Media Images and Women Perception of Gender Stereotypes in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated media images and women perception of gender stereotypes in Nigeria. Anchored on Cultivation theory, survey method was adopted with the questionnaire as instrument of data collection. The sample size of 384 was drawn from a population of 228,132 women in Makurdi Metropolis, using the Araoye formula. Findings show women portrayed as housewives dependent on husbands; the media depict women as sexual objects with only sex value; women shown only for their beauty most times; women/girls shown as inferior to men/boys; women often portrayed as emotional and weak. Findings also show that women are portrayed as inferior and subservient to the male gender. Findings also show women perceived that women are negatively stereotypically portrayed in the Nigerian mass media and stereotypes against women are still prevalent in every day media. Also, women are portrayed as homemakers and caregivers of the family and objects of beauty and sex. The study concluded that the mass media are powerful tools in image creation because of their capacity to preserve, define and shape human values, dreams, roles, beliefs and expectations. Nonetheless, due to insensitivities on the part of content producers, the media, especially television, tend to portray women through a stereotypical lens. The study recommended among others that media practitioners should make deliberate efforts to ensure gender balance in their contents in order to dismantle the patriarchal structure which seems to be the fundamental cause of the imbalance.

Keywords: Media; Images; Women; Perception; Gender; Stereotypes

Introduction

Life today is increasingly saturated by mass media information and technology with various contents on television, radio and the various magazines and newspapers each day. These have affected views of women, society, beliefs and culture (Devi, 2018). The media have the power to transmit messages and images of the world. They are not simply mirrors of the world but active

shapers of perceptions and ideas. They have thus, become powerful and central actors in constructing and making sense of local and global social affairs. As institutions, they shape cultural and social attitudes, impact on politics and public policy, and even influence journalism (Council of Europe Network of National Focal Points on Gender Equality, 2013).

There has been a growing debate among men and women about the way women are portrayed in the media. According to Ojomo and Adekusibe (2020), the portrayal of women in media contents has received commendable academic consideration driven by the criticism of feminist movements in the society. Nigerian women are often portrayed in media contents from the traditional perspective that presents women in an unequal position with their male counterparts. This often creates gender stereotypes for women. Lee (2004) observes that female stereotyping has generated widespread debates among scholars and feminist groups over the years. Although a decrease in female stereotyping can be conceivable bearing in mind the modern-day structure of the society that recommends manifold gender roles, literature are still full with studies documenting that female stereotyping still exists. Research has shown that there is a great deal of female stereotyping in media contents, especially on television (Alibrahim, 2017). Indeed, women have often been the subject of various stereotypes exhibited through visual imagery in media contents.

The mass media present images of women in a distorted, negative and impractical manner that outnumbers their positive and realistic portrayals (Amobi, 2013). Ojomo and Adekusibe (2020) aver that despite evidences to the progressive role of women in the society, women are often depicted in media contents as sex objects, men dependent, domestic workers and incompetent in leadership tasks rather than as professionals or members of the society that contribute to national development. Describing the overall media depiction of women as being shallow and narrow, Ibrahim, Yunus, Shah, Ilias and Mokhtar (2017) aver that women have not been treated fairly by the media. They observed that women activities and interests as portrayed in media contents typically do not go beyond the confines of home and family. Sanni (2016) has said that the portrayal of women is largely from the masculine perspective such that women are presented in an unequal position or as inferior to their male counterparts. Regrettably, women portrayal in the media quite reflects similar roles they perform in the society, the limited opportunities they are given and the forms of abuse that they suffer therefrom (Achakpa-Ikyo and Anweh, 2016). Several women movements such as Arise Nigerian Woman Foundation, Kudirat Initiative for Democracy, Nigerian Women Trust Fund, among others have challenged media representations and cultural practices that are derogatory to Nigerian women while insisting on essential transformation on issues relating to gender. In spite of these efforts, however, there still exist discrepancies in the coverage and portrayals of men and women in the media. According to Verhellen, Dens and Pelsmacker (2014), this stereotype redirects certain assumptions that affect women negatively in the society because the mass media have the power to represent reality in a distorted way that can marginalize women and reinforce their roles with a status of inferiority.

