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Investigating Roles and Assignments in Media Practice in Cameroon: A Gender-Based Approach

Emilien E. Matole, Kingsley L. Ngange, Martin E.-M. Elonge

Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Buea, Buea, Cameroon
Email: kngange@yahoo.com

Abstract

The media, known as the fourth power of a democratic society, continues to be instrumental in defining what we think about and how we look at issues in society. By implication, the role and content of the media play a decisive part in reinforcing gender stereotypes and setting agendas for public opinion through selective themes and views. This study investigates how the media in Cameroon uses its power to perpetuate gender stereotype norms. It examines the types of roles and assignments that women and men handle in the media defined by their gender, irrespective of professionalism, productivity, skills, and competence. The main research question is: to what extent are media roles and assignments constructed along gender lines? The study employed the quantitative research approach with a survey method. Data was collected from 81 media practitioners in Fako Division, South West Region of Cameroon, purposively selected from 35 media houses, with a response rate of 79.4%. The findings reveal that majority of female media practitioners are assigned the role of "Presenters" (76.6%) and "Reporters" (70.3%) over other functions. Female are tasked to "soft news" as opposed to their male counterparts who handle "hard news". Discriminative practices (t (80) = −8.61, P = .000) and traditional gender stereotypes (t (80) = 13.49, P = .000) were found to significantly influence role attributions in the media. It is evident that the editorial policy (with 43.2% respondents agreeing as opposed to 17.3%) has great influence on roles and assignment distribution in media practice. The findings confirm the Agenda Setting theory of the media in that the media reflects society by reinforcing gender stereotypes with the types of roles and assignments distributed in media organs. Evidence from the Radical Feminist Perspective shows that women are the more oppressed gender. Despite the suggestions of respondents on gender bias, the media is caught between presenting equity, and not distorting cultural norms. Principally, the

study recommends that the media should practically mainstream gender in media practice at all levels; more women should feature on hard news for instance. This is vital because the welfare of the world will be limited if the condition of women is not improved upon. The study, therefore, affirms that equity is a strong hold for sustainable development.

Keywords

Media, Gender Balance, Stereotypes, Roles, Assignments, Cameroon

1. Introduction

Several researchers and feminists (Tuchman, 1978; van Zoonen, 1998; Gallagher, 2002b; McQuail, 2005; Byerly, 2011; Morna, 2014; Hills, 2018; Kosho, 2019) ascertained that the media has continued to perpetuate traditional gender stereotypes for women (cookery, housekeeping, nurturing, childbearing, and more) in its daily contents. In so doing, the media is reflecting and strengthening dominant social values through the roles and assignments of media practitioners. This paper focuses on how the media in Cameroon use their power to propagate gender stereotype in society and with what outcome. It examines the types of roles and assignments that women and men handle in the media based on their gender, irrespective of professionalism, skills, productivity, and competence. The media, known as the fourth power of governance, continues to be instrumental in defining what we think about, how we look, our social place and issues in society. By implication, the role and content of the media play a decisive role in reinforcing gender stereotypes, and setting agendas for public opinion through selective themes and views (Tuchman, 2018).

Kayoka (2001) ascertains that, modern society has made advanced strides toward the acceptance and appreciation of multiculturalism and diversity as well as the gender role identity. However, gender role stereotypes exist all around, and thriving more in these contemporary times. The interplay of role and assignment distribution in the media suffers from continuous intercepts of gender manipulations (Tuchman, 2018); with multidimensional effects on media outputs. This study further handles the general field of communication, exploring more definitively, concerns on organizational communication strategies and functioning (media work ethics). Put differently, it explores the roles and assignments that women handle in media practice which reinforce gender stereotypes.

Studies on media issues by the Global Media Monitoring Project since the late 90s (World Association for Christian Communication, 2010; Gallagher, 2005) reveal that the growth of print media also brought tears to the Cameroonian elite women as well as the public, in relation to media coverage roles and assignments and portrayal of women. In Cameroon, the media has a key role in shaping issues of gender differentiation in the workplace. Creating such a balance only helps build and reshape readership of its society. These studies (World Association for

Christian Communication, 2010; Gallagher, 2005) also show that men are more likely to be quoted than women in the media, and more likely to cover "serious topics" which are termed "issues at stake". According to Tuchman (2018) gender roles are societal views governed by culture that perpetuate women's subordination to male supremacy in roles and achievements. Gender analysis of 20 episodes of the programme "Women's venture" on Mt Cameroon FM Buea revealed that 60% of the content was stereotype of child rearing, primary health care, food producer and community manager. Mainstream politics and economic activities receive little or no attention as far as gender-based media programmes are concerned. Management also views women's problems (programme) as part of women and should be handled by women. For example, the TV programme "Calling the Women" on the Cameroon Radio Television (CRTV) every Wednesday at 6:30 pm, "Women and Development", and the radio programme "Global voices for women" on CRTV are solely presented and anchored by women.

It is however, expected that female media practitioners can help to change coverage, roles and assignment in media practice. Women working in the media represent other women in the country as they drive and perpetuate the core ideologies representing most women not only in their programmes but also based on their representation. The society, therefore, expects them to spearhead changes leading to a change in stereotypes in the roles and assignments that women and men handle in the media. Kayoka (2001) explains that very little research exists in Cameroon in relation to women's roles and assignments in media practice. It is based on this assertion that women as subject of media practice are of interest to be studied.

The imposition of censorship laws also places a good number of women in a tight corner to avoid daring certain roles in the media which have been defined as "men's domain" by in-house policies, such as investigative journalism, politics, sports reporting, and others. The image of television, in particular, reinforces the conceptions of gender roles in the media which affects the types of radio and TV programmes that women and men handle as well as the type of assignments accorded to women. Thus, the media moulds people's thoughts and actions (Endeley, 2004).

Kijem (1998) argues that many women programmes, four decades after the first United Nations Conference on women in Copenhagen, still concentrate on traditional images of the women in welfare, social services and domestic roles. By implication, these traditional images limit the full exploration of women's capacity, thus, affecting performance in the entire media work force. Also, a lot of censorship in the media is highly perpetuated by state bodies and this impacts negatively on women's participation in the programme and management of the media. Gender barriers have existed within the workplace ever since women in Cameroon "came out of the kitchen" and went to work during World War II. Like any new experiences of empowerment, when the men came home after the war, the women were wholly a changed group. Women had entered the work force and they were there to stay, despite the misgiving of much of the country's

male population. The truth remains that gender inequality within the media world is a factor that is still vastly relevant, despite mandated government equality rules. Though men and women enter the media every day, in order to do the same jobs, certain gender barriers continue to exist. Jaffer (2000) opines that the mass media reflects on social assumptions about gender which defines the woman's role in the media from the male perspective. To understand this complex issue, the researchers posed the following questions and hypotheses.

2. Research Questions and Hypotheses

Main research question: To what extent are roles and assignments in media construed along gender lines?

Specific research questions:

RQ1: To what extent does the editorial policy of media organs significantly promote gender equality/inequality in role assignments of media practitioners?

H1. The editorial policy of media organs significantly promotes gender inequality.

RQ2: To what extent are beats assigned on gender preferences?

H2. Assignments in the media, given to media practitioners are significantly dependent on gender considerations.

RQ3: To what extent are gender roles in the media influenced by traditional gender stereotypes?

H3. Traditional gender stereotypes have a significant influence on roles attribution in the media.

Main Objectives

The general objective of this study is to investigate roles and assignments in media practice from a gender-based perspective.

Specific Objectives

SO1: To investigate the extent to which the editorial policy of media organs promotes gender equality/inequality in role assignments of media practitioners.

SO2: To examine the extent to which beats are assigned in the media based on gender preferences.

SO3: To scrutinize the extent to which gender roles in the media are influenced by traditional gender stereotypes.

The structure of this paper includes an introduction to the subject matter of roles and assignments in media practice in Cameroon from a gender-based perspective. After the introduction, which presents the research problem, research questions, hypotheses and objectives of the paper, there is a review of relevant literature. The review includes media and gender practices in Cameroon and globally. It equally addresses the theoretical underpinnings of the paper and ends with an explanation of the theoretical model developed for this research. The methodology section details how the research was conducted. This is followed by the presentation and discussion of findings as well as a conclusion based on set objectives.

3. Literature Review

3.1. The Media in Cameroon

The Cameroon media sector is characterised by both state and private ownership. Forcha & Ngange (2022) opine that media ownership and concentration in the hands of individuals/tycoons who are often not media trained, has an adverse effect on the practice and output of the media in Cameroon. The broadcast sector is dominated by the state-owned Cameroon Radio Television Corporation (CRTV) created on December 17, 1987. The corporation is composed of one national TV station based in the capital city of Yaoundé; ten (10) regional radio stations based in the various regional capitals and, FM commercial radio stations in Yaoundé, Douala, Bafoussam, Buea, Kousseri, Yagoua and Wave FM. The government also owns Cameroon Tribune, a bilingual daily which is published by its official house (SOPECAM).

Following the introduction of multiparty politics in the 1990s and the subsequent passing of the 1990 law of freedom of mass communication, a publishing euphoria developed in the country in which the Cameroonian print media saw a rapid growth with over 400 newspapers registered by 1998 (USA Department of State, 1999 cited in (Fombad, 2003)). Majority of these appeared sporadically and few survived longer than a couple of months or a particular event.

As Fombad (2003) notes, this publishing euphoria died around 1993. By 1997, 50 newspapers were in circulation (Commonwealth observer group, 1997 cited in (Ndangam, 2008)). Though there has been a steady increase in newspaper ownership in Cameroon to over 618, the state-owned, Cameroon Tribune has been the most frequent (Tatchou, 2022; Nyenty, 2013). Most of these papers are weeklies, biweeklies or triweekly with low literacy levels, little advertising revenues, high cost of printing, distribution problems, pre- and post-publication censorship, arbitrary suspension of publications and arrests of journalists. Because of these reasons, very few of these papers are published regularly. In many cases some newspapers have ceased existing (Fombad, 2003). Further amendments to the law in 1996 saw the abolishing of pre-publication censorship and other forms of pre-publication restraints that had been placed on the media in 1990.

3.2. The National Gender Policy of Cameroon

In a global quest to curb gender stereotypes, the state of Cameroon has put in place a policy known as the National Gender Policy (NGPC) (Mefire, Vissandjee, & Bibeau, 2017). One may believe that this policy is a tool for planning and implementing government initiative to promote equality and equity between sexes in all socio-economic, political or cultural domains. To consolidate this policy and grant it a high priority, the president of the Republic of Cameroon, in an inaugural speech delivered on October 4, 2011 during his presidential election campaign, stated that "Notre septennant sera centre sur la promotion de la condition feminine pour pavenir a l'egalite des droits entre hommes et femmes

'(our seven-year term will focus on the promotion of the status of women to achieve equal rights between men and women' (Mefire et al., 2017)." In 1997, Cameroon developed and adopted its first policy paper on the advancement of women, defining government priorities and strategies related to this goal. This document is the policy statement associated with the National Action Plan for the integration of women in development.

The seven lines of action emerging from this document stem from the twelve points of the recommendations the United Nations Fourth Women's Conference for the promotion of women empowerment which was held in Beijing, China, from September 4 to 15, 1995. In addition, it aims to universalise quality primary education, promote functional literacy for people of both sexes and reduce disparity in all sectors of economic and social development. The purpose of this mechanism is to promote an egalitarian and equitable society between men and women to ensure sustainable development. However, the bitter reality is that the Cameroon state has not yet fully implemented its national gender policy, following the type of roles and assignments that both men and women handle in the media, which define their gender from a patriarchal point of view. This is embedded in a paradigm which is a struggle for daily life, due to lack of objectivity. In addition to the above, the National Gender Policy is part of the documents that bind the Cameroon state to international institutions.

Consequently, any attempt to refute it, becomes a pitfall for its denial. Going through this research, investigations reveal that this document is only known within the management services or the departments' which designed it. Thus, there is room to question management's willingness and ability to implement the national gender policy in the field. Even among the elite women in Cameroon, many do not know that there is a national gender policy to fully mainstream women in the socio-political, economic, and social walks of life (Mefire et al, 2017). One is, therefore, tempted to say that national policy documents end up being theoretical and filling up ministries drawers and cupboards.

3.3. Gender Portrayal in the Media

The media plays an important role in society by reporting on current events, providing frameworks for interpretation, mobilising citizens with regards to various issues, reproducing predominant culture and entertainments (Llanos, Pena, & Ronco, 2011). As such, the media is an important factor in the promotion of gender equality, both within the working environment (in terms of employment, promotions, roles and assignments between men and women at all levels) and in the representation of women and men (in terms of fair gender portrayal and the use of neutral and non-gender specific language).

Raj (2014), Livingstone & Lunt (1994) hold that the power of the media and how unavoidably the media is to humanity. According to him, we are constantly bombarded by media in the form of commercials, billboards and other advertisements blatantly telling us who we ought to be, especially with the different

roles and assignments that media practitioners handle. Media entertainment also has a subtle influence on society's way of thinking (Sanders, Yang, Ciaramella, Italiano, Whitenack, & Hickerson, 2021). Kosho (2019) further notes that media impact on the society is generally proven. The agenda setting theory describes the power of news media to shape public opinion and to set the public agenda. News media is responsible not only to inform the audience, but also to induct positive social behaviours through its socialising function. In this context, media has a strong impact on women status in the society. Through its news reporting lenses, media can improve the status of the women, or decrease their power, by creating new gender stereotypes or strengthening old ones.

In the last 30 years, there has been a considerable amount of academic research from media scholars that focuses on a gender-based perspective of media production and representation issues (Reviere & Byerly, 2013; Chambers, Steiner, & Fleming, 2004; De Bruin & Ross, 2004; North, 2009; Tuchman, 1978; van Zoonen, 1988). The media have always been at the centre of feminist critiques referred to as a "Common ground" (Gallagher, 2002a) or common repository of information, ideas and representations that contribute to maintaining a particular gender status quo. Though the number of female journalists has been consistently increasing (the so-called "feminization" of the profession), this has not improved women's equal participation in media or gender balance within media content as well as roles and assignments in media practice (Tuchman, 2009).

During the first six decades of the twentieth century, women's presence in the media was scarce (Sobreira, 2003; Garcia, 1994). The number of women in the newsroom began to rise in the late 1960s and increased particularly from the mid-1970s due to existing studies (Ventura, 2012). This followed the national trend of increasing female labour market participation, mainly in liberal professions such as advocacy, magistracy, medicine and teaching as well as key historical landmarks such as the recognition of free speech and press freedom in 1974 and the liberalisation of the media sector in the 1980s. By 1987 women compromised about 20 percent of the certified journalism workforce and in 2009 they made up just over 40 percent of the total newsroom work force (Garcia, 1994).

In spite of this feminisation process, newsrooms are still marked by inequality; women are still seen as outsiders by their male colleagues. This happens because journalism practices are deeply rooted in a male centred professional culture (North, 2009). Many male journalists particularly those in position of authority in newsrooms, often do not experience a "newsroom culture"; rather they are the "culