Representation of Women's Images in Nigerian Newspapers

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Abstract

The representation of women in the media has been a subject of concern. This paper examines the photographic image of women portrayed in the print media today. It explores the agenda-setting theory explaining the importance readers attach to gender representation in the print media. The research presents the findings from a content analysis of two Nigerian national newspapers using articles published from January to December 2012. The findings show that the photographic images of women in the print media are portrayed negatively which undermine the status of the African woman today depicting the Nigerian women negatively, confining them to areas traditionally meant for them, and reinforcing gender discrimination and stereotype. The findings can inform media stakeholders to come up with policy on the portrayal of photographic images of women in the print media.

Keywords: Print media, Stereotype, Content Analysis, Marginalisation, Discrimination

Introduction

The equality and representation of women in the media has been a subject of concern. . Globally, women have been treated with prejudiced attitude, even though there are changes today and women have been contributing greatly in the society, the prejudiced treatment has not stopped. Most people consider women to be the weaker ones in the society which might affect how they are treated. Media remain one of the main sources of information, ideas, and opinion for most people around the world and have the potential to propagate and perpetuate or to ameliorate the gender inequalities and stereotypes (UNESCO, 2012)., this study sets out to investigate the depth, prominence, and direction of newspaper portrayal of photographic images of Nigerian women.

Statement of the Problem

The mass media is part of our everyday lives and they are powerful tools for enjoyment, companionship, surveillance, and interpretation. This study will find out if women's pictures are sensationalized, discriminated, and trivialised in the Nigerian print media.

Objectives of the Study

So many scholars have talked about the representation of women in the mass media, the purpose of this research is to know how often Nigerian print media cover female images, if there is imbalance between the coverage of men and female images, the issues of their coverage and also to know if these images undermine the status of women in Africa today.

Research Questions

1. How often do the Nigerian newspapers give coverage to female images?
2. Are the images of women portrayed in print media undermining the status of women in Africa today?
3. How much prominence is given to the images of women in the selected newspapers?
4. What are the significant issues portrayed by the images of women in the selected newspapers?

Hypothesis

1. There is no significant difference in the <u>direction of images portrayed</u> between the Guardian and the Punch newspaper
2. There is significant difference in the <u>direction of images portrayed</u> between the Guardian and the Punch newspaper

Methodology

The dailies analysed were The Punch and The Guardian newspapers. The period for the research was from August to December 2012 and simple random sampling technique was employed to select the 3rd, 5th of the week and Saturday edition of the newspapers. A total number of 130 newspapers were covered in the two newspapers. The analysis fell into some categories: the number of photos, amount of space devoted to the photo, title of the photo, placement of the photo, obvious contrast in the way women and men are shown.

Literature Review

The media is a channel used to inform and entertain the public. Sharma (2012) in his studies says that, "the media is a carrier of information, ideas, thoughts and opinions. It is a powerful force in influencing people's perceptions on a variety of issues". The newspaper organizations also determine what to cover, and one of the factors that influence what to cover is the editorial policy of the news company. Udoakah (2001:32) states that there, "is always a set of pre-determined position of the news company on what type of news it would be

publishing". The newspaper communicate to the readers through the images they present, in fact, for most people in the western and developing world, life is saturated with visual images and representations, we communicate with one another through the images and representations and, more importantly, make sense of the world (Soobben, 2012). This shows that the images in the newspaper depict who we are – our thoughts, beliefs and values. Bamburac, Jusic & Isanovic (2006) opine that,

> In a newspaper, photography visually supports an article, by offering additional information and by attracting the attention of the reader, it is both a reporting technique as much as a marketing strategy. Nevertheless, by doing so it also represents those who are photographed in a particular way depicting their facial, body or style, characteristics, expressions, positions, movements, etc.

Department of Communities (2012) buttresses this point and says that, "media affects our ideas of who we are and what we could be. We create our identity in relation to the images we see around us, from a young age." World population data sheet 2012 indicates that women make up almost 50% of the world's population (World Population Data Sheet, 2012). According to United Nations (1995), one of the points noted at the 4th Women Conference in September 1995 at Beijing is, "the continued projection of negative and degrading images of women in media communications – electronic, print, visual and audio".