Ojomo and Adekusibe (2020) have opined that the ideology underpinning female stereotypes in Nigerian media contents is quite in tandem with the cultural belief of gender roles in the Nigerian society. With women getting more prominence in a changing global society, critics such as gender activists and women movement have, however, queried why the Nigerian media still portray women in stereotypical roles considering the effects such portrayals have on

women. The issue however, is, what is the perception of gender stereotypes by women in Nigeria?

Statement of the Problem

It is widely recognized that the media play an instrumental role in bringing social transformation and social change by promoting and disseminating information. The content of media reflects the pattern of value in any society. The prevailing attitude of the society gets revealed through the way subjects dealing with women are treated by the media. Whether deliberately or unintentionally, the way women have been portrayed in the Nigerian media is an exaggerated form of real-life circumstances and assumptions and it has very little relationship with real life. The matter of concern is that it has a great impact on the life style of today's young women as they imitate and identify themselves with the characters shown in the content of programmes of print or electronic media.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate media images and women perception of gender stereotypes in Nigeria. Specifically, the following are the objectives of the study:

i. To determine the media images of women portrayed by the media in Nigeria;
ii. To ascertain the gender stereotypes portrayed by the media in Nigeria;
iii. To ascertain effects of gender stereotypes on women as portrayed by the media in Nigeria;
iv. Find out women perception of gender stereotypes as portrayed by the media in Nigeria.

Review of Related Literature

Although women's role and taking part in media have changed over the years, equal representation of female and male in the media is not fully achieved. This can be seen in daily discussions for hours on local and international television channels and radio programmes (Kaul & Sahni, 2017). In these programmes, participation of women as experts or discussants is very low or almost negligible. Women's participation in television media is seen more as beautiful talking heads that read news or programme anchors, or in commercial advertisements, serials and other entertainment programmes. The media promote photo-shopped unrealistic images of people especially women. Some pictures feature highly attractive, slender, fair and tall female characters, at times sexualized. Viewing such stereotypically attractive women leads to greater endorsement of stereotypically feminine gender role expectations for women. The appearance of the fake or beautified characters demeans girls' self-esteem and encourages them to wish to alter the shape of their bodies to look more like the actresses in the media. Thus, unrealistic cultural expectation of beauty is enhanced through the media (Devi, 2018).) Such messages also conveyed through the media misguide the adolescents of today to maintain a slim and skinny body image (Ford, et al, 2018).

In radio programmes also, the concept of masculinity and femininity are heavily ingrained. One could find the father occupying centre stage, as educated, intelligent, and domineering; and expects tea, snacks and tasty food from his wife. The wife on the other hand is portrayed as uneducated, superstitious, who raises silly questions for which she is laughed at (Lipka, 2008). Also, the joint families heard on radio dramas are not happy, harmonious but full of intrigues and disharmony and are on the verge of breakdown as seen in *Yumgi Mou* (The

daughter in law), where women are projected as mainly responsible for the ills and disharmony plaguing the family, being idle, scheming, wicked and bent on destroying family values and tradition (Devi, 2018).

Similarly, films and dramas have exploited women by using cultural stereotypes to reinforce subservient role model for women. Such creation of particular image of women will have a negative impact on efforts to promote gender equality, and in strengthening the conceptualization of women's incompetence to actively contribute to public and political domain.

In newspapers and magazines, women are featured more as victim of crimes on front pages where readers are likely to sympathize with them. There is not a day where news on the growing disease of women related crimes, drugs, immorality and poverty are reported. Anyone who picks up a newspaper will find headlines occupied by news of rape, murder, abduction, sexual harassment, human trafficking and illicit relationship (Sharma, 2013).

