Zaria, Queen Bakwa Turuku, Moremi of Ife, Emotan of Benin, Omu Okwei of Ossomari, Olufunmilayo Ransom Kuti of Abeokuta and Margaret Ekpo of Calabari kingdom, who all played unbeatable roles in development of their communities. Previous studies have it that mass media give more coverage to men contesting for public offices than women, (Oyesomi&, 2012; Ugbede, 2013; Ottah, 2018). Even when the media do in the very least, such women are portrayed as ineligible to compete with men for public offices, and as such the time of their coverage is reduced as against the men. Against this backdrop this paper looks at the media role in sensitising women for political participation as contestants for public offices.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Examine the extent of exposure by residents of Ede North to media messages tailored towards women participation in politics.
2. Examine the extent at which the media through their programmes and adverts, publicised women who indicated their interest in competing for public offices.
3. Examine the ways residents of Ede North LGA respond to media frames of women who participate in politics.

Theoretical framework

The study is hinged on the framing theory propounded by Goffman in 1974. Media frames seek to influence the perception of the audience about a concept, personality or view. This way it could be construed as a form of second level agenda-setting – they not only tell the audience what to think about (agenda-setting theory), but also how to think about that issue (second level agenda setting, framing theory). Media framing can also be linked to the frame of a house providing the structure around which everything else fits, and influencing overall style of construction (Fountain & McGregor, 1999).

Framing theory is important in analysing media and politics because it brings out the relevance of media and politics and more importantly, framing theorists use it to study the framing of women's issues and how these issues are presented in the media.

Review of Related Literature

Generally, the media refer to the various means of communicating an idea from one person or group to the other or from one person or group simultaneously to a public audience. It includes the mass media of radio, television, newspapers, bill-boards, the internet, blogs, Facebook, tweet, etc. But, in this study, we refer specifically to the traditional mass media of newspapers. Media content influences and shapes the way we experience reality and also contribute to the shaping of gender roles and identities and how they are perceived and accepted in the society.

The MacMillan Dictionary defined the media as any form of communication that delivers information. The main goal of the media is to inform or communicate with the greatest number of people possible, all at once. It states that the public relies on the media to learn more about social and political issues, entertainment, alongside other trending issues in the past, the media was mostly limited to newspapers, magazines and other printed publications. It concluded that technology has helped to advance the media and expand the options for people to get their daily news and information, first on the radio and then on television. Now, many millions of people rely on the internet to get their news and online media outlets have become very popular all over the world.

Justin Stoltzfus (2020) describes the media as any channel of communication that has mass capacity to reach or influence people. One of the major tools of the media is its agenda setting function, McCombs and Shaw (1972) state that media coverage of any issue, positions the issue as vital and important. It affirms that the media has a huge influence on how much prominence and relevance the audience gives to an information or story. It further states that the media influences audience interpretation of the message.

Mc Nair (1995) asserts that the media in political reality can take on three roles. Firstly, the media acts as an intensifier, the media is able to bring up issues and sharpen them. The media has the capacity to portray issue and at the same time make this issue important. Secondly, the media as a conflict diminisher, the media has the power to sink an issue. The media intentionally negates the issue, especially when it concerns the interests of the media, both ideological and pragmatic interests. Thirdly, the media can act as a director of conflict resolution; the media becomes a mediator by presenting issues from various perspectives and resolving it.

Druckman (2011) affirms that most of what citizens know about politics stem from the media, he concluded that the influence of the media is both of practical or normative importance.

Women have historically been underrepresented and misrepresented in stereotypical roles within mainstream media. Television adverts have long been a key player in depicting women as helpers to their male counterparts washing, cooking, cleaning and the likes while the men are shown in board rooms or performing high end task.

Gaye Tuchman (1978) cited in Karl Thompson (2019), developed the concept of Symbolic Annihilation to refer to the under-representation of women in a narrow range of social roles, while men were represented in a full range of social and occupational roles. Tuchman argued that women's achievements were often not reported or trivialized and often seen as less important. Women were often represented in roles linked to gender stereotypes,

particularly those related to housework and motherhood. Men are at the forefront of the world politics and political appointments are majorly dominated by men even with women making up half of the world's population.

