



Professionalism, Gender and Media Competences in Broadcast Organisations in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study – *Professionalism, Gender and Media Competences in Broadcast Organisations in Nigeria* – was aimed at ascertaining if women, as a result of their gender, were deprived of some duties in the media; if the broadcast organisations engaged in gender balancing in assigning news beats and if women occupied decision-making positions in their news organisations. It was also meant to ascertain, from the women's point of view, the attitude of men towards women in decision-making positions in news organisations. The study covered female journalists and producers in four broadcast organisations in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria, namely *Akwa Ibom Broadcasting Corporation, AKBC, both Television and Radio Services; Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) Channel 12, Uyo and Atlantic FM, Uyo*. Fifty three female media operatives constituted the population of the study, and all of them were polled. The measuring instrument was the questionnaire. The findings showed that women had, on merit, without any gender balancing act, risen to positions of trust in the media, and were no longer restricted to the soft beats hitherto reserved for women. It was concluded that the growing influence of women both in number and position in the peripheral media was a signpost to the revolution which was imminent in the media at the centre.

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1. Introduction

The last decade had been particularly eventful for gender activists across the world. Echoes of women equality with men were deafening. World attention to these echoes resulted in more opportunities for women in different spheres of life in different countries. More opportunities for women also swept through Islamic countries which, traditionally, restrict public, visible roles for women. And into the middle of the second decade of the 21st century, women have clawed themselves into positions which were hitherto the exclusive preserve of the men. It is therefore not surprising, and it should be actually expected, that there should be some increasing visibility of women as they expand into different frontiers in the media.

About 50 years ago, journalism was almost exclusively a male profession. Women were discouraged from pursuing careers in the profession. In recent times, however, more and more women are employed as journalists. Today's journalism and communications schools have more women than men as students. For example, in the Department of Communication Arts, University of Uyo, Nigeria, about two-thirds of the students are female.

Yet, looking at women in the media from the point of number may be deceptive because it does not indicate the level of participation or involvement of women in the decision-making process in the media. Neither does access to the media by women translate into increased participation, specifically at the decision-making level. So the question arises, are women so employed in the broadcast organisations allowed or are able to exhibit their competence and discharge their duties professionally and discretionally? This is the burden of this work.

2. Statement of the Problem

It is a fact that the number of women in the media profession in Nigeria has increased tremendously in recent times, in some cases outstripping the number of men in some media organisations. This is a positive development for feminism and for the media profession generally. Yet this is only an aspect. The other aspect is whether these women in the media occupy decision-making positions and whether they are consigned to the soft beats that are always thought to be given to women, or if they are allowed to compete with the men in covering what is usually described as 'hard news'?

Against this backdrop, the study seeks to answer the question, to what extent are women in the media allowed to express their competence through decision-making and coverage of news beats hitherto reserved for the men?

3. Area of Study

The study area of this work is Uyo, the capital city of Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria, located in the South South region of the country. In the city are seven broadcast organisations, namely Akwa Ibom Broadcasting Corporation (AKBC), Channel 45, Uyo (Television Service); Akwa Ibom Broadcasting Corporation, Radio Service; Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Channel 12, Uyo; Atlantic FM, Uyo; Planet FM, Uyo; Inspiration FM and UNIUYO FM. Of the seven, Planet FM and Inspiration FM are privately funded. The rest are funded and controlled by the government: AKBC (Akwa Ibom State Government), NTA and Atlantic FM (Federal Government) and UNIUYO FM (University of Uyo, a Federal-funded institution). However, only AKBC Television, NTA 12, AKBC Radio and Atlantic FM are under focus in this study.

4. Research Questions

The following were the questions that gave direction to the study:

- i) Do women occupy decision-making positions in your news organisation?
- ii) To what extent are women deprived of some duties in your news organisation because of their gender?
- iii) What is the attitude of men towards the women in decision-making positions in your news organisation?
- iv) Does your news organisation deliberately engage in gender balancing in assigning responsibilities to its personnel?
- v) Are the roles assigned women in your news organisation based on their competences?
- vi) Are women in your news organisations restricted to the usual 'soft, feminine' beats?

5. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation for this work is the feminist theory. Sometimes known as feminism, the theory has emerged over many decades and in many countries of the world with different personalities spearheading.

The basic ideas about feminism are working to increase equality, expanding human choice, eliminating gender stratification, ending sexual violence and promoting sexual freedom (Moffitt, 2016). Lord, Greiter and Tursunovic see feminist theory as an outgrowth of the general movement to empower women worldwide. They define it as a recognition and critique of male supremacy combined with efforts to change it. According to them, the goals of feminism are to demonstrate the importance of women; to reveal that historically women have been subordinate to men; and to bring about gender equality. Simply put, Lord *et. al.* (2016) hold that feminists fight for the equality of women and argue that women should share equally in society's opportunities and scarce resources.

Scholars have identified five types of feminism, according to Lord *et. al.* (2016):

i) Liberal feminism – Here the key point is that all people are created equal and should not be denied equality of opportunity because of gender; that inequality stems from the denial of equal rights and that the primary obstacle to equality is sexism.

ii) Marxist Feminism - According to this point of view, division of labour is related to gender role expectations. Females give birth; males support the family.

iii) Postmodern Feminist - The postmodern feminist argues that all theory is socially constructed. It further argues that looking at the past is no longer the way to go because today's world is an economic order highlighted by technology.

iv) Socialist Feminism – This looks at women oppression as stemming from their work in the family and in the economy. It demands equal opportunities for women in the public sphere.

v) Radical Feminism – This school of thought sees women are the oppressed group; women's oppression is the most widespread; and women's oppression is the deepest. It also holds that women's oppression causes the most suffering; women's oppression provides a conceptual model for understanding all other forms of oppression.

The feminist theory also extends to the media. A continuing theme of feminist media critique has been the relative lack of visibility of women in news and their *ghettoization* to certain topics (McQuail, 2005). Feminists believe that media contents are gendered, and that "the trivialization, personalization and sensationalism are (whether correctly or not, but in line with dominant stereotypes) often

synonymous with 'feminization'" (McQuail, 2005, p.122). He summarises it thus:

Differently gendered media culture, whatever the causes and the forms taken, evokes different responses, and that differences of gender lead to alternative modes of taking meaning from media. There are also differences in selection and context of use which have wider cultural and social implications. While the greater attention to gender has been widely welcomed, there have also been warnings about reading too much into gender identity (McQuail, 2005, p.123).

Feminist critique raises two issues which are aptly articulated by McQuail (2005, p.345): "The first is the extent to which media texts intended for the entertainment of women (like soap operas or romances) can ever be liberating when they embody the realities of patriarchal society and family...The second is the degree to which new kinds of mass media texts which challenge gender stereotyping and try to introduce positive role models can have any 'empowering' effect for women (while remaining within the dominant commercial media system)".

6. Review of Related Literature

6.1 Professionalism and Media Competence

Professionalism and media competences are strongly related and are mutually reinforcing. We shall define professionalism in the media in the words of Elliot (1977, p.150) that it is "an adapting to the role conflict by which skill and competence in the performance of routine tasks becomes elevated to the occupational ideal." Claims to professionalism are based on such routine competences as factual accuracy, punctuality, speed at meeting deadline, style in presentation and a shared sense of expectations from the workforce.

According to Elliot (1977), the benefit of professionalism is two-pronged. First, through it an operative in an organisation can pre-empt executive control and, secondly, it can be used by the organisation to pre-empt external regulations. Elliot (1977, p.152), however, states that "professionalism...does suggest a claim to leadership, a claim to know better than the client what his needs are."

