Full Length Research

Media Role in Women Advocacy and Inclusion in Politics

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Abstract

This research explores the role of the media in advocating for women's inclusion and participation in Nigerian politics. It examines how traditional media channels, including digital platforms, set agenda for public opinion, drive political narratives and support women's political engagement in a rather patriarchal political environment like Nigeria. The study evaluates the media coverage of women politicians, the prominence of gender-focused advocacy campaigns, and the impact of advocacy, especially in social media spaces, for movements like #MeToo, #HeForShe, #BringBackOurGirls, and #WomenInPoliticsNG. Findings reveal a multifaceted dynamic: though media has the potential to promote women's voices and rights and challenge stereotypes, it also sometimes reinforces societal biases. The study concludes with recommendations on how the media can effectively use their medium to advance gender equity and increase women's representation and political participation in Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Media representation of women in politics has been a topic of debate in recent decades. The feminist movement in the late 20th century marked a significant shift in how women were treated, with mainstream media portraying successful and struggling women. Digital media and social platforms have further amplified this, allowing women to share their stories and gather support for advocacy movements like #MeToo and #HeForShe. These social causes demonstrate that media can be used as advocacy, (Jenkines et al, 2018).

Media plays a crucial role in women advocacy in political systems, empowering women and bringing changes for society's betterment. However, media often presents women in a negative or positive light, shaping public perception and policy, (Burke, 2017). Social media has emerged as a tool for women to come together, mobilise, and overturn oppressive systems and cultures. Media is a powerful tool for relaying information and defining and changing a society's political landscape and can quickly become a means of advocacy that empowers women, speaks for gender equity, and disrupts stereotypical political norms. This overview reviews general and historical perspectives, current trends, challenges, and strategies for future advocacy and politics.

Historical Context

Media portrayal of women in politics has however in the past been difficult as cultures have given women a raw deal especially in political affairs, and given subordination and inferiority of women as compared to men, (Celi, et al 2015). The Suffragette movements, especially of the early twentieth Century employed printed material in selling their causes but while selling the message, media re iterated gender stereotype that women were less capable then men. While the Title IX act, the United States in 1972 ushered in a new era

largely formalizing gender equality in scholarship and sports. However, women in politics were still subjected to assessing their attire and ordered to produce their family lives, (Gallagher, 2001). Efforts to overcome such trends that emerged in the 1980s with the help of feminist media aimed at increasing the representation of women's voices as well as the coverage of topics that remained in the periphery of attention of mainstream media. Such periodicals as Ms. Magazines and other parts that appeared online helped to promote the free-flowing discussions about reproductive rights, domestic violence and workplace equality discarding the tradition of patriarchy and allowing women to retake the word, (Benson, 2005).

In the last few years, social networks have further added to the uncertainty of women's presence in political processes and, at the same time, non-traditional platforms for harassment and spreading of fake news especially in relation to females in political leadership. The fight for better portrayal of women in politics as well as fight for using appropriate and non-sexualized language in political discourse is a never ending process, because it is about recognizing women's rights to be involved and contributing to political process and about building politically tolerant society in general, (Tong, 2009). There has been increased attempts to address the issue particularly given the increased social media presence and new platform that preach for diversity. Activist and ground-up movements have consequently employed these structural forums to champion change, but also to pressure the media to provide more responsible portrayals, (Vardaman, 2020) and (Bruns, 2018).

The Media Landscape

The media environment is a vast system that can be defined as the set of communication tools and outlets by means of which information is produced, disseminated and received. They are newspapers, television, radio and the new media which includes Facebook, twitter, websites and streaming services. This landscape is evolving constantly owing to changes in technologies and consumers themselves. The use of breeding hydro carbon awareness in new young generation is that the change in the new generation audience behavior as they switch from the conventional system of being passive recipients of content delivered to them to the new informative and engaging digital platforms. One of the main characteristics of new media is the changed focus of the participation of users in content generation and distribution and social media has been one of the main focal point for this change where the users are more interactive in terms of communication as identified by Jenkins (2006). On the other hand, with the advancement in communication technology and the coming of streaming sites, the traditional mode of broadcasting has

been an issue as the consumer has the option of downloading his/her content (McQuail, 2010).