Ross (2016) concludes that the perceived lesser importance of women and their interests is reflected in the way they are treated in the media, where men are the experts whereas women are asked how they juggle family and career and are judged on their physical appearance and their age. Ross in his discussion states that while the media focus more on the political coverage of the male candidates, the personal lives of women are at the fore front of media discussions during electoral procession.

A 2019 study by the French “Conseil Supérieur de l’Audiovisuel” (The body in charge of regulation of France Electronic media) shows that the percentage of women in radio in France is on the decline and women's under-representation during peak times is staggering. Although more women experts are being given airtime, the number of female politicians invited to participate in debates on mainstream media channels is still extremely low (24.4%), compared to male politicians (75.6%).

According to the Africa Women Journalism Project (AWJP) and the International Centre for Journalist (ICFJ), women make up just 24% of the people seen, heard, read-about, or seen in Newspaper, Television and Radio News. A recent study by the organization on women coverage in News story across India, Kenya, South Africa, United Kingdom and The United Kingdom shows that there is a substantial bias towards men perspective both in news gathering and news coverage with Men perspective outnumbering women by at least 5-1.

Most of what citizens know about politics comes from what they learn via the media which makes the result more alarming.

Miller, Peake, and Boulton (2010), cited in Van der Pas (2020), came to the conclusion that there is progress towards equitable coverage, some indicators of bias are glaring in the way men politician receive significantly more positive media coverage than their female counterpart.

The media dwells more on how a female politician look, her family and relationship status and not her leadership ability and vision for the office she's contesting for in comparison to her Male counterpart. This is in line with Cann, et al. (2016), cited in Van der Pas (2020) which states that women politicians are stereotypically associated with private life than men with their public persona.

In Nigeria, Participation of women in politics is at a slow rate, even though they constitute 47.14% of registered voters in the country and more than half of the country's population, Nigeria is yet to have a Female Elected Governor or President. The house of Senate in Nigeria has Eight (8) Female Senators out of a possible One Hundred and Nine (109), while the House of Representatives have a meagre 13 translate to an increase in women's participation in government.

According to the Gender Strategy Advancement International, (GSAI), Nigeria is ranked 181 of 193 Nations of the Gender Equality Index for countries with low women participation in government. Iwuagwu. (2018) list the reason for the low participation of women in Nigeria politics which includes; Lack of public acceptance, Religious Factor, Male dominated political parties, an unhealthy political system with a win or die mentality, Traditional Culture that places Women as helpers and not leaders amongst other factors.

Cili (2015) states that one of reasons for weak media representation of women in politics is the absence of gender issues experts in media institutions and also a male dominated board room. Rarely do you watch women on TV programs, where are given opinions about politics, economy or other important international events. Also, during the electoral campaigns, politician women find it difficult to take the needed space in the media in order to present their program and objectives to the public and electorate rarely do you see female politicians interviewed during election, rarely do you see Female Politicians invited to partake in political debate.

Basit (2020) deduce that with such a large capacity, the media has the potential to have an impact on the formation and evolution of social and cultural norms, including connecting social and cultural norms with women. At the same time, the image of women and the role that women play in the media are strongly influenced by existing social and cultural norms. He concludes that the media needs to get involved in building the image of female politician so as to make them more acceptable by the public.

Methodology

This study examines the individual opinion of residents of Ede North in assessing the position of the media in publicising. The study adopted a qualitative approach by conducting interviews for data gathering. Based on this, purposive sampling technique was used. Supporters of the major parties whose candidates were contesting for the governorship in Osun States were Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), All Progressive Peoples' Congress (APC), Accord party, Labour Party (LP), were selected and participated in the interview. The women were selected through guidance from the national secretariats of each of the major political parties mentioned, based on their political pedigrees and ability to frequently address media on women issues in Nigerian politics (though not all were accessed).