Here the female media professional is assumed to know more than her client, which is her audience. She is expected to lead in the discussion of issues, show the light to the audience and, from the standpoint of being better informed, guide the audience into making rational decisions (Akpan, Udeze and Asogwa, 2014).

Given the point above and the fact that the majority of cultural producers are drawn more widely from the whole spectrum of the middle class, are professionalism and media competences gender-defined? Professionalism is often regarded as a product of an organisation. According to McNair (1999), the organisational approach to the media contents are outcomes of the limitation imposed by the news form, constraints imposed on journalists' ability to gather news and routine professional practices of journalism.

Media content, according to this school of thought, is a function of the organisation's structure and is an organised response to routine bureaucratic problems. According to McNair (2002, p.46): "Journalists, then, must construct their news in accordance with the scheduling and space requirements of the organisations within which they work. Not only does this help to explain why news is characteristically about events rather than processes, and effects rather than causes, it might also be thought to be part of the reason why news media tend...to favour the definitions of the powerful when constructing accounts of events."

Thus if routine competences appear to be lacking among women media professionals, it has less to do with their gender than the organisational set up.

There is also the ideological factor to explain the shortcomings in competences. As already stated, the majority of cultural producers are drawn from the middle class. According to Brown (1995), ideologically, women in the media identify with the ideological dispositions of the society. But the same ideological disposition tends to create a division between masculine and feminine tasks in the media. Matterlart (1995, p.411) puts it that: "Capitalism merely continued and deepened a hierarchical division of labour which had come into being well before as modes of production developed, reserving for males the most prestigious and best-rewarded work and restricting women to the lowest kind. The sex role discrimination is fundamental to the maintenance of the capitalist economy. The division of labour finds expression in a definition of masculine and feminine qualities transmitted, reinforced and rearticulated by the different institutions of society (the church, schools, the media)."

Mattelart (1995, p.2) further says that "the invisibility of women's work and the concealment of the productive value of their household tasks are of decisive importance in determining the image of them projected by the media and the media's relationship with them".

5.2 Broadcast Programming and Portrayal of Women

Writing on the symbolic annihilation of women by the mass media, Tuchman (1995, p. 408) says that "the portrayal of incompetence extends from denigration through victimization and trivialisation. When television women are involved in violence, unlike males, they are more likely to be victims than aggressors". Again, Tuchman points out that "those few working women included in television plots are symbolically denigrated by being portrayed as incompetent and inferior to male workers...More generally, television most approves those women who are presented in a sexual context or within a romantic or family role" (1995, p.408).

According to Brown (1995, p.403), "the terms 'feminine' and 'masculine' are used to define social constructions of a woman and a man as opposed to biological, essential, and/or natural inherited properties of men and women". To that extent, therefore, the gender that dominates naturally defines and provides the social constructions for both men and women. These constructions, according to Rothman's (1996), make female characters to be portrayed on TV as the weaker sex, less well educated and for that reason should hold lower status jobs. Television and radio programming is very revealing in this respect. Television and radio programming, according to Mattelart (1995, p.412): "Punctuates the day with moments that make women's condition all worthwhile and helps to compensate for being shut up at home all day. It makes women's work legitimate, not as work but as a duty that forms part of their natural function...The values around which their themes are structured can correspond to different points in women's relation to capital, and to the more or less modern and free-thinking character of the sections of the bourgeoisie that produce them."

Generally, programmes have been designed for women to affect their social and cultural behaviour, to free themselves from their virtual confinements within the family. Traditionally, the woman is portrayed as fulfilling her role as daughter, wife and mother, hence the characters of 'tender mother' or 'the good little wife' as dominant themes.

Tuchman (1995, p.416), however, maintains that "there are a few TV plays that show pioneering or resistant female characters; but as a rule these plays present women as always willing to conform to the dominant attitude, and go to reinforce traditional female way of thinking." Matterlart (1995) argues that women are portrayed in the most conventional light imaginable: passive, dependent, and prone to a sugary-sweet view of life.

Rothman (1986) believes that there is an increasing change in the portrayal of women. This may be due, partly, to the increasing number of women who are working in the media. Watson (2003) says there have been substantial increases in the number of women in journalism schools undergoing studies in public relations, advertising, magazine production, publishing etc. Van Zoonen (1994), cited by Watson (2003, p.193), says "one of the factors explaining why some areas of communication provide more opportunities for women than others is the status of the medium". Where the status of the media is low, opportunities for women increase. Where there is loss of prestige, male interest may have decreased. According to van Zoonen (1994), local (low prestige) media almost invariably employ more women than national (high prestige) media.

Once employed, women have had further problems to deal with – in particular, the discriminatory attitude towards women by male colleagues and decision-makers. Watson (2003, pp.193–194) argues that "women journalists are often expected by men colleagues and by the organisation which employ them to perform professionally in a manner different from men; to subscribe to the expectations of 'femininity'." Writing on the expectation of 'femininity', van Zoonen (1994) says: "Women are confronted by social and cultural expectations of femininity and at the same time are expected to meet criteria of professionalism. In the Netherlands, for instance, many female journalists feel that they are judged primarily as women being subjected to continual comment on their appearance and 'invitations' from male colleagues." Watson (2003, p.194) notes that "the chief problem facing women is that they generally enter an organisational culture whose *mores* and discourses are male-oriented. To survive, women must adapt; become socialised into ways of the institution – what van Zoonen believes 'tends to reaffirm a conservative *status quo*' which she discerns as already having begun at the stage of journalist training."

With more women in media production, there is an increase in what Watson (2003) calls 'maleness' of the news. This implies that news generally, and international news in particular, needs to be viewed through the prism of gender; hence news content and news gathering are 'gendered' with an institutionalised bias towards maleness (Jansen, 1996). Drawing inference from the United States, Watson (2003, p.194) writes: "Women, women's issues and problems are not newsworthy unless they can be labelled according to traditional female roles - wife, mother, daughter. Men are typically assigned to *hard news*, news that has significant public implications. Women, in contrast, cover *soft news* stories and stories related to topics traditionally associated with female responsibilities. In international news coverage, women not only are marginal but also normally absent."

This leads to what Connel (1987) calls 'hegemonic masculinity' which Watson (2003, p.194) explains as "masculine relationships characterised by dominance and subservience, men to men, and men to all females."

There seems to be resistance among traditional media operators to attempts to assert women's rights. Sometimes advertising-dependent magazines are threatened with withdrawal of advertisements if they continue to address issues such as prostitution, birth control, female circumcision, polygamy and sex education. Such stories, according to Jansen (1996), are deemed to have low or no news value within the framing convention of mainstream objective media. According to Jansen and Connel (1999), hegemonic masculinity is replicated in global ordering of relationships between nations. They state that the present global gender order makes policymakers and journalists to find it more *manly* to deal with guns, missiles and violent conflicts than with matters like female infanticide in China, increased trade in children in the sex markets of Manila and Bangkok in the wake of the AIDS epidemic, the impact of the intifada on Palestinian women, or the political activism groups such as Women in Black - Israeli women who support the intifada.

6.3 Women and Under-representation in the Media

The issue of under representation of women and the stereotyping roles assigned to the women in the media still touch on every aspect of media culture. Branston and Stafford (2008), citing Ross (2004), argue that it is still difficult for women to be assigned 'manly' roles much as commentating live on an important men's TV football or rugby match, even if female sports anchors and interviewers are appearing. The 'authority' of the white male voice is still preferred to the soft voice of a woman.