In addition, the fragmentation of audience targeted by multiple media options combining different varieties of interests is another emerging shift in the media field (Pew Research Center, 2021). This evolution also has large ethical implications which include: fake news, and the accountability of media houses (Levy & Gollmitzer, 2017). It can therefore be said that comprehending media systems is essential for explaining the flows of information in the society of the present time, with the distinctions between the senders and receivers of content being far from clear (Castells, 2016).

Summarily, media environment means the relations between the media and its surroundings including the traditional media mainly the television and radio, and the print media on one hand and the internet media in form of the social media, websites, and the internet service providers, the movie industry etc on the other hand.

Effective Campaigns of Women advocacy

Campaigns for women advocacy have played a significant role towards advocating for change on women and girls rights, and fighting for policies change against various challenges facing women, girls and women such as discrimination, violence and economic marginalization. These include campaigns that individuals, organisations, and international coalitions undertake to court social, legal, and political justice for females around the world. Every advocacy campaign seems to involve some advocacy communication goals, strategies, tactics, methods, techniques, and tools that are at least partly alike, (Jain, 2023).

To be effective, a campaign usually focuses on one or two issues; this way it is easy to get funding and keep the campaign going. For example, #HeForShe campaign that was initiated by UN Women to call upon men to support women's rights for equality. The campaign had a clear objective: to involve men and boys as partners in advocating for changes in relations between man and woman, which expanded the debate and brought people worldwide in support of the women's' rights, (Moghadam, 2022).

The use of Digital Media and the Social Media

In the course of advocating for women, Media has been instrumental in publicizing Women Advocacy Campaigns. The use of microblogs such as Twitter, facebooks, and Instagram has been critical in sharing messages within the shortest time and involving many people including the use of the #MeToo, # Timesup and #Chibokgirls hashtags, (Jain, 2023). Among the traditions in these campaigns, the use of hashtags has been more

effective in fostering movements that do not confine themselves to certain geographic areas while fostering discussions on opinion change movements. Social media permits people to come up with first-hand accounts making the campaign more credible and moving. Other sources include the social networks and other media including television, radio and newspapers as other channels of getting to the different broader audiences, (The global movement advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. 2022).

The #BringBackOurGirls campaign was trending in 2014, to help raise awareness for the kidnapping of over 200 Nigerian schoolgirls by Boko Haram. Media attracted former First lady Michelle Obama to join other leaders demanding for the release of the girls, hence a prove of how media influences the international community to support women's rights.

Community Organisation and Advocacy

According to Moghadam, (2022), Women's advocacy campaigns are usually effective by participating widely in grassroots movements. Involving ethnic populations mobilises people and makes the effort appropriate and sensitive to the culture. Community activism on the ground involves women at the grassroots level, and lobby for change within the society on issues affecting them. This implies that, other women advocacy groups include the Global Fund for Women and Girls Not Brides have stood to effectively organize grassroots organizations across the world and support them in advocating for women's rights at that grassroots level. Women Not Brides concentrates on eliminating child marriage and strives to make changes in cultural practices that affect young girls in different ways by collaborating with community, schools, religious factions etc. These efforts have had impacts on the legal reforms and alteration of cultural/ sociological perception about child marriage in many countries.

The Representation of Women in the Media

The portrayal of women specifically in the media has been a focal interest in communication, gender and sociology fields. AOver time, television, films, newspapers, magazines, and the internet have influenced and reflected the definition of gender roles; most investigative findings have linked media to gender stereotypes, the objectification of women, and subsequent cultural marginalisation (Rodríguez & Lopez-Figueroa, 2024). However, things are changing with growing concern over the emerging gender statement or the sert equality and the decency of portraying ladies in media.

Media women have been stereotyped in the past and still are. Common stereotypes include women being depicted as:
1. Sex objects: Especially in advertising, women continue to be objectified with an emphasis on their appearance rather than their brain, skills, or personality.
2. Caretakers: Women are often stereotyped in television programs and films as 'nurturers' or 'carers,' frequently associated with roles such as housewives, wives, or mothers..
3. Dependent characters: Gender-selective is when women are portrayed as being subordinate to men, either by being in charge of their emotions or financially.
4. Victims: Consistently throughout news programs, reporting of crime and even theoretical narratives, women are presented predominantly as victims of violence, which further propounds the notion that vulnerability is the new normal for women.

According to Chandra & Shakya (2024), sexualisation of women and girls in mass media, especially commercials and popular culture, divests them of any value but the aesthetic one. The effect is a ripple effect that defines how a woman sees herself and defines how others see her as well as her position in the society. It has been found that when people are exposed to objectifying images, they develop body dissatisfaction and are reminded of undesirable aesthetic norms.

Underrepresentation and Misrepresentation

Females are like their counterparts in many forms of media today. They account for more than half of the world's population, yet many of them are rarely seen occupying positions of power or decision-making or in news anchors, political reporters, and film industries. According to Imhanobe (2025), "The representation of different genders in films has more layers of complexities concerning power relations, identity politics, and cultural ideologies in the current era."
More often than not these parts are ancillary, contributing to the construction of knowledge that men are central to significant societal stories (Rodríguez & Lopez-Figueroa, J. 2024).

However, when women are included, their narratives or perspectives may either be constructed inappropriately or otherwise overemphasised. It is possible to watch a complex female character in certain movie genres, as women characters are mainly depicted as the mere 'love interest', the 'damsel in distress' or the 'femme fatale'. It produces a small picture of what women are capable of and the situations they find themselves in.

Representational Shifts in the Current Media

Recently, there has been a significant increase in

concern, particularly regarding the demand for women in media. Social media campaigns like #MeToo and #TimesUp have made people more aware of gender violence and the gross under-representation of women in media executive positions. This, according to Misra & Monika (2024), has resulted in:

i. More complex female characters: There are more smart, dynamic and complex female characters in films and television. These are actual woman characters whose purpose is not only connected to the men around them but who have their plans, dreams, and issues.

ii. Increased visibility of women of colour and LGBTQ+ women: Media is slowly changing for the better in the way that it is starting to include gender with regard to ethnicity, orientation, and many other factors. Nevertheless, it is still a field that can use some more focus.

iii. Women in leadership roles in media production: Currently, the female sex is becoming leaders as directors, producers, scriptwriters, and editors. This shift is gradually influencing the narratives and representations of women being presented.

The effect that Media Representation has on Society

This paper argues that the media's portrayal of women shapes society's perception and treatment of them. The depiction of women and girls in diverse, respectful, and empowering ways will lead to reflection on the change in traditional gender roles for women. However, where regrettable portrayals are used, these bring out degrading perceptions which tend to undermine the position of women in society. According to Ruiz (2024), representation matters for women in how women or girls perceive themselves and also for the society as a whole in the roles of women. For example, positive portrayals of women in leadership or women as experts will go a long way in motivating girls and changing perceptions about women in society.

The Role of Media Literacy

Media literacy plays a very crucial role when it comes to how the media set agenda for their audiences, especially women. It is helpful to understand who wields power in media production, distribution, and content because it prepares learners to identify stereotypes or biases and call for better representation. Msofu & Britto (2024) have it that, although women are portrayed in the media now more than ever, the portrayal of women in media poses a challenge that was and still is halfway up. During the advance of gender equity in society, media are expected to reciprocate by offering empowering and diverse images of women. Progress is being noted, but there is still plenty of work to be done to make sure that all women are depicted fairly and accurately in media.

Women's Political Media Roles and Responsibilities

Importantly, political media play a significant role in shaping people's perceptions of political leaders and related policies. However, women enjoy a relatively different and enduring situation in obtaining political media representation. Even today, in developed countries, women are still excluded, misrepresented and often sidelined in political news. The following are some of the challenges that influence perceptions towards female politicians and women's participation in politics in general (Msofu & Britto, 2024).

Political Media Representation

Of all the issues that women battle continuously, the limited visibility of women in political media is a monumental problem. Research on the gender differences indicate that women politicians are under covered than their male counterparts. It was also clear that when women feature in the political lime light more often than not, attention is diverted to more issues such as scandals in their private lives, dress code, how they shed a tear – and all these considered as relevant by serving as indicators to their capacity to lead the nation. One of the reasons for this underrepresentation is that media organizations also have gender biases. There are many media houses today especially business machines with the male gender in the dominant positions of power decision may not feel the importance of the woman in politics as they do not get their chance to be heard or recognized. Therefore, female political contribution is unseen and female political involvement is estimated to be negligible, (Serttas, et al 2023).

Stereotyping and Gender Bias

The representation of women in political media is therefore often accompanied by stereotypes. Women in politics are more likely to be associated with appearance, behaviour or family responsibilities and less likely with their professional achievements and political portfolios. Some of the adjectives used include emotional, bossy, and cold among them, which deviate from the right temperament expected in a leader and paint a prevalence of stereotyping, especially in the leadership roles supposed for women in male-dominated organisations. They can also affect the tenor of the media that provides information to the people. These biases can also determine the tone of media. What is more, men can be appreciated if they are presented as decision-makers or as being tough, while women with the same characteristics are often considered rude or unfaithful to their gender. On one hand, the women are criticised for

being overly pink in that they are overly sensitive or cooperative to the extent that they cannot effectively deal with political job descriptions (Gaur & Sarkar, 2024).

Pursuit of Personal Traits and Colours

Chen (2024) adds that female politicians often experience how their private life, relationships, or bodies are criticised – things which male politicians are rarely or less exposed to. Likely, the audience can pay attention to marital status, child custody or the dress worn by one female politician rather than her policy priorities or management style. The determination of personal factors can indeed demean women's pull into politics by transforming their public image into something as trivial. For example, although male politicians are scrutinised, for the most part, for their experience and political performance, female politicians are often judged by how they appear or their roles as wives or mothers. This double standard can really harm them in the eyes of the public since, in most cases, it is true.

Coverage during Elections

In this context, Hu, (2023), said that, there are more strict barriers for women to cover media attention during the election campaigns. Television always provides more attention to the male contender, especially in races that are conventionally coded as men's territory. Whenever women become the subject of such attention, it is usually couched in novelty where the women are identified as being outsiders from a man's world. Besides, some media sources painting women as unelectable or as individuals who are unfit to be voted into office. This may become a circle of contributive cause; the media starts portraying female candidates in a less supported manner, the public follows suite by exercising the same attitude. Consequently, these media barriers make it hard for women out there to penetrate to media competitive levels as these men.

Intolerance and Cyberbullying

According to Kearney (2021), women in politics experience high rates of hostility and harassment on social media, particularly due to the latest technological advancements. Women have always suffered different terrorism from men, especially in politics through the internet. They are not just personal but often much related to gender, looks, or the fact they have children and need to be mothers. The case introduces various barriers that such hostility can create for women in politics, putting off women's political engagement. Such sentiments may force women not to contest for political posts or even recede from the public media in case they receive comments that molest them. This is even more so in developing nations where social-cultural perceptions of women in leadership positions are even more constricted (Woodward & Bernstein, 1974).

The Effect on People's Perceptions

The combination of these challenges is that women are viewed as less politically competent or capable than their male counterparts. This paper posits that media representation of women is central to women's ability to garner public support or legitimacy; when women are systematically excluded, sexualised, or otherwise objectified in media messages, it is more challenging for them to mobilise public support, as men can. Moreover, that is why women politicians have little possibility of receiving positive and balanced media representation; others also do not go into politics. In cases where women intending to be leaders do not find these people treated fairly by the media, then they are also discouraged from participating in political activities (UN Women 2021).

To improve the portrayal of women in political media, media organisations should promote gender-sensitive journalism, increase female representation in media leadership, and challenge gender stereotypes through targeted educational programmes, information campaigns, media literacy projects, and public awareness. These strategies aim todress under-representation, biased coverage, and cultural gendered constructions that restrict women's electoral prospects and leadership. By addressing these challenges, media organisations, political institutions, and society can work together to promote gender-balanced representation in political media., (Williams, 2022).

Case Studies that Support the Argument for Media Influence

Media is a very essential component of organisations, political and social opinions and the creation of awareness of issues. It is through news, documentaries, films, and social networks – entertainment that the media, positive or negative, can raise stories that promote change or enshrine prejudice. A sample of what must be considered as some of the most outstanding cases involving media influence is provided below in a bid to support the argument that media can either be helpful or unhelpful to society (UN Women, 2017).

