

Gender and the Media: Assessing the Visibility of Women in the Nigerian Press from Five Widely Circulated National Dailies

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Abstract: The mass media have been accused of inequality in gender representations from the continuous decline of female reporters to the stereotyping of women in news reportage and the exclusion of women in news source selection. The visibility of women in the Nigerian press was assessed by analysing the manifest content of an edition each of five widely circulated national dailies namely: Vanguard, The Guardian, Daily Sun, New Telegraph and The Nation, published in August, 2020. The purpose was to find out if the various accusations are justified. The study was hinged on the muted group theory which stated that women belong to the minority group in environments where men control power. The visibility of women in the Nigerian press was examined by checking the representations of women against their male counterparts through the by-lines, newsmakers, contributors, photographs, portrayal, beats, prominence and senior staff positions which made up the content categories where the units of analysis were drawn. Data collected were statistically presented in tables and graphs. The findings show that the male gender dominated with over 80% in every content category examined in each of the newspapers. The study concluded that there still remains an overwhelming gender gap in favour of the men in the Nigerian press. The women are the muted group and are almost invisible the print media. Therefore, the study recommended that the media should consider gender reforms and avoid the exclusion of women.

Keywords – Gender, inequality, stereotyping, gender gap, gender representation.

I. INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality is a global issue of concern and the strife for equality is very common in patriarchal societies such as Africa where there is a clear defined inequality between the male and the female gender in several, if not almost all spheres of human socialization. Societal constructed gender roles and stereotypes have lent their arms to this unfortunate situation. Opinions of the woman's purpose, expectations and aptitude are deep rooted, clearly demarcating what they expect of themselves and what society expects of them (Liena, 2011). In a country such as Nigeria, women and their aspirations are seen as subordinate to that of the men and they are thus, marginalized (Ikuomola & Okunola, 2011).

According to Amobi (2013), gender inequality has a ripple effect on the development of a nation because it puts women who are potential development prospects in disadvantaged position. The division of work into women's jobs and men's jobs, low pay for women's jobs, restricted entry into top positions among many others, contribute to the limitation of most women to visible active service to the nation (Lober, 1998). The foregoing argument can relate to the relationship between a country's development and their level of gender sensitivity. Most developing nations are those descending the curve of global gender sensitivity. For example, in the year 2018, Nigeria ranked 128 out of 153 countries in the global gender gap index rankings (World Economic Forum, 2020). Culture and belief system have a tenacious grip on gender issues in various societies and by extension influence media content. Nonetheless, the media are expected to contribute their quota to gender sensitivity by cutting down on the stereotypes and including to a reasonable extent, both genders in information gathering, writing, contribution and reportage. Gender representation in the media exerts influence on social outcomes to a very great extent.

Gender approaches to media studies have remained focused on the statistical representation of women as against the men in journalism both in news gathering and content. These studies over the years recorded male dominance in news gathering and reporting. For example, Ikuomola and Okunola (2011) observed that women are not a significant part of the media workforce, and that the men are mostly those who make up the decision makers of media organisations. Statistically, the Global Media Monitoring Project [GMMP] (2000) cited in Okunna (2002) shows that in Africa, only 24% of news reporters are of the female gender. Sequel to the above, GMMP (2015) shows that women are least present in print news and that the overall proportion of stories focusing on women has held relatively steady at 10% since 2000. Anyanwu (2001, p.8) argued that even when the news is about women, "the story only gains prominence if there is a male authority, figure or newsmaker on the scene". These above mentioned observations by scholars denote that in gender representation by the media, women are hardly seen neither are they heard. Is this still very true? Have things changed for

the feminine gender in media representation and news reportage? The manifest content of five well circulated Nigerian newspapers – Vanguard, The Guardian, Daily Sun, New Telegraph and The Nation, all published in August 2020 were examined to measure gender representation in the print media and this would add to the existing body of knowledge on gender and communication studies.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Culture, Stereotype and Gender Representation in the Media

The place of men and women in society and the role they play are most of the time determined by culture and values that are passed across generations. Most African cultures place the man above the woman in all ramifications. The man is perceived to be strong, decisive, articulate, objective and emotionally balanced while the woman is perceived to be weak, fragile and totally dependent on the man. The boy-child is trained to develop supposed right male interests such as football, outdoor work, managing money, learning to drive or ride and a great career while the girl-child is trained to develop female interests such as cooking, dancing, singing and careers that would help her be a good home maker and a mother (Kiprotich & Chang'orok, 2015). In line with the foregoing, Ikuomola and Okunola (2011, p.228) argued that these ideals are evidently aspects of Nigerian life and they are very effective to the extent that "male chauvinistic attitudes towards women appear inborn and are often displayed unconsciously, irrespective of the educational background of men".

These beliefs or stereotypes mainstream into all aspects of human endeavour including the media workforce and their portrayal or representation of the male and the female gender. The media have been accused of projecting the stereotypical elements that are common in society (Kiprotich & Chang'orok, 2015; Omenugha, 2005). The men are not only at the top echelon in media organizations, they also make up the greater percentage of the total media workforce and thus, influence allocation of beats and the content the media carry (Okunna, 2002). The male reporters cover more of hard news stories while the female reporters cover more of soft news stories and also write more features (Liena, 2011). GMMP (2015) shows that women are mostly under-represented as authorities, spokesperson, subject and sources for eye witness account, personal experience and popular opinion. These are outcomes born out of culture and stereotypes that demean women and subdue them into the side-lines regardless of their academic qualifications and their capabilities.

Representation of Women in the Media

Socially constructed gender roles and stereotypes have been blamed for gender inequality because agents of socialization such as the media are sub-units introduced into a large entity (society) which has an already existing contagious aura. Based on the aforementioned assertion, Amobi (2013) argued that media and society are inseparable because media owners

who make media and journalists who create, produce and package media content are part of the society who share certain norms, values and beliefs. In other words, the media gives back to society what already exists and is attainable in the society they represent. Therefore, the media maintain the masculine trait descending from the patriarchal enlightenment ideal of "the strong man" and "the fragile woman" in whatever they do because that is what is obtainable in society.

On another hand, Chukwurah, Nduba and Izunwanne (2020) maintained that the mass media have the ability to facilitate attitude change and opinion formation in society and so far, have not been doing a great job in complementing the continual strife for gender sensitivity. In every society, public attitude regarding the role of women are major factors in deciding the status of women and in shaping these attitudes, the media exert a strong influence. The image of women in mass media content, news, advertising, entertainment and so on will undoubtedly be reflected in the attitudes of society towards women in the long run (Sandman, Rubin & Sachman, 1976 cited in Izunwanne, 2013).

The mass media are guilty of the stereotyping of women and further increase their vulnerability by giving them little voice and demeaning through little or no positive representation compared to the men who are the dominant newsmakers (Okunna, 2002; Omenugha, 2005). Also on the representation of women in the media, Nyondo (2005) had the view that journalists prefer male sources to female sources. She posited:

The masculine newsroom culture has spilled into the stories journalists write. The criteria of importance in news worthiness become an issue when the reporter quotes female sources. The questions are: what does she know about the topic? What is her level of education? Who is she in society? (p.4)

Furthermore, GMMP (2015) observed that the journalistic gender lens in source selection is not only male centred, but it is also skewed to a certain kind of masculinity when selecting interviews for all types of views, from expert opinion to ordinary person's testimonies. Invariably, the above observations show that the yardstick used in measuring objectivity, intelligence and prowess in issues of discussion would depend on whether the source is male or female. According to Cassidy (2008) cited in Izunwanne (2013), even the female journalists are shown to adapt the traditionally male value structure of the media industry.

On another note, those who make news are mostly those who are in the seat of power but according to Nwankwo (2012), women are yet to be proportionally represented in the position of authority in public life everywhere in the world. In Nigeria, particularly, Chukwurah et al. (2020) noted that all the 36 state governors are males and their deputies are also male dominated (33 males and 3 females); also, the current Senate has only 6 female senators to 103 of their male counterparts. Out of the 44 ministers under President Muhammadu Buhari's second term administration, only 7 women occupy the

position while others are men (Premium Times, 2019). The glaring disparities in the proportion of men and women in power could account for the under-representation of the female gender in the news media.

The Muted Group Theory

The muted group theory was propounded by Ardener (1975). The theory explains that there are clear divisions in society – the majority and minority groups which are those with great or partial influence and those who practically have no power, respectively. The minority group is called the muted group because they are seen and not heard. These groups could be identified in gender, ethnicity, class etc. However, the muted group theory is often classified as a gendered feminist theory and used to understand the disparities between men and women in certain social environments. The feminist angle of the muted group theory specifically revolves around the gender inequality where the men are seen as the majority group and the women as the minority or the muted group. Kramarae (1981) further expanded this theory and applied it to gendered communication studies. Her main argument was that accepted language practices have been constructed mainly by men in order to express their experiences and consequently, women have been muted. In a subsequent study, Kramarae (1984) cited in Nangabo (2015), posited that the muted group theory depends on three assumptions:

The first assumption is that women's perception of the world is shaped by different experiences in society. These experiences are as a result of them performing different tasks from what their male counterparts do. The second assumption is that men politically control power. They use these powers to suppress the ideas proposed by women and block women from gaining public acceptance. The third assumption is that, in order for women to be accepted into the public sphere in areas such as leadership, they have to convert their ideas, conversations and speech and actions to be in conformity to the language of men. (p.2)

Amobi (2013) explained that the above mentioned traditionally accepted assumptions justify why some societies have found it difficult to embrace shifts in paradigms which are sweeping across the world – gender sensitivity. In such male-dominated societies, Kramarae (2005) acknowledged the speech of the female gender is disrespected, their knowledge not considered sufficient for public decision-making of their culture and are encouraged to see themselves as being represented in dominant discourse.

Even though the muted group theory recognized the complexities of cultural differences amidst their recurrent reference to gender disparity, some researchers maintain that the theory is very relevant beyond gender-based applications where dominant and subordinate entities must communicate with each other (Colfer, 1982; Wall & Gannon-Leary, 1999). Another argued that not all men belong to the dominant group and not all women belong to the muted group citing an example such as a case where the man is the prisoner and the

woman, a correctional officer (Barkman, 2018). Despite these criticisms, this theory is relevant to this study because it is a gender-based study conducted in Nigeria where there still remain stringent issues of male dominance and the strife for women empowerment. The major investigation is to assess media representation of men and women by analysing the manifest content of five widely circulated and read newspapers in Nigeria, in order to determine whether there has been a shift to the right direction in achieving gender sensitivity or put differently, whether women are still indisputably, the muted group in the Nigerian press.

Gender Inequality in the practice of Journalism

Gender inequality is very evident in places of work especially in careers that are male dominated. Lorber (1998) explains that the workplace is one of the areas where women are still a long way from gender equality. In journalism, women are hardly recognized when it comes to the gathering and writing of hard news stories. According to Liena (2011):

The patriarchal nature of the African society extends right into the newsroom. The male journalists are given pride of place to the female not minding their competence. most editors have the stereotypical idea that women have a limited intellectual capacity... They are hardly ever assigned to major political beats, for example, covering the president or parliament. They are most often assigned to the less important beats like gender violence, health, beauty and cookery tips. (p.2).

There seems to be a global glass ceiling for female news reporters as far as they are visible in newspaper by-lines and newscast reports (GMMP, 2015). Nigerian women continue to be left out of the media industry as they trail their male counterparts who dominate the journalism profession in large numbers (Oyinade & Daramola, 2013). In line with the foregoing, Okunna (2005) affirms:

The gender inequality in Nigerian society is reflected in men's representation of women in the news media. Research evidence continue to show that women as journalists are still invisible in the Nigerian press because the overwhelming majority of people who report the news are men. Monitoring of the Nigerian press, it shows very few of the by-lines in the news pages belong to the women. This is the power to define the media agenda in Nigeria is still mainly a male privilege. (p.127)

It is also worthy to note that media ownership influences the content therein and majority of the media outlets are owned by the dominant gender. Consequently, the men control the production and packaging of media content, they determine the styles of expression, staff distribution and assignment of roles and to sustain supremacy they assign themselves the more playing, the more powerful and prestigious roles while leaving the weaker and less prestigious ones to the women (Amobi, 2013).

Female journalists are seen as women and cannot deal with certain risks as the male journalists would. Ronderos (2012)

stated that apart from obstacles such as threats, murder, confiscation of materials, deportation, arrests and intimidation that journalists come across, female journalists have peculiar gendered risks within the profession which is steeped in cultural and patriarchal norms. In African societies, women are expected to play the principal role of keeping the home, so, working efficiently in the field of journalism as a woman, especially married ones could be doubted by editors. Women are also at risk of sexual violence both in the workplace and in the field when her femininity is considered more than her abilities as a professional. Gender biased decisions come up when employers and editors fail to look beyond stereotypical assertions that surround women to see what they have to offer.

III. METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

This study is a content analysis of the visibility of women in five purposively selected national newspapers (an edition each) namely: Vanguard, The Guardian, Daily Sun, New Telegraph and The Nation all published in August, 2020. These newspapers were chosen because they are widely circulated in Nigeria and the choice of time frame was because the researchers needed to content analyse current newspaper publications in order to complement previous studies on gender representation in the media. The content categories and units of analysis used to measure male and female representation in the selected newspapers include:

- *By-lines* – reporters, columnists and feature writers
- *Newsmakers* – politicians, celebrities and other public figures.
- *Contributors* – sources, opinions, voice quoted, interviewees and columnists.
- *Photographs* – stand-alone, focus on a group and along with.
- *Portrayal* – victims and criminals, icons and achievers, beneficiaries identified through pictures and semantics.
- *Beats* – business/economy, politics/power, crime and tragedy, health/education, aviation/law, sports and others.
- *Prominence* – placement, headline size and story length.
- *Senior staff positions* – Editor-in-Chief, editors and others (As specified in the editorial page).

Data generated were presented in numbers and simple percentages in a clearly defined table. Bar charts and pie charts were also utilized to aid data interpretation. The Microsoft Excel software was used for data management.

IV. PRESENTATION OF DATA

Data collected were analysed according to the content categories mentioned in the method of data analysis, chronologically. The statistical representations of the female gender as against their male counterpart in Vanguard, The Guardian, Daily Sun, New Telegraph and The Nation newspapers are presented as follows:

Table 1: By-lines by gender

	Male	Female	Total
Vanguard	40	10	50
The Guardian	55	13	68
Daily Sun	41	6	47
New Telegraph	51	12	63
The Nation	81	13	94
Total	268	54	322
Percentage	83.2%	16.8%	100%

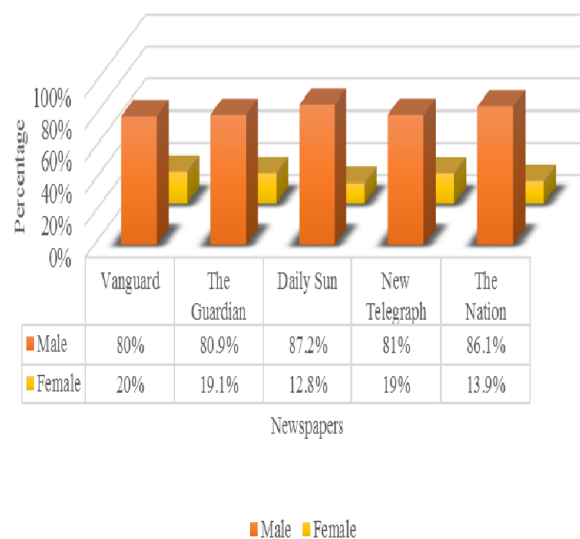


Fig. 1: Percentage of male and female by-lines per newspaper

Table 1 and Figure 1 shows that in the five analysed newspapers, there are more male than female by-liners with over 80% each. In total, out of 322 by-lines present in the newspapers, there are 83.2% male by-liners and only 16.8% of female by-liners. This implies that there are female journalists but their numbers are insignificant compared to their male counterparts.

Table 2: Newsmakers by gender

	Male	Female	Total
Vanguard	39	3	42
The Guardian	37	7	44
Daily Sun	39	2	41
New Telegraph	42	4	46
The Nation	51	1	52
Total	208	17	225
Percentage	92.4%	7.6%	100%

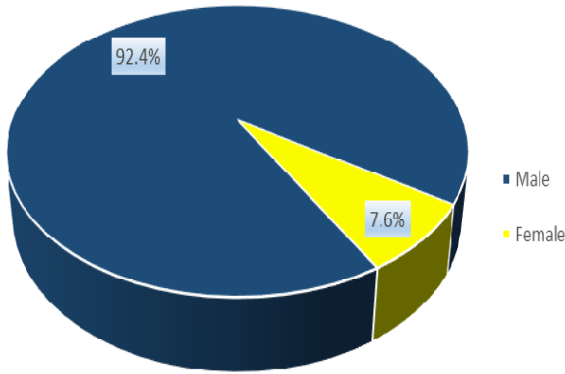


Fig. 2: Total percentage of newsmakers per gender.

The male gender once again took the lion’s share in the newsmakers’ list as seen in table 2 and figure 2. Even though the Guardian newspaper had more female newsmakers than the others, a great gap still exists between them and their male counterparts. Generally, the men make up a whopping 92.4% of newsmakers as against the women who are just 7.6% of 225.

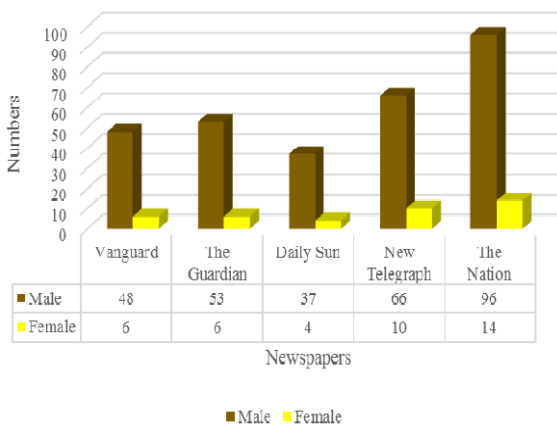


Fig. 3: Contributors by gender per newspaper

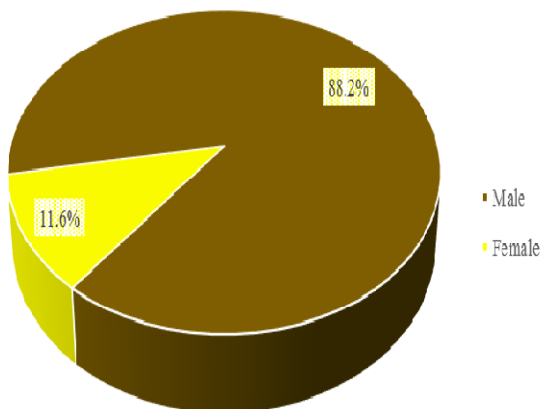


Fig. 4: Total percentage of contributors per gender

Figures 3 and 4 are graphical representations showing how much men and women contributed to newspaper content creation. The men also hold a greater percentage of contributors (sources, interviewees and columnists). A total of 340 contributors was recorded and 88.2% are men while 11.6% are women.

Table 3: Male and female pictorial presence per newspaper analysed

Newspaper	Stand-alone photos		Focus on a group		Along with		Total
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	
Vanguard	3	23	0	1	11	32	70
The Guardian	1	8	0	6	4	18	37
Daily Sun	4	16	0	4	2	11	37
New Telegraph	1	22	0	1	14	36	74
The Nation	5	46	0	1	20	44	116
Total	14	115	0	13	51	141	334
Percentage	4.2%	34.4%	0%	3.9%	15.3%	42.2%	100%

Pictures add aesthetics to newspapers and most of the times, relevance to the individuals. The pictorial presence of men and women in the 5 newspapers analysed can be seen in Table 3. Pictures with individuals are 334 in total and are male dominated. There are more men in the stand-alone photographs (34.4%) than women (4.2%). They men, 3.9% precisely, are also the focus in some group photographs and no woman was seen to be the focus in any group photograph. Women appear to be in more group pictures (along with) than in stand-alone pictures but they still did not outnumber the men. The women make up 15.3% in group pictures while the men make up 42.2%. Generally, the male gender takes 80.5% of pictorial presence in the analysed newspapers. This outcome complements the outcome of table 2 and figure 2. Pictures accompany news stories and since there are more male newsmakers, then newspaper photographs are bound to be male-dominated.

Table 4: Gender portrayal per newspaper analysed

Newspaper	Victims/Criminals		Icons/Achievers		Beneficiaries		Total
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	
Vanguard	1	4	8	46	1	0	60
The Guardian	1	1	7	29	4	0	42
Daily Sun	2	0	3	27	3	0	35
New Telegraph	3	1	10	47	1	1	63
The Nation	0	2	16	82	3	2	105
Total	7	8	44	231	12	3	305
Percentage	2.3%	2.6%	14.4%	75.7%	4.0%	1.0%	100%

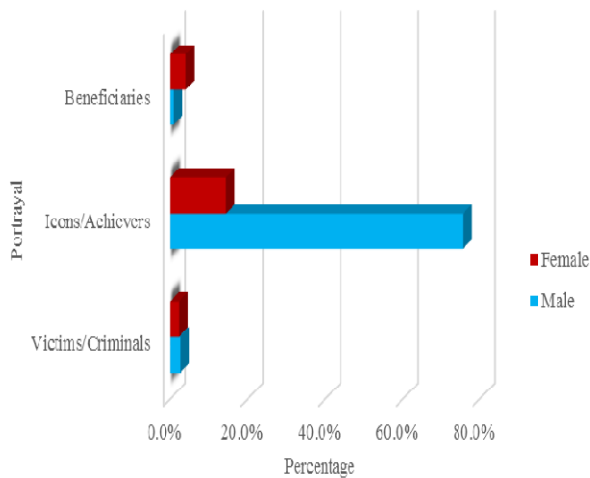


Fig. 5: Graphical presentation of gender portayal in the newspapers analysed

Table 4 and figure 5 shows how men and women were portrayed in the analysed newspapers. There were more male than female victims and criminals with a Minuit difference of 1 (one). Women were portrayed as beneficiaries more than the men (12 out of 15). While 44 women were portrayed as icons and achievers they were nothing compared to their 231 male counterparts. This obvious difference is clearer in figure 5.

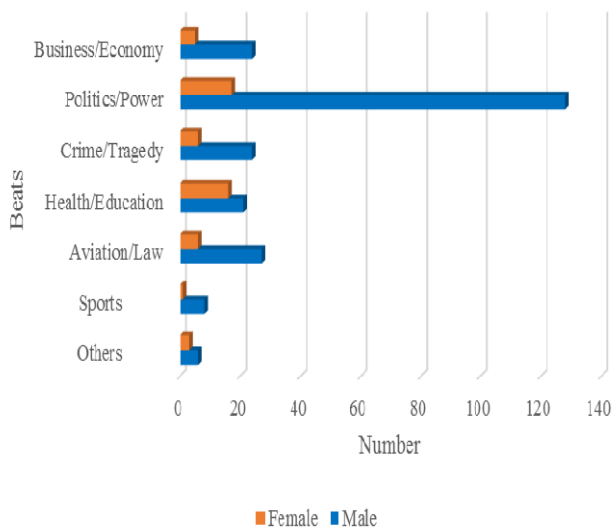


Fig. 6: Beat coverage by gender.

The 322 by-lines as seen in table 1 were further classified into beats and figure 6 is a graphical representation on the beats covered by men and women. The male gender dominated in all the beats that were covered, however, the female gender was almost at per with the male gender in health/education beats and others (which includes celebrity, lifestyle, fashion, religion etc.), compared to other beats. In figures, business and economy beats had 54 males and 5 females; politics and power beats had 128 males and 17 females; crime and tragedy had 24 males and 6 females; health and education had 21 males and 16 females; aviation and law had 27 males and 6

females; sports had 8 males and 1 female; and finally, others had 6 males and 3 females. Using the difference in number of males and females per grouped beats, men are trusted with hard news or strong stories than the women. Since the number of males to females in health/education, celebrity, lifestyle, fashion, religion etc. are almost proportionate, then, those are likely, the beats they cover the most.

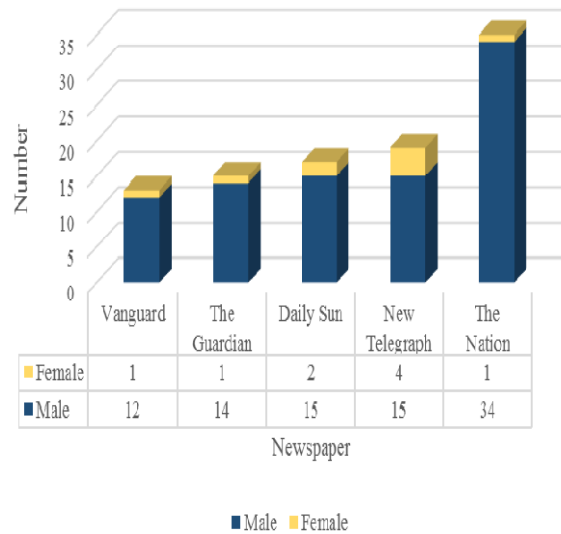


Fig. 7: Number of Newspaper content about men and women that gained prominence

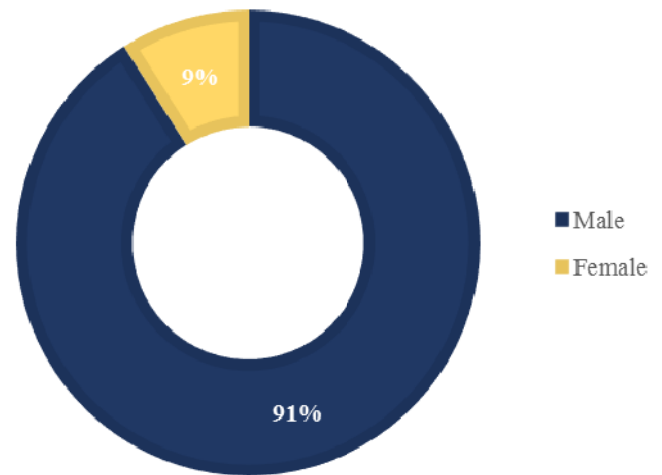


Fig. 8: Total percentage of content about men and women that gained prominence.

Figures 7 and 8 show that stories concerning men than women gained prominence in the analysed newspapers through difference in male and female numbers per newspaper and general percentage per gender, respectively. Stories about men that gained prominence were 91% while that of women were just 9%. The above outcome is a consequence of the outcomes of Tables 2 and figure 2.

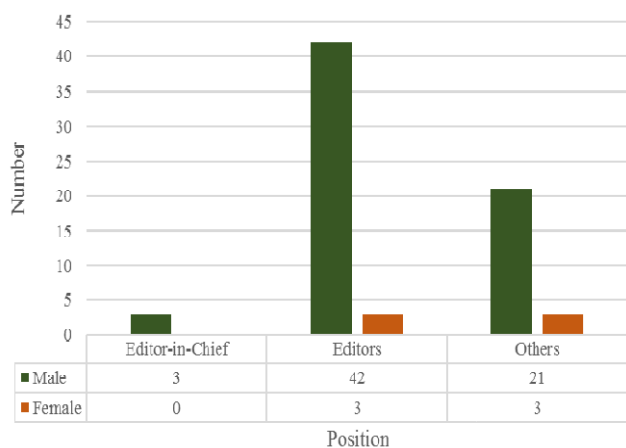


Fig. 9: Senior staff positions by gender in Daily Sun, New Telegraph and The Nation Newspapers.

The senior staff positions are usually seen in the editorial page but were absent in two of the analysed newspapers – Vanguard and The Guardian, therefore, the researcher made do with the ones available as identified in figure 9. The bar chart shows that the newspapers all have male Editors-in-Chief. The male gender also makes up 93.3% (42) of the editors while the female gender makes up just 6.7% (3). Other senior staff position includes heads of: Sales, marketing/advertising, finance and admin, operations, internal audit, legal, arts and creative, training and development; general, regional and press managers and there are only 3 women out of 24. It is worthy to note that the 3 women are heads of sales, marketing/advertising. This implies that the men are those who make decisions as regards recruiting reporters, beats allocation, news or picture placements and the overall content of the analysed newspapers.

V. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Drawing from the just concluded data analysis, these were the findings of the study:

The male gender made up more of the by-lines than the female gender in all the newspapers. The female by-liners were not just very significantly lower (16.8% as against 83.2%), they also covered the softer stories such as health/education, celebrity, lifestyle, fashion, religion beats while their male covered the hard news stories such as business and economy, politics and power, crime and tragedy, aviation and law, and sports (see figure 6). These outcomes complement, GMMP (2000, 2015) and Okunna (2005) that found out there are more male than female reporters and that very few by-lines in the newspapers belong to the women. The findings also go in agreement with Amobi (2013) and Liena (2011) who argued that women are assigned less important beats while the men take the more powerful ones.

The newspapers also showed male dominance in aspects of news making, content contribution and pictorial presence. In total, female newsmakers were just 7.6%. Women as source, interviewees and columnists (contributors) were 11.6%.

Consequently, the general pictorial presence of women in the newspapers were just 20.5% and they were more present in group pictures than in stand-alone photographs neither were they made the focus in any of the group pictures. This goes in line with Kramarae (2005) who maintained while explaining the muted group theory that men control power, the speech of the female gender is disrespected and their knowledge not considered sufficient for public decision-making. Also, the findings agree with Nyondo (2005) who observed that male sources are more considered than female sources. Furthermore, the male gender as the dominant news makers could be attributed to the observations of Chukwurah, et al. (2020) on male dominance in Nigerian politics.

Women were portrayed more as beneficiaries than as icons and achievers. They made up just 16% of 275 people portrayed as icons and achievers while they made up 80% of 15 identified beneficiaries. Also, only 9% of stories about women gained prominence in all the newspapers. This outcome rhymes with Okunna (2002) and Omenugha (2005) who argued that the media increase the vulnerability of women through stereotypes and no positive representation.

Women are in the background when it comes to staffing in the senior cadre as identified in the editorial pages of Daily Sun, New Telegraph and The Nation newspapers. They do not take the key roles in making decisions regarding news gathering and reporting as the men do. All the Editors-in-Chief are men and women are just 6.7% of the editors. They were seen as heads under sales, marketing and advertising instead. This is in accordance with the observations of Lober (1998) that explained that the workplace is where women are far from gender equality and Okunna (2005) that explained that the men are at the top in media organizations and therefore, influence the activities going on.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study has shown that the print media is guilty of the under-representation of women. The findings confirm that there still remains an overwhelming gender gap in favour of the male folk as regards visibility in the news media since the GMMP reports of 2015. Women are practically invisible in the Nigerian press and when they are seen at all, they are seen more as sideliners; they report soft news stories, write features, portrayed more as beneficiaries than icons and achievers. Women are therefore, the muted group in the Nigerian press because the men are the ones who hold power and authority. The men decide news content and are responsible for beats allocation. They also make up the by-lines in the Nigerian press. This consequently, explains the male advantage in content creation and source selection. Women are still given very little voice in the Nigerian press and everything about them tends to revolve around the *status quo* in a typical patriarchal African society. It is unfortunate to see this trend still at its peak in the twenty-first century.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusion drawn from the findings of this study, the researchers recommend that the Nigerian press should begin to recognize and embrace gender reforms and plans should be made to have women in strategic and recognizable positions within the media house.

The media power to influence opinions and attitudes should be utilized in the quest for gender sensitivity. News writers and editors should avoid gender bias in decision making as regards beats allocation, news worthiness and source selection. Also, they have to cut down on the stereotypes because the 21st century Nigerian woman continues to prove to be a goal getter.

The few women in the media should strive to make a difference through creating content that can promote the ideas, capabilities and contributions of women to the growth of society. A woman who has made a difference or an impact in various spheres of life are worthy newsmakers and interviewees.

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