Devi (2018) states that several magazines, like *Nupigi Punsi* and *Women and Crime*, focus on women related crimes and issues. This means that many such magazines do no tattempt to liberate, emancipate or to reinforce women's real voices and empowerment. Neither do they have enough systematic study of the situation, its causes and solutions to the problem. Apparently, the news content is not to empathize with women but to cater to sensational stories to the prying public, thereby emphasizing feudalistic notions that virginity and chastity are more important than life and stressing the old-fashioned impression that it would be better for any girl to die than to lose her virtue of chastity.

Even cartoons in newspapers embody stereotypical images of women. In comics, women are either victims or demons; men represent highly masculine traits. They are powerful, intelligent and adventurous and saviour or protector of beautiful and weak women. A popular cartoon comic strip, *Makar* in Manipuridaily *Poknafam* is one example (Sharma, 2013). The idea of the comic strip is to depict the reality of social and political ills like corruption, nepotism, among others. The central figure *Makar* exhibits hegemonic masculinity, he is illiterate, a simpleton and reckless while the wife, Ameshwari, is a highly educated one. Although *Makar* is silly, his ideas, opinions, actions seem witty, shrewd and ingenious and are very influential. Yet the wife has no voice against the prevailing issues and is in no position to influence public opinion. Her disposition and attributes are of a normal housewife.

Theoretical Framework

The cultivation theory hinges the study. The theory, according to Scott (2011), posits that the mass media are responsible for molding viewers' perception of social reality. The theory was developed by George Gerbner in the 1960s when he used it to investigate the influence of television on viewers' notion of reality and found that television has a long-standing effect on the viewers. In essence, the theory holds that people exposed to television viewership end up interpreting social realities to be in alignment with the way they are portrayed by television. Thus, whatever is seen on television is an accurate representation of reality. As Sanni (2016) corroborates, the theory explains the extent to which a viewer's attitude is influenced on a particular topic or idea based on the extent of exposure to television contents.

Though Gerbner used television audience in developing the theory, it was later expanded to generally include other media channels too, as corroborated by Ward and Harrison (2005) that prolonged exposure to media contents can cause women to think they are not supposed to function outside the home. This explains why regular viewing of television is linked with creating more stereotypical connotations. Shanahan and Morgan (1999) also agreed with

cultivation theory that women are seen as being part of a consigned social group, given their underrepresentation and over discrimination in mass media contents. These portrayals of women, therefore, contribute to the reinforcement of stereotypes which in turn creates perceptions that are detrimental to women and the society at large.

Method

This study adopted the survey method. The reason for the use of survey method was to elicit responses from the sampled respondents, using the questionnaire. The population of the study was drawn from the entire population of women in Makurdi Metropolis which is 228, 132 women (NPC Projected Figure, 2022). The population of women in Makurdi at the 2006 Population and Housing Census was 146, 239 women. This was then projected to 2020 at 4% benchmark set by the National Population Commission which brought the population of women in Makurdi to 228, 132 (4% of 146, 239 in 17 years gives a projection of 228, 132). However, such a number would constitute a problem since it is too large. Therefore, a sample was taken from the population for the study. The sample size for the study is statistically determined using the formula: $n = \frac{Z^2Pq}{d^2}$

$n = 384$

Therefore, the sample size for the study was statistically determined to be 384. The sample size was drawn using multi-stage sampling procedures of cluster, purposive and simple random sampling techniques.

Cluster sampling technique was used to divide the population into twelve units based on the major settlements in Makurdi metropolis and a random sample of these clusters were selected: High-Level, North Bank, Akpehe, New G.R.A, Old G.R.A, Gboko Road, Kanshio, Wadata, Ankpa Ward, Modern Market, Wurukum and Nyiman. Simple random sampling technique was used to pick two streets from each of the twelve selected settlements. The names of all the streets in each of the selected settlements were written on pieces of papers and dropped in 12 separate jars, with a blindfolded research assistant picking two randomly from the12 jars. The twenty-four streets picked, two from each settlement produced: Ernyi and Yogbo streets in North Bank, Inikpi and Iorkyaa Ako in High-Level, Terwase Agbadu and Akange from Gboko Road, Doo and Laha streets from Nyiman, Court Road and Mzambe Street in Akpehe, Aernyi and Atume streets in New G.R.A, Bakut and Gebi streets in Old G.R.A, Adikpo and Kuna streets in Wadata, Imande and Torkwase streets in Kanshio, Benue Crescent and Moji streets in Ankpa Ward, Onitsha and Awe streets in Wurukum, and Dogo and Ladi streets in Modern Market.