Data Collection and Analysis

Primary data were collected, using interviews with residents (male and female) of Ede North Local Government Area of Osun State, to determine their views on how they perceive female politicians, how they fare during and after elections as well as the extent of support from male counterpart. Their responses were transcribed and read through which led to different themes and titles. These themes and titles are discussed viz a viz the study objectives.

Discussion of Interview Data

In addressing the objectives of this study, from coded transcripts, the following themes emerged:

- (1) Absence of enthusiasm by women on political matters
- (2) Female stereotypes in our society.
- (3) Media and women in politics

Absence of Enthusiasm by women on political matters

The decline in interest in politics by women has being a lingering concern to the world over and Nigeria is not left out. Mercy 2010; posits that “the world over, participation of women in politics and administration have been of no significant value.” Oyinadeet *al* (2013) notes thus: “but in spite of the many numbers of women groups, the population of women and those aspiring for elected offices, the disproportionate number of women elected to the Nigerian House of Representatives is nothing to be proud of.” Participants who were interviewed did not have a contrary opinion on women in politics as they were of the opinion that women will rather concern themselves with matters that have to do with keeping and caring for their homes. Some of the interviews were of the opinion that women were usually intimidated by men whenever they indicated their interest to run for public offices.

Female represented as stereotype in our society.

The society especially in Africa expects women to be behind men and not in front. Women are stereotyped as sex slaves, weaker vessels and must submit to men, at home and even in a politics. Women have suffered a lot of gender discrimination, inequality and violence. This view was the opinion of majority of men and women interviewed in trying to find out the media frame of women portrayed by the media. In studying the second objective the residents said that the way the media portrays women in programmes and advertisements as to wearing revealing clothes, ambassadors of feminine products, is also another reason why the public may not agree that women have anything to offer politically other than having a husband, children and maintaining physical beauty.

Media and women in politics

The media may need to up its game as far as women under-representation in politics is concerned. Media coverage of women issues in Nigeria has been unimpressive. This is the summary of what all the interviewees said when addressing the first objective which addresses the level of media exposure by the residents on portrayal of female politicians. The media over the years continue to cater to urbanelites featuring articles and information about politically powerful men as seen on the front pages of newspapers and magazines across the continent. This is because these men and stories surrounding them have become newsworthy while those of women fall short of the categorical indices of the media. This theme reflects what should and can be done. The general view is that women who indicate interest in running for public offices should be encouraged by the media. The may be taken as the corporate responsibility of the media and to ensure that women are given equal representation with the male folks.

Summary

Since Nigeria returned to democracy in 1999 till date, the issue of women participation in politics and their lower number in public offices are some of the issues that have continued to remain in the front burner for media practitioners in Nigeria who are working hard to promote women participation in contesting for public officers at the federal, state and local government levels across the length and breadth of Nigeria.

It was discovered that instead of women enjoying the provisions of the extant National Gender Policy (NGP) 35% affirmative action for women to occupy political cum public space, they have over the years become targets of violence of diverse forms, framed into elegant fashion items and celebrity gist's, portrayed as sex objects, or relegated to the background by some religious, social or cultural practices and stereotypes.

The mass media (Print, Broadcast and the New Media) therefore must undertake the vanguard of mobilizing sensitizing and educating the populace on the need to allow women contribute their quota to the development of Nigerian political system.

Conclusion

This study investigated the limitations hindering women from participating in elections as candidates for various public offices. The situation is attributed to lack of public acceptance of women as being capable of holding public offices, male dominance of political parties, thuggery, religious and cultural factors among others. The media remains an indispensable tool for mobilizing people for participation in elections and electoral processes. The study further enlightened the public on the role of the media in creating awareness on emancipation of women in politics.

Recommendation

The media needs to do a better job of portraying women as influential members of society rather than as society's object of servitude. Additionally, the media should seek ways to project women as trusted, accountable, reliable and dependable people who can occupy a public office. The media must promote increased female engagement in politics by making sure that qualified female candidates are equally treated with respect and dignity, as their male counterparts as well as promoting their political career rather than their private lives.

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