Branston and Stafford (2008) believe that gender differences are culturally formed. This, some feminists argue, translate into unequal pay in the realm of production or work. Men's social position and power can often be shown to exploit women's domestic and even emotional work for them and their children (Andermahr *et. al.*, 2000). And because of the assumed 'naturalness' of women's caring role in the home, they tend to be employed in the 4Cs: caring, cleaning, catering and cash registers (Hochschild and Babara, 2003). We might add call centres, which involve the kinds of 'emotional labour' skills which many women learn, both in caring for the family and in growing up with the expectation they will have families, and anyway have 'natural' abilities to work or care in this way. Hochschild and Babara (2003, p.182) define emotional labour as the "effort expanded to manage or regulate one's emotional reaction in certain kinds of work. Examples would be the requirement to smile at the checkout or perform 'vocal smiling' in call centres and to suppress expressions of irritation or anger, despite possible rude customers or a lactic workplace".

Discussing on gender, McQuail (2005), citing van Zoonen (1991, p.45), says "the meaning of gender is never given but varies according to specific cultural and historical settings..." This naturally affects the differential values attached by each culture to masculinity and femininity. Branston and Stafford (2008) emphasise this when they say that gender differences are culturally formed. Culture does influence content; hence media texts are to a greater extent also gendered. McQuail (2005, p.122) makes the argument that "many media texts are deep and persistently *gendered* in the way they have been encoded, usually according to a view of the anticipated audience...the gendering of content may also be studied at the point of production, since most media selection and production work is carried out by men".

Beside the construction of media texts, McQuail (2005, p.122) says that studies of media audiences and the reception

of media content have shown that there are relatively "large differences according to gender in the manner of use of media and the meanings attached to the activity. A good deal of the audience can be accounted for by patterned differences in social roles, by the typical everyday experience and concerns of men and women, and by the way gender shapes the availability and use of time. It also relates to power roles within the family and the general nature of the relationships between women and male partners or of women in the wider family".

In many countries women are believed to be less in number in the media; are generally on lower occupational status in the news media and are under-represented or stereotyped in the news (European Commission, 1999). Since the structures of the news are gendered in favour of men, it is probable that most of the topics treated in the media would correlate with what those at the structures of news would tolerate. McQuail (2005, p.301), citing Lind and Salo (2002), reports that "an extensive study of the way in which US electronic news media framed feminists and feminism showed both topics as making a rare appearance and, where they do, to be demonized and trivialized. Content implicitly differentiated between feminists and 'regular women'." This also suggests a correlation between men's dominance in the media and men-oriented themes. While the news media may not exhibit open hostility to issues affecting women, they may, however, subtly deny access to those issues that are perceived to be feminist and perhaps 'hostile' to men. The interesting point is that even the women in the media have been socially conditioned to accept and implement this. The European Commission (1999) is, however, doubtful over the correlation between the number of women employed and the portrayal of women. Neither has it found convincing support that because women are few in the news media, then content is skewed against them. But Baehr (1999) is of the opinion that decisions about content are much more influenced by financial necessity than by personnel preference.

Pavarala, Malik and Cheeli (2006) write on participatory community media initiatives aimed at increasing the involvement of women in the media, and perceive women as producers and contributors of media content and not solely as 'consumers'. Such initiatives are meant to enhance women's engagement in technical, decision-making and agenda-setting activities, and encourage them to develop as socio-political actors. The authors, however, state that there may be limitations to participatory community initiatives; if unaccompanied by changes in structural conditions, participation may not be sufficient to foster substantive social change. Baú (2009) explains that the establishment of a women's radio station (run and managed by women) in Afghanistan faced constraints in that women engaged in self-censorship in order to avoid criticism from local male political and religious leaders.

6.4 The Changing Paradigm

According to Branston and Stafford (2008, p.148), "feminist studies of gender roles seem to show both that there have been huge changes in attitude to gender difference, and that these co-exist alongside long-standing cultural stereotypes." Women, though, are not anchoring the most prestigious levels of news such as Election Night: "Perhaps the authority of the white male voice is hard to hand over to a woman" (Branston and Stafford, 2008, p.149).

The changing paradigm goes beyond representation of women to the different roles occupied by women.

For van Zoonen, although women representation in the media has been boosted, it occurs mainly in the media whose status is relatively low: "One of the factors explaining why some areas of communication provide more opportunities for women than others is the status of the medium" (cited in Watson, 2003, p.193). She argues that where the status is low, opportunities for women increase; where there is a loss of prestige, male interest may have decreased: "The resulting loss of prestige may have decreased male competition for job openings enabling women to fill the gaps" (Watson, 2003, p.193). Hence, local media tend to employ more women than high prestige media.

More entry into the media by women in the long run has shot women into prominent roles. Increasingly, some have made career progress into decision-making positions, thus assuming some critical roles in the hierarchy. Other women, by sheer will driven by availability of capital, have established and become media owners. With proprietary influence, they gradually institute a 'new' gender ideology where women are increasingly pushed into critical positions formerly occupied by the men. It involves the gradual dismantling of the existing gendered structures in the organisation to give room to the female gender to rise and occupy positions of responsibility. Thus, whether by career advancement or media proprietorship, women representation in the media is becoming increasingly visible, and in some instances the men, feeling their depreciating dominance, may, like women in times past, whisper aloud gender marginalisation.

However, White (2009) has reported of studies that have established that although the number of women working in the media has been increasing globally, the top positions (producers, executives, chief editors and publishers) are still very male-dominated and that this disparity is particularly evident in Africa, where cultural impediments to women fulfilling the role of journalist remain (e.g. travelling away from home, evening work and covering issues such as politics and sports which are considered to fall within the masculine domain) (Myers, 2009). The Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) reports that throughout the world, female journalists are more likely to be assigned 'soft' subjects such as family, lifestyle, fashion and arts. The 'hard' news, politics and the economy, is much less likely to be written or covered by women.

According to White (2009), the level of participation and influence of women in the media also has implications for media content: female media professionals are more likely to reflect other women's needs and perspectives than their male colleagues. She, however, says that not all women working in the media would be gender aware and prone to cover women's needs and perspectives; and it is not impossible for men to effectively cover gender issues. Recent research from 18 disparate countries shows that male and female journalists' attitudes do not differ significantly (Hanitzsch & Hanusch, 2012). Nonetheless, the presence of women on the radio, television and in print is more likely to provide positive role models for women and girls, to gain the confidence of women as sources and interviewees, and to attract a female audience.

7. Methodology

The population of the study comprised all female reporters, editors and programme producers in four broadcast organisations: two television and two radio stations. Coincidentally, all of them were government-financed. The population of female reporters, editors and producers in these organisations was 53, broken down as follows:

Reporters/Editors in AKBC Radio - 5

Reporters/Editors in AKBC TV	-	5
Reporters/Editors in NTA Uyo	-	9
Reporters/Editors in Atlantic FM	-	7
Programme producers in AKBC Radio	-	10
Programme producers in AKBC TV	-	9
Programme Producers in Atlantic FM	-	8

Given the small size of the population, all those in the population were polled. It was a census study. The measuring instrument was the questionnaire which had six items. The respondents were accessed in their offices. They showed enthusiasm in participating in the study.

8. The Results

The questionnaire was administered on 53 female respondents who worked either as reporters/editors or producers in the news and programmes of NTA 12 Uyo, Atlantic FM as well as AKBC Radio and TV.

Research Question 1: Do women occupy decision-making positions in your news organisation?

All the 53 (100%) respondents answered in the affirmative.

Research Question 2: To what extent are women deprived of some duties in your news organisation because of their gender?

Option	No of Respondents	%
Yes	5	9.4
No	40	95.4
To some degree	4	7.6
I don't think so	4	7.6
Total	53	100

Research Question 3: What is the attitude of men towards the women in decision-making positions in your news organisation?

Option	No of Respondents	%
Loyalty	32	60.4
Routine Compliance	12	22.6
Insubordination	4	7.6
Disloyalty	5	9.4
Total	53	100

Research Question 4: Does your media organisation deliberately engage in gender balancing in assigning responsibilities to its personnel?