Purposive sampling technique was used to pick four compounds on each of the streets, two on the right and two on the left after an interval of seven houses. Total number of compounds thus came to 96. Purposive sampling was used again to select four respondents from each compound, 96 x 4, which translated to 384 respondents, who responded to the questionnaire. The method of data analysis is the percentage method and the results presented in tabular form, based on the responses to the questions in the questionnaire.

Data Presentation

A total of 350 respondents from a sample size of 384, completed the questionnaire while thirty-four 34 returned uncompleted questionnaire and thus, they were found unusable. Below is the presentation of the data in tables.

Table 1: Media Images of Women portrayed by the Mass Media in Nigeria

Options	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Women are portrayed as complete housewives only and completely depend on their husbands	18	5
Media depicts women as sexual objects with only sex value	21	6
Women are shown only for their beauty most times	13	4
Women/girls are shown as inferior to men/boys	10	3
Women are often portrayed as emotional, weak and dependent	40	11
All of the above	248	71
Total	350	100

Table one presents data on the media images of women portrayed by the media in Nigeria. In the Table, 248 (71%) of the respondents agreed that women are portrayed as complete housewives and completely dependent on their husbands, depicts women as a sexual object with only sex value, also women are shown only for their beauty most times, also women/girls are shown as inferior to men/boys and often portrayed as emotional, weak and dependent, 40 (11%) agreed that women are often portrayed as emotional, weak and dependent, 21 (6%) went for the media depicting women as sexual objects with only sex value, 18 (5%) were for women portrayed as complete housewives and completely dependent on their husbands, 13 (4%) went for women being shown only for their beauty most times, while 10 (3%) agreed that women/girls are portrayed inferior to men/boys. This paints a negative image of women as portrayed in the Nigerian mass media.

Table 2: Gender Stereotypes portrayed by the Media in Nigeria

Options	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Women are weak	21	8
Women are inferior and subservient to the male gender	38	15
Women are expected to be accommodating and emotional	25	10
Women are portrayed as weak, servile, nurturing,		

and pliant and are often sexually objectified	32	13
Women and girls are expected to dress in certain way and be polite	28	11
Women are expected to take care of children, cook and clean the home	35	14
Women are expected to be slim, thin and graceful	20	8
Women are expected to look beautiful all the time	22	9
Women are expected to be nurses, fashion designers, hairdressers, makeup artistes and primary school teachers	29	12
Total	350	100

Table two presents the gender stereotypes portrayed by the media in Nigeria. Here, 38 (15%) respondents averred that women are portrayed as inferior and subservient to the male gender, 35 (14%) of the respondents agreed that the Nigerian mass media portrayed women with various stereotypes like being expected to take care of children, cook and clean the home, 32 (13%) agreed with the media portraying women as weak, servile, nurturing, pliant and often sexually objectified, 29 (12%) respondents saw the portrayal from different prisms of stereotypes of being nurses, fashion designers, hairdressers, makeup artistes and primary school teachers, 28 (11%) saw the portrayal of women and girls being expected to dress in a certain way and being polite. While 25 (10%) respondents went for women being expected to be accommodating and emotional, 22 (9%) expected women to look beautiful all the times, 21 (8%) pickedwomen portrayed as weak and 20 (8%) settled for portrayal as slim, thin and graceful. The inference that can be drawn here is that the Nigerian mass media are portraying women with negative gender stereotypes.