The Watergate scandal, the #MeToo movement, and the Arab Spring all demonstrate the significant role of media in political processes. The Watergate scandal, which began in 1972, exposed the White House's involvement in the Democratic National Committee and led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon. The #MeToo movement, created by women in 2017, hastened discussions on gender-based violence and harassment,

prompting legal actions, resignations, and policy changes in various industries. The Arab Spring, a collective protest movement in the Arab world, used social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to plan demonstrations, disseminate information, and publicise human rights violations. The media played a crucial role in instigating revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, as well as in Syria, where the revolt initiated an extended civil war (UN Women 2014).

During the Vietnam War, newspapers and television influenced the public and changed their policies; the media accelerated protests against the war and influenced the US government's withdrawal from Vietnam. The phenomenon of fake news, which spreads untruthful or unverified information, has significantly influenced politics, including the 2016 US presidential election.

Climate change coverage has also evolved over time, with media discourses focusing on the seriousness of climate change issues. Television programs like Al Gore's documentary An Inconvenient Truth and Greta Thunberg's coverage of the Global Climate Strikes have contributed to the focus on climate change in media communication strategies (Allcott, H., & Gentzkow, M. (2017).

These case studies highlight the potential of media in shaping political, social, and cultural changes, with its functions as investigative reporters, social media activists, and purveyors of fake news. While media will always have a significant influence on society, it is very important to acknowledge its role in shaping society and its impact on society.

Measures for Strengthening the Advocating Function of Media for Women's Inclusion and Advocacy

Media plays a crucial role in advocating for women's rights and political inclusion. To improve this, journalists should advance gender-sensitive practices, promote women's media ownership and leadership, and feature grassroots organisations and women's advocacy agencies. By promoting gender sensitivity, mentorship and development roles, and funding for women-focused media organisations, the media can ensure more gender parity and coverage of women's rights stories (Boulianne, S. 2019).

Media should also focus on expanding ordinary people's activism and women's organisations, showcasing their struggles and achievements to a wider society. This can be achieved by soliciting stories about grassroots organisations, growing a section or show dedicated to feminism and women's rights, and encouraging diverse female representation in opinion articles, interviews, and commentaries.

Media should also ensure that political institutions are answerable by investigating and writing journalistic articles on policy domains focusing on women's political representation, tracking and reviewing gender equality in its agenda, and organising television and radio programmes to call political personalities to account on gender equality issues. These activities will apply pressure on political institutions to address women's issues and ensure equal representation and representation for minorities in political processes and government policies. Boykoff & Boykoff (2004).

Leverage social media for advocacy.

Media has played a crucial role in promoting women's advocacy and bringing change to the public. To achieve this, media should engage with social media influencers, use platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to post key areas of women's advocacy, and create campaigns around gender topics. These activities will create awareness and bring people together, enabling women to spearhead campaigns on core areas of concern such as women's politics, violence against women, and equity (**Bring Back Our Girls, 2014)**.

To promote positive images of female politicians and leaders, media should celebrate their accomplishments without discussing their appearance or sexuality. This will create room for women to take up political leadership roles and alter social perception (Cott, 2000).

The media should also partner with advocacy organisations to ensure that policy change processes support the appointment of women leaders. This can be achieved by partnering with community-based organisations, introducing demographics that promote women's causes in media programs, and creating multiproject initiatives that combine investigative reporting with advocacy.

Media should also address bias and stereotypes in reporting by eliminating sexist language, comparing attitudes toward women in the media, and including more women in news gathering and production. By employing gender-sensitive journalism reporting, partnering with grassroots movements, and conducting advocacy on social media, media organisations can enhance women's politics and justice for all in society.

CONCLUSION

Media plays a crucial role in promoting women's rights and political participation. It raises public awareness of women's injustices, gender equality, and women's rights, such as education and health. Media coverage also provides representation of women leaders, activists, and politicians, promoting inclusivity **(Every Woman Every Child 2022)**. Media also sets a political agenda in women's matters, compelling decision-makers to address diverse gaps. It serves as a platform for dialogue and coordinates various actors, including government, non-governmental organisations, and businesses.

Investigative journalism can reveal vices that may warrant policy changes. The media crisis is a significant factor in advocating for women's rights and political enfranchisement. By responding to concerns and providing diverse representations, media can contribute to a more inclusive political climate. The challenge is to make the media more responsive to these standards and give women a fair portrayal.

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