Option	No of Respondents	%
Yes	5	9.4
No	40	75.5
Slightly	5	9.4
I don't think so	3	5.7
Total	53	100

Research Question 5: Are the roles assigned women in your news organisation based on their competences?

Option	No of Respondents	%
Yes	43	81.2
No	5	9.4
Sometimes	5	9.4
I don't think so	-	-
Total	53	100

Research Question 6: Are women in your organisation restricted to the usual soft, feminine beats?

Option	No of Respondents	%
Yes	5	9.4
No	40	75.5
Sometimes	6	11.3
I don't think so	2	3.8
Total	53	100

9. Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1: Do women occupy decision-making positions in your news organisation?

Instructively, all the 53 respondents answered in the affirmative. This implies two things: first, some women have risen through the ranks to the top, and, secondly, by virtue of their positions they are part of the driving force in their establishments. This further implies that women are increasingly assuming leadership in their organisations which is an attribute of professionalism. As Elliot (1979) says, professionalism does suggest a claim to leadership. If the women are occupying positions of leadership in their news organisations, it indicates that the women have the necessary skills and competences that have elevated them to their present level. This has a seeming long-term effect on the portrayal of women in the media. Because their own are part of the drivers of decision-making, women cannot be negatively portrayed by such media. Rather, efforts would be made to present the women in positive light. Women's attainment of decision-making positions is both an achievement and encouragement – achievement on their part and encouragement to others that if they exhibit professional competences, they may one day attain such lofty positions.

Research Question 2: To what extent are women deprived of some duties in your news organisation because of their gender?

Responses indicate that strongly, women are not denied duties because of their gender. This finding re-echoes the issue raised by Branston and Stafford (2008) as well as van Zoonen (1994), namely that although more women are being represented in the media, the status of the media is a factor. According to van Zoonen (cited in Watson, 2003), one of the factors explaining why some areas of communication provide more opportunities for women than others is the status of the medium; that where status is low, opportunities for women increase. Watson (2003, p. 193) goes ahead to explain that “the resulting loss of prestige may have decreased male competition for job openings enabling women to fill the gaps”. It is probable that the media surveyed in this study have a low status. All of them are what could be termed as local media because they cover a small geographical part of Nigeria – Akwa Ibom State. These media are neither regional nor national. Hence the pull that they offer is neither strong nor attractive enough to ignite competition for places. This could actually explain why women, from the poll, seemed to be having their way, without any deprivation by men. It is also probable that if the media surveyed had a regional or local character, the men would be sufficiently interested to the extent that the women would have to strive hard to be assigned some beats or even to climb on the ladder of responsibilities. Therefore, local media tend to employ more women than high prestige media.

Research Question 3: What is the attitude of men towards the women in decision-making positions in your news organisation?

Responses to this question indicate that 60% of the subjects believe that men show loyalty to the women under whom they work, while about 22% engage in routine compliance. Still they are those, though fewer, who exhibit insubordination and disloyalty. It can be deduced from the findings that some men are professionally inclined, and respond to the existing bureaucratic structure with routine compliance – more a matter of duty and less an issue of personal conviction.

Routine compliance, then, carries with it the danger of little or no motivation to work. People with such unconvincing attitude can easily be wooed and won over by those who find it a pleasure to be out rightly disloyal to their female bosses or

show stark insubordination. Those in this category rely on a hierarchical division of labour long established by capitalism, under which prestigious and best rewarded work is reserved for the men, while restricting women to the lowest kind (Matterlart, 1995). Routine compliance, insubordination and outright disloyalty of men to a female boss would likely put the boss on the edge, and she may end up struggling to prove her competence to convince her male subordinates, rather than focus on discharging the roles of her position in order to meet corporate goals.

In accepting this finding, however, caution should be exercised, since all the respondents were women, and gender bias, even among the female folk, cannot be ruled out.

Research Question 4: Does your media organisation deliberately engage in gender balancing in assigning responsibilities to its personnel?

The overwhelming answer to this question, from the responses of the subjects, is that most media organisations (those surveyed) do not engage in gender balancing. This is without prejudice to the 18.8% that believe that there is always a deliberate act of gender balancing in the assignment of responsibility and the 5.7% that are uncertain of gender balancing act. This finding agrees with the finding of Research Question One earlier discussed, and in which the respondents are not denied any responsibility because of their gender. If there is no gender balancing, it can be deduced that women in the media organisations studied are assigned roles based on professionalism and routine competences. If the women are competent in the discharge of their duties, they do not need any special favour to be assigned some responsibility.

It is important to note that women who formed the subjects of this study would be less likely to accept or suggest that they are pampered into positions based on their gender. Rather, they would want people to know and accept that despite the gendered structures of news, women have, on the basis of competence and professionalism, been assigned responsibilities without any gender balancing act. No one would readily admit her weakness and the consequent favour done to make the weakness less visible. And if the earlier allusions regarding the locality of the media with its attendant decrease in male interest are strongly considered, then it is safe to accept that these “local media” have not engaged in gender balancing in the assignment of roles.

Research Question 5: Are the roles assigned women in your news organisation based on their competences?

The majority of the respondents (81.2%) are convinced that the women in their media organisation have competences necessary for them to discharge their duties. It implies that the women do possess the skill and competence in the performance of routine tasks. Such is predicated on routine competences as factual accuracy, punctuality, speed at meeting deadline, style in presentation and a shared sense of expectations from the work force (Elliot, 1979).

Given the rising number of professionally trained women in the media in Nigeria today, it is expected that their academic training coupled with their experience in the media would manifest in professionalism and leadership in the discharge of their duties. Through professionalism, female media operatives invariably assume some leadership. That is to say, they are able to guide the audience into making rational decisions through their presentation and discussion of issues. In the same vein, through professionalism they are able to pre-empt executive control as well as external regulations.

Research Question 6: Are women in your organisation restricted to the usual soft, feminine beats?

The answer that women are not restricted to the soft beats in the media reflects the changing paradigm in the composition of the workforce in the media, including the top. Slowly, women are moving into managerial positions and this is critical to the kind of beats assigned to female journalists. Female managers would actively strive to eliminate the dividing line between male and female journalists in the coverage of beats. Moreover, the attainment of higher professional status by women equips them to handle duties hitherto reserved for the men, either because of gender bias by the men or lack of professionalism on the part of the women.

This finding is without prejudice to the observation of van Zoonen (cited by Watson, 2003) that women have more opportunities in the media with a low status. This may be true, given the fact that the media studied are neither regional nor national in outlook but local outlets serving a rather restricted area. If women's entry into prominent roles is revolutionary, then, as it is in a revolution, it has to start somewhere, not from the centre, but from the periphery of the polity, before the revolutionary fervour moves to the centre. The same should be expected by women's ascendancy in the media structures.

10. Summary of Findings

The following were the summary of the findings of the study:

- i) Women occupy decision making positions in the news organisations studied.
- ii) Women are not deprived of some duties in the media because of their gender.
- iii) Men working under women in the media exhibit loyalty, much of it being routine, not out of conviction.
- iv) Media organisations do not deliberately engage in gender balancing in the assignment of duties.
- v) Women in the media are regarded as people with the necessary competences to discharge their duties.
- vi) Women are assigned any beats and are not restricted to the usual soft, feminine beats.

11. Conclusion

From the findings of this study, it is concluded that there is a paradigm shift regarding women in the media in Nigeria: their number is increasing; their competences have been acknowledged through their elevation to sensitive, decision-making positions; they are no longer restricted to gendered beats. It is further concluded that women ascendancy in the media, though starting in the peripheral media, signposts the revolution which is imminent at the centre.

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