Table 3: Effects of Gender Stereotypes on Women as portrayed by the Media in Nigeria

Options	No. of Respondents	Percentage
It shapes women's self-perception, attitudes to relationships and influence participation in work places	40	16
It affects young girl's classroom experience, academic performance, subject choice and well-being	48	19
It results in women being treated differently or offered different opportunities based on their gender	53	21
It results to unconscious bias to women by making assumptions based on background or perceived background	49	20
Media's treatment of women and their reproduction of female stereotypes are		

directly or indirectly linked to gender injustices faced by women in everyday life	60	24
Total	350	100

Data in Table three show the effects of gender stereotypes on women. In the Table, 60 (24%) respondents agreed that media's stereotype treatment of women is directly or indirectly linked to gender injustices faced by women in everyday life, 53 (21%) agreed that it results in women being treated differently or offered different opportunities based on their gender, 49 (20%) of the respondents agreed that it results to the unconscious bias to women by making assumptions based on background or perceived background, 48 (19%) respondents agreed that it affects young girls' classroom experience, academic performance, subject choice and well-being, 40 (16%) were of the view that it shapes women's self-perception, attitudes to relationships and influences participation in work places. The implication from this data is that women are negatively affected by the stereotypes portrayed by the Nigerian mass media.

Table 4: Women Perception of Gender Stereotypes portrayed by the Media in Nigeria

Options	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Unbalanced portrayal in favour of men is wide spread	64	26
Stereotypes against women are still prevalent in every day media	72	29
Women are portrayed solely as homemakers and caregivers of the family	53	21
Women are still portrayed as objects of beauty and sex	61	24
Total	350	100

Table four presents data on women's perception of gender stereotypes portrayed by the media in Nigeria. The data show 72 (29%) respondents averring that stereotypes against women are still prevalent in every day media, 64 (26%) said unbalanced portrayal in favour of men is wide spread, 61 (24%) went for women still being portrayed as objects of beauty and sex, while 53 (21%) stated that women are portrayed solely as homemakers and caregivers of the family. The inference drawable here is that women have a negative perception of the Nigerian mass media based on the negative portrayal of women in the Nigerian mass media.

Table 5: Ways Gender Stereotypes against Women can be minimized in the Media

Options	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Setting new media policies	74	30
Pointing it out	56	22
Being a living example	54	22
Speaking out	66	26

Total	350	100

Data in Table five reveal ways gender stereotypes against women can be minimized in the Nigerian mass media. As the table shows, 74 (30%) respondents went for setting new media policies, 66 (22%) agreed with speaking out, 56 (22%) agreed with pointing out the stereotypes while 54 (22%) went for being a living example especially with women working in the media. This implies that some of the ways gender stereotypes against women can be minimized in the mass media is by setting new media policies among others ways as stated above.

Discussion of Findings

Findings from the study on the media images of women portrayed by the Nigerian media show that women are portrayed using stereotypes that degrade the personality of the Nigerian woman. They are thus, seen as complete housewives that are completely dependent on their husbands, as sex objects with only sex value, for their beauty most times and just as women/girls are shown as inferior to men/boys, generally emotional, weak and dependent.

The above finding is corroborated by Sharma (2013) that more often than not the media depict women as sexual objects with little value. Devi's (2018) study further support that female characters in films are often depicted in film and television with gender stereotypes and the likelihood of women, specifically young women, to be hyper sexualized in the media whether in film or advertisements is far more expected than men. Devi also found that in television commercials, the trend of sex-role stereotype can be observed where women are mostly given roles that do not involve making important decisions at home and outside, dependent on men, need men's protection

Findings on the gender stereotypes portrayed by the media in Nigeria show that women are portrayed as inferior and subservient to the male gender. Also, the Nigerian mass media portray women with various stereotypes such as women are expected to take care of children, cook and clean the home. In addition, the Nigerian mass media portray women as weak, servile, nurturing, and pliant and are often sexually objectified, just as the Nigerian mass media portray women with different stereotypes as women are expected to be nurses, fashion designers, hairdressers, makeup artistes and primary school teachers. Also, the portrayal of women in the Nigerian mass media show that women and girls are expected to dress in a certain way and be polite, just as women are expected to be accommodating and emotional, look beautiful all the times, slim, thin and graceful.