Studies have shown that women are portrayed more negatively in the media, thereby presenting them as unserious news sources. BBC News Magazine (2012) says that a report by Object and three other women's campaign groups surveyed eleven (11) British newspapers over a forth night in September 2012 and found that there is, "excessive objectification of women in some parts of the press, reducing them entirely to sexual commodities in a way that would not be broadcast on television, nor allowed in the workplace because of equality legislation". Often, the image of women in the media is presented in a stereotyped form such as, nurturing mother, dutiful wife, or as sex objects, the under-representation of women in media and the stereotyping and sex-role socialization is still a feature of much media content (McQuail, 2010). The media has been persistent in the stereotyped portrayals of women and marginalization of their perceptions and experiences that continue to negate women's roles and their contribution to societal development. Sharma (2012) says that,

> although the media has played an important role in highlighting women's issues, it has also had negative impact, in terms of perpetrating violence against women through pornography and images of women as a female body that can be bought and sold. Overall, the media treatment of women is narrow and continually reinforces stereotyped gender roles and assumptions that women's functions are that of a wife, mother and servant of man

For the Department of Communities (2012), "women are also more likely to be shown in ways that focus on sexual availability, passiveness, and dependence on other people – they are motherly or domestic, sexualized, or too often represented as victims". This negative portrayal of women in the media may have significant consequences on the masses which might bring up undesirable effects. When the masses are repeatedly shown images of women as victims, sexualized, or in domestic roles, they might likely accept those images as normal and will build their beliefs and values on them (Department of Communities, 2012).

Theoretical Framework

The agenda-setting theory is based on the fact that the media filter and shape reality and concentrate on some issues and subjects leading the public to perceive those issues as more important than others. The news media tell the public what to think about, Miller (2002:259) sees the agenda-setting theory as when "the media agenda influences the public agenda not by saying "this issue is important" in an overt way but by giving more space and time to that issue and by giving it more prominent space and time".

Findings/Discussion

Question 1: How often do the Nigerian print media give coverage to female images?

Table 1. Number of images from Newspaper

News paper	Male		Female	
	Frequency (N=5870)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (N=1353)	Percentage (%)
THE GUARDIAN	3445	58.7	636	47.0
PUNCH	2425	41.3	717	53.0
Total	5870	100	1353	100.0
	Ratio of female images to male images is 0.23:1			

According to the Table1 above the number of images for female which the two newspapers featured are The Guardian, 636 (47%) and Punch, 717 (53%), for men is 3445 (58.7%) and 2425 (41.3%) respectively. In contrast, which is shown in the graph below, female images are 19% while men's images are 81%. This indicates that the newspapers coverage of the photographic images of women is less than the men. The men's pictures dominated the news agenda.
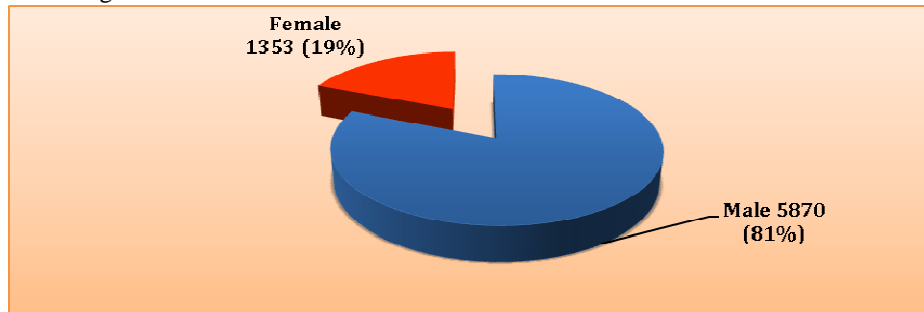

Question 2: Are the images of women portrayed in print media undermining the status of women in Africa today?

Table 2. The Direction of women images

Direction	Frequency	Percent
POSITIVE	913	67.5
NEGATIVE	330	24.4
NEUTRAL	110	8.1
Total	1353	100.0

Table 2, answers research question two, women are seen as weak and passive. The positive pictures are 913 (67.5%), negative 330 (24.4%), while neutral is 110 (8.1%). The pictures are sub-categorised into assault/victim 8.4%; inappropriate exploitation/exposure of women sexuality 3.7%; advert 6.5%; sports 1.8%; death 1%; economy 5.6%; entertainment, fashion & Arts (lifestyle) 12%; and others 25.3%. Women are still portrayed seductively in some of the adverts, in some of the pictures; their cleavages were showing which did not represent women well.

Figure 2. Direction
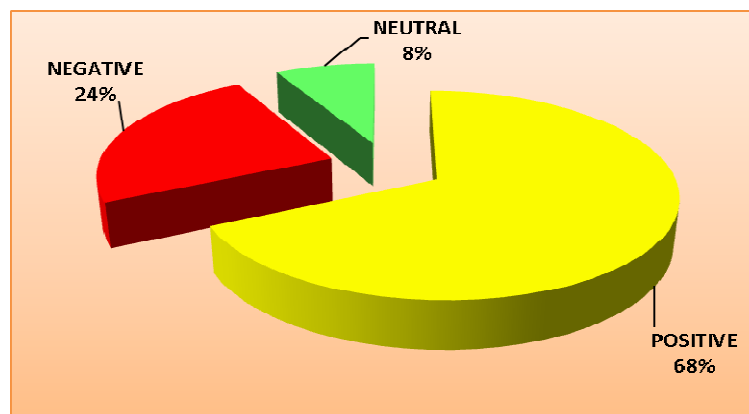
Table 3: Direction of images of women across Guardian and Punch Newspaper

