

Gender Framing and Women Career Progress in the Media Industry in Kenya

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Abstract:- The concern with gender relations has been strengthened by the affirmation that equality in the status of men and women is fundamental to the development of every society. Increasing attention is being placed on gender equality issues globally, buoyed by several legal and normative instruments – conventions and declarations. Kenya as a country has laws prohibiting gender discrimination following UN Conventions to promote gender equality in the work place. And because of these efforts, it has become common in Kenya for employers to emphasize that they are equal opportunity employers, meaning that women have similar chances of getting a job as men. Studies however, show that women still do not have equal access to jobs at the higher levels of management. In this article, Framing Theory is used to explain the disparities in gender representation in management positions in the work place. The argument is that conscious and unconscious frames may have hindered the progress of women. We draw evidence from existing literature on the media industry employment patterns in Kenya to support our argument.

Key words: Framing theory, gender framing, gender equality, Kenyan media industry, women employment, media industry.

I. INTRODUCTION

The concern with gender relations in development has strengthened the affirmation that equality in the status of men and women is fundamental to every society. This concern has prompted countries to refine their perspective on what development should be and how to bring it about efficiently. It is realized that development requires more than the creation of opportunities for people to earn sustainable livelihoods. Development requires free and open societies that give men and women equal voices in decision-making and policy implementation.

UNESCO places great emphasis on the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment especially in Africa. 'Equality' as used by UNESCO is meant to ensure that the potential of women and men is fully unleashed and that the value of each person is recognized without prejudice (UNESCO, 2012). Increasing attention is being placed on gender equality issues globally, buoyed by several legal and normative instruments: conventions and declarations. Chief among these are the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Kenya has taken proactive measures to accelerate gender equality and women's empowerment. The government has cited the establishment of a variety of programs to integrate women. Among them are

the Affirmative Action which encourages women employees to form at least a third of every group of labor force and the establishment of a fully-fledged gender affairs department as one of government efforts to support women's progress.

In these programs of change, the media is expected to play major roles both as a change agent and as an employer. The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, in 1995, emphasized these key roles of media. Despite this emphasis, a ground-breaking study of the media employment patterns in African region conducted by UNESCO in 1995 to assess the progress showed that on average, women accounted for only 8.4 percent of the workforce at the highest levels in management in broadcast media and 14 percent in print media. The low job opportunities for women was again confirmed in a 1997-1998 in a study conducted on employment patterns of 37 media organizations in Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. According to the findings the majority of media organizations hire men for decision-making positions such as editor or general manager. When women reach higher level positions, they are often given the secondary position of deputy. On average, there were 24 male senior reporters per organization compared to only six women in the same position. While 54 percent of the organizations studied said they had at least one female board of management member, most had an average ratio of five men to two women members sitting on their boards. Forty-three percent had no female members.

In Kenya a 2013 Media Council of Kenya (MCK) report showed that women journalists in media houses in Kenya outnumber men at the lower levels. An East African Journalist Association (2008) study entitled "Enhancing Gender Equality in the Media in Eastern Africa" showed that although men and women were equally represented in their workplaces, fewer women, as compared to men, were reported to be serving in senior positions. The study noted that in more than half of the institutions, all senior and middle level positions are occupied by men, while only two out of the 14 media institutions are headed by women. The premise of this article is that framing theory provides a potentially useful umbrella for explaining these gender disparities in the work place. The purpose of the study is therefore to examine the employment patterns in the media industry to establish how far the pattern is influenced by conscious and unconscious frames.

II. DEFINING THE PROBLEM

Kenya as a country has laws prohibiting gender discrimination in the work place following UN Conventions to promote gender equality. For Kenya, the gender equality campaigns mean much more, having hosted one of the key UN conventions on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. These conventions have emphasized the role of the media as the accepted public watchdog and as an employer. The Kenyan media more than any other industry, is therefore expected to place an exceptional premium on implementation of equal employment policies. It is however appreciated that even where good will exists, gender farming continues to impact the level of gender representation in the workplace. It limits women's and men's capacity to develop their personal abilities, pursue their professional careers and make choices about their lives. Gender biases often lead to differences in opportunities and earnings, the number of women in leadership and the time required for women to advance in their careers compared to men. In deed a study by the MCK confirms that in more than half of the media institutions in Kenya, all senior and middle level positions are occupied by men, while only two out of the 14 media institutions are headed by women.

The aim of this study is to apply the framing theory to explain the effects of gender framing at the workplace using the case of the media industry in Kenya. Using secondary data, the argument is that conscious and unconscious framing in the workplace may have hindered the progress of women.

III. REVIEW OF FRAMING THEORY

Framing Theory describes how reality is constructed through language from interactions among people. Such "realities" or frames become identities defining and describing overall character and attributes of persons in an interactive situation. Semantic framing is used to focus on particular attributes that might be flattering or derogatory and, thus, be advantageous or disadvantageous to the person or group of persons framed. Frames may be either conscious or unconscious. Gregory Bateson defined frames as a "spatial and temporary bounding of set of interactive messages" that operates as a form of meta communication. Ordinarily, we create frames to help us understand what to expect from situations we are faced with, what actions are important to the situation, why and how we should act in response. Framing operates by biasing the cognitive processing of information by individuals by providing contextual cues that guide decision making and inferences drawn by message audiences. Putnam and Holmer hold that framing is vital to the negotiation process and is tied to information processing, message patterns, linguistic cues, and socially constructed meanings.

According to Goffman (1974) frames play the role of helping individuals interpret data so that their experiences can be understood in a wider social context. He identifies two distinct types of frames: natural and social.

Natural frames identify events as physical occurrences taking natural quite literally and not attributing any social forces to the causation of events. For example, the commonly accepted frame those women are weaker than men.

Social frames on the other hand view events as socially driven occurrences, due to the whims, goals, and manipulations on the part of other social players or people. Social frames are built on the natural frames. They influence how data is interpreted, processed, communicated or acted upon. An example is the statement that women initiated businesses remains small. In terms of gender inclusion, both these frames can play key roles on the success of women either as employees or entrepreneurs.

In traditional situations, biological frames created divisions of labour and expectations from each gender. For example, sexual division of labour did not allow women to take part in trade or expeditions. And it was not until the 1960s that this pattern of division of labour was challenged by the rise of feminist theory. Feminism is the belief in social, economic, and political equality of the sexes. Although issues that specifically concerned workingwomen included the fact that many in company managements were asking the workers to get company permission to get married, the most critical issue for many of the women was the pregnancy rotation. Management allowed each worker to get pregnant only during a certain time period of two months. If the worker did not get pregnant during her turn, she lost her chance until her next turn. And with these oppressive conditions, formal employment soon became the more visible theatre of inequality tensions in society.

Unconscious bias in work situation can hinder the career progress of a person or group of persons. Unconscious framing is done unknowingly and with no intention of harm. This is the most common type of gender framing in the workplace. In the work situation, we create frames to help us understand how jobs are assigned and the opportunities for career progress open to whom. Ely and Meyerson (2000) describe unconscious frames as invisible barriers to women's advancement which arise from cultural beliefs about genders and workplace structures, practices, and patterns of interaction that inadvertently favor men. For example, in most cultures, women are traditionally, confined to domestic chore and child upbringing. They are not expected to seek employment outside the home. This frame is transmitted to children and affects the way people perceive women and the work they should perform. Frames thus arise as a consequence of women belonging to the female gender, defined by Cecilia L. Ridgeway as the social roles that males and females play.

IV. HOW GENDER FRAMES WORK IN EMPLOYMENT: AN APPLICATION TO MEDIA IN KENYA

In work situations gender framing may start with the hiring process – from the process of defining the job through to the announcement, interviewing and hiring. Petersen and Togstad (2004) divided the hiring process into three stages –

communicating the existence of the position to potential employees, interviewing or deciding whom to employ and whom to leave out and finally the offer of terms or benefits and responsibilities. At any point in the hiring process, gender biases can be introduced. For example the recruitment advertisement which communicates all aspects of the recruitment is a potent tool for introducing biases. Ployhart (2006) points out that in the hiring process, organizations seek to attract people who have person-organization fit.

Biases in the workplace have even greater effect on gender career progress. For instance, companies may introduce gender bias consciously or unconsciously in the process of performance evaluation and promotions by applying criteria which have masculine frames using terms such as 'availability' and 'mobility'. Such masculine frames also influence the type of projects women are assigned with men being assigned projects which may raise their visibility in the organization resulting in promotions and better pay. The result of male overrepresentation in senior positions further perpetuates the "think-manager-think male" perspective. All these conscious and unconscious biases may result in women not rising in their careers.

Kirk Hallahan (1999) says framing is a useful tool for studying gender disparities in the work situation. Its emphasis on providing context within which information is presented and processed allows framing to be applied across a broad spectrum of communication situations. Using existing literature in media studies in Kenya, this study identifies the gender frames frequently used in the media industry in Kenya.

V. ANALYSIS

Introduction

Literature analyzed in this study shows that while women have considerably outnumbered men in university-level journalism programs and that the employment of women in media is increasing, the organizational culture of media remains largely masculine and women are still significantly under-represented at the decision-making levels. Although many media organizations will add the statement that they are equal opportunity employers to their job advertisements, evidence shows that gender disparities still exist. The argument of this study is that these gender disparities are due to conscious and unconscious frames. The following are the key frames that the study identified:

i) Biological attributes

In this type of framing some characteristics of people are accentuated, whereas others are ignored, thus biasing processing of information in terms of desired attributes. In terms of gender relations, natural differences based on biological factors that exist between the sexes are exaggerated. From the studies examined, journalism career was framed as a demanding job, and therefore not suitable for women. Self-exertion -literally "pulling on their bootstraps", which is a necessary quality in journalism – was seen as a

physical strength with the masculine frame. Because of this women are not assigned duties which are framed as assertive and significant. The result is that women miss the opportunity to raise their visibility in the organization and miss out on promotions.

A study by Antonia Okono, (2013) also confirms that in the prime beats of economics, business/and finance women constituted only 8%, of the journalists, and politics had 6% while investigative beats had 6%. In the media such beats are considered as catalysts accelerating career advancement into management and leadership.

ii) Age

In the media industry in Kenya, the attitude of the 1980's during which women were regarded as suited only in the role of presenters has continued. They are not expected to take part in creative/ production roles and more often they are hired as continuity announcers and anchors. Anne K.Muthamia (2009) writes that women were "viewed as pretty faces for delivering news".

This frame also encourages the perception that youth is essential for women in the career. Thus, according to Okono (2013) the age limit for female presenters has been moving lower, with more young presenters being selected to anchor news. 'There is a stereotype that Kenyans want young faces on TV. The result is that by the age of 30 most women have already left the career,' she writes.

iii). Choices

Choice frames involve posing alternative decisions in either negative (loss) or positive (gain) terms often creating uncertainty. In Kenyan media industry this frame is portrayed by presenting a career in media as contrary to marriage and respectable family. This is a frame that continues from the early 1990s when women in journalism were seen as people who did not care about family life. Thus women who made a choice to remain in journalism risked remaining unmarried or not having stable families. Muthamia(2009) says, "There was a stereotype that most of the women were divorcees. Many parents did not want their children to join the career."

iv). Responsibility

Management positions in the media are framed as carrying a lot of responsibility, a masculine frame and therefore unsuited for women. In many organizations, the criteria used in performance evaluation and promotions emphasize terms such as availability and mobility which are masculine frames and pro-male definitions of leadership. Because of this frame, men are assigned projects which may raise their visibility in the organization resulting in promotions.

The effect of this on women career advancement in the media industry in Kenya is described by one study which says that more than 50 percent of the women employees in media organizations had resigned by the age of thirty to restart

a career where there are better chances to rise to managerial positions (Okono 2013).

VI. CONCLUSION

Despite efforts by the international communities, the Kenya Government and the media industry in Kenya to eliminate gender disparities in the workplace, this analysis of gender employment and career development patterns in the media has shown that unconscious frames have significant influence. In work situations unconscious framing may start during the hiring process – from the process of defining the job through to the announcement, interviewing and hiring. The consequence of gender framing is that as the studies analyzed found out, there was significant gender disparities in career advancement in the media sector. Most of the women leave employment in the media by the age of 30 to restart a career where there are better chances to rise to managerial positions.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout the study, we have come to the conclusion that gender framing is practiced often unconsciously in our workplaces. Possible solutions lie in changes in organizational practice including organizational norms, performance evaluation methods as well as developing ways to enable women to progress in their careers. Blind evaluation, structured hiring are some of the methods that companies can use to reduce effects of gender framing that work against women progress in careers.

Blind evaluation is where information which may influence the job applicant's chances of being recruited is hidden until after the recruitment is complete while structured hiring is a selection process that seeks to counteract bias ensuring interviews of all candidates are evaluated according to relevant and predetermined criteria related to work performance. Comparative evaluations of the candidate's answers according to explicit criteria can help to reduce gender bias and enable hiring authorities to more easily select the candidate with the best performance. Companies should

also invest in diversity training programs targeted at dealing with unconscious bias with the aim of changing attitudes and behaviors.

A suggested method for lasting solution is to put effort in changing attitudes or perceptions of gender roles starting with promoting the sharing of domestic responsibilities between girls and boys in the family setup. This is because traditionally, women have been known to perform house chores and domestic work without necessarily seeking employment. This has affected the perception of children who have been brought up in these settings to believe that women should always do these chores. Sharing of house chores may go a long way in changing the perception of women in our societies, and in this case, workplaces.

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