The above findings are also supported by Jyotin's (2002) study which found that there are a number of channels with specific content or programmes like cartoon channels for kids, health channels, devotional channels and channels especially for daily soaps The channels showing daily soaps, basically target the housewives sitting at home in the afternoon. Women watch more daily soaps than men. But the popularity of these daily soaps is not limited only to this category of women; many working women and male also watch these soaps regularly. The striking features of these serials is that they portray women either as vamps planning some conspiracy or an ideal woman who keep herself busy in performing household chores, whose main aim is to make everyone happy over sacrificing herself. But it has no relationship with reality. Omojo and Adekusibe's (2020) study also found that though in few serials have come up to raise the bold tabooed issues related to women such as child marriage, widow remarriage and women

education. But being based on these themes ultimately, they portray the submissive and sacrificing image of women simultaneously. It has also been shown in these serials that when women possess power or excel in their professions, the ego of males gets hurt and gets webbed into all sorts of insecurities and inferiorities. These serials exaggerate a selection of real-life circumstances and assumptions. These types of programmes create a world which seems very real and viewers are unable to differentiate between the contrived world and the real one. Television serials have a definite impact on thought pattern of society.

Findings on the effects of gender stereotypes on women as portrayed by the media in Nigeria show that there are negative effects of gender stereotypes on women as portrayed by the media in Nigeria as it shapes women's self-perception, attitudes to relationships and influence participation in work places. It also affects young girls classroom experience, academic performance, subject choice and well-being and it results in women being treated differently or offered different opportunities based on their gender. It results to unconscious bias to women by making assumptions based on background or perceived background, also media's treatment of women and their reproduction of female stereotypes are directly or indirectly linked to gender injustices face by women in everyday life. This is supported further by Ford, et al's (2018) study which found that the message conveyed through the media misguide the adolescents of today to maintain a slim and skinny body image. It may give rise to many health related issued among adolescent girls. The study also found that the pervasiveness of sex stereotyped role in commercials are not only limited to Nigeria but a strong similarity of sex role in advertising that can be seen around the world.

Findings on women perception of gender stereotypes portrayed by the media in Nigeria show that unbalanced portrayals in favour of men is wide spread in the Nigerian mass media just as stereotypes against women are still prevalent in every day media. Also, women are portrayed solely as homemakers and caregivers of the family, just as women are still portrayed as objects of beauty and sex in the Nigerian mass media. This is supported by Amobi's (2013) study which found that the mass media present images of women in a distorted, negative and impractical manner that outnumbers their positive and realistic portrayals, describing the overall media depiction of women as being shallow and narrow. Ibrahim, Yunus, Shah, Ilias and Mokhtar (2017) also found that women have not been treated fairly by the media. Ibrahim et al. (2017) also found that those women's activities and interests as portrayed in mass media contents typically do not go beyond the confines of home and family. This stereotype redirects certain assumptions that affect women negatively in the society because mass media have the power to represent reality in a distorted way that can marginalize women and reinforce their roles with a status of inferiority.

Conclusion

Following the findings, the study concluded that the Nigerian mass media still portray women through stereotypical lens and this is perceived by the women too. Media contents still reinforce gender stereotypes, which continuously contribute to gender inequality in the Nigerian society, with women bearing the brunt. Thus, media that portray women images and issues stereotypically need an orientation. Media contents should be more rational, educative, informative, inspiring and developmentally-oriented.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from this study and findings of other empirical studies reviewed in this study, the research makes the following recommendations: The Nigerian government should formulate a gender-friendly policy that will serve as a check on media houses on their coverage of gender. As such, media practitioners would be made to deliberately ensure the presence of gender balance in their contents so as to dismantle the patriarchal structure which seems to be the fundamental cause of the imbalance.

If the media could mold and define people's perception of discerning roles and values, the same media should be used to give a more vibrant and real portrayal of women as members of the society in their own rights.

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