DIRECTION		NEWSPAPER		Total
		GUARDIAN	PUNCH	
POSITIVE	Count	468	445	913
	% within NEWSPAPER	73.6%	62.1%	67.5%
NEGATIVE	Count	151	179	330
	% within NEWSPAPER	23.7%	25.0%	24.4%
NEUTRAL	Count	17	93	110
	% within NEWSPAPER	2.7%	13.0%	8.1%
Total	Count	636	717	1353
	% within NEWSPAPER	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 4: Chi-square test Summary of significant difference in direction of images portray between Guardian and punch Newspapers

	Guardian Newspaper	Punch newspaper	N	df	Calculated value	Table value	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Positive (+)	468	445	1353	2	50.797	12.706	0.000
Negative (-)	151	179					
Neutral (o)	17	93					

P<0.05

According to the table 4 above, the chi square test was carried out so as to ascertain whether there is significant difference in the direction of images portrayed between The Guardian and the Punch newspapers. It is revealed that chi-square calculated value of 50.797 is greater than the table value of 12.706 at df (degree of freedom) of 2 and significance level of 0.000 (that is, P<0.05).

Decision rule for chi-square test is set on a standard of accepting the null hypothesis if calculated value of chi-square is less than table value of chi-square or rejecting the null hypothesis if the calculated value of chi-square is greater than the table value of chi-square. Therefore, the Null hypothesis is rejected while the alternative hypothesis is accepted which states that there is significant difference in the direction of images portrayed between The Guardian and the Punch newspapers

Question 3: How much prominence is given to the images of women in the selected newspapers?

The pictures of the women are placed more on the pages inside and the amount of space allocated to them is not much. The pictures appeared more in the 'other' pages with 88.2%. The center page 1.2%, back page 1.9%, and the front page 8.6%. The amount of space allocated to the pictures depict that women are less important and should be relegated at the background. Full space allocated to the images is 8.9%, half top is 25.4%, and half bottom is 9.8%, top right is 12.4%, top left is 5.2%, half center is 31.4%, bottom right is 1.3%, bottom left is 3.3% and half page (vertical) is 2.3%. The breakdown is highlighted below:

Table 5. Prominence

	Frequency	Percentage
FRONT PAGE	117	8.6
CENTRE PAGE	16	1.2
BACK PAGE	26	1.9
OTHER PAGES	1194	88.2
TOTAL	1353	100.0
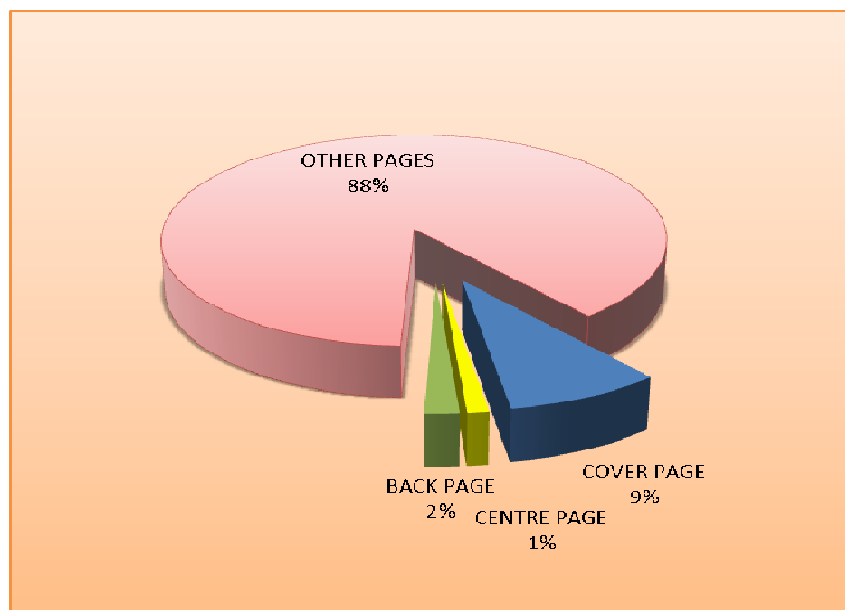
Table 6: Position

	Frequency	Percentage
FULL	120	8.9
HALF TOP	344	25.4
HALF BOTTOM	132	9.8
TOP RIGHT	168	12.4
TOP LEFT	71	5.2
HALF CENTRE	425	31.4
BOTTOM RIGHT	17	1.3
BOTTOM LEFT	45	3.3
HALF PAGE (VERTICAL)	31	2.3
Total	1353	100.0

Question 4: What are the significant issues portrayed by the images of women in the selected newspapers?
The issues are classified as assault/victim, inappropriate exploitation/exposure of women sexuality, advert, sports, death, education, politics, economy, entertainment, fashion/Arts (lifestyle) and others (health, social, relationships, cartoon and others). Based on the findings, 8.4% pictures of women appeared under assault/victim, 3.7% appeared under inappropriate exploitation/exposure of women sexuality, 13.5% in advert, 10.4% in sports, 7.7% in death, 6.1% in education, 4.8% in politics, 7.4% appeared in economy, 8.9% in entertainment, fashion/Arts (lifestyle) and 29.2% in others (health, social, relationships, cartoon and others). The findings show that pictures of women appear most in others, advert, sports and assault/victim. Women are not considered important in major news items.

Table 7: Subjects

	Frequency	Percentage
ASSAULT/ VICTIM	113	8.4
INAPPROPRIATE EXPLOITATION/ EXPOSURE OF WOMEN SEXUALITY	50	3.7
ADVERT	182	13.5
SPORTS	141	10.4
DEATH	104	7.7
EDUCATION	83	6.1
POLITICS	65	4.8
ECONOMY	100	7.4
ENTERTAINMENT, FASHION/ARTS (LIFESTYLE)	120	8.9
OTHERS (health, social, relationships, cartoon, among other)	395	29.2
Total	1353	100.0

Table 8: Comparison of situation (remarks from observation) of images and its directions

SUB-CATEGORIES	DIRECTION			TOTAL
	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NEUTRAL	
ASSAULT/ VICTIM	0	113	0	113
	.0%	34.9%	.0%	8.4%
INAPPROPRIATE EXPLOITATION/ EXPOSUAL OF WOMEN SEXUALITY	0	50	0	50
	.0%	15.4%	.0%	3.7%
ADVERT	161	21	0	182
	17.5%	6.5%	.0%	13.5%
SPORT	135	6	0	141
	14.8%	1.8%	.0%	10.4%
DEATH	27	1	76	104
	2.9%	.3%	69.1%	7.7%
EDUCATION	83	0	0	83
	9.0%	.0%	.0%	6.1%
POLITICS	65	0	0	65
	7.1%	.0%	.0%	4.8%
ECONOMY SITUATION	82	18	0	100
	8.9%	5.6%	.0%	7.4%
ENTERTAINMENT AND FASHION (LIFESTYLE)	81	39	0	120
	8.8%	12.0%	.0%	8.9%
OTHERS (HEALTH, SOCIAL, RELATIONSHIPS, CARTOON, AMONG OTHER)	279	82	34	395
	30.4%	25.3%	30.9%	29.2%
TOTAL	919	324	110	1353
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Conclusion

There is an imbalance representation of women's picture in the newspapers analysed especially in the area of economy, education and politics. Women's diverse lives and contributions to society were not portrayed much like that of the men. More of the women's pictures appeared in entertainment and fashion (lifestyle), advertisement and others confining women to areas that traditionally meant for them. The images of women portrayed in the print media are negative and undermines the African woman today. The images analysed did not show women as successful business persons and professionals in various fields. More of the women's images were seen in advertisements for beauty, technology/network, health products, in sports and assault/victims. This shows that the pictures of women are centered on their domesticity and sexually which are used either to sell products or to present women as beautiful objects.

The pictures are not well positioned, and there is imbalance in the presentation of the men and women's pictures. The media should portray women as strong and achievers, changing the attitude of the society towards them and not reinforcing prejudices and stereotypes of women by the society. The media as an agent of change can challenge dominant discourse by providing the society with alternative representations of women, new gender ideas and identities, values and ways of living that crosscut earlier traditions and beliefs. The media can also reinforce traditional gender definitions, where a woman's body is her pride and cultural patterns and thereby legitimate, justify and preserve dominant ideology of gender (Johannessen, 2002).

Recommendation

The media as an agent of change should provide the society with alternative representations of women, new gender ideas and identities, values and ways of living that will address the accepted norms and beliefs. There is need for organizations to review their policies on the pictures of women that will be represented in the print media. There should be trainings for sustainable changes, and continuous awareness on gender issues in the media. The public should be involved in media monitoring thereby mobilizing their power as media consumers.

The diverse voices, images and opinions globally should be heard and seen by everyone. The media should be used to advance the interest of both the men and the women equally. According to United Nations (1995), one of the suggestions at the 4th Women Conference in September 1995 at Beijing is that the media should, "establish, consistent with freedom of expression, professional guidelines and codes of conduct that addresses violent, degrading or pornographic materials concerning women in the media, including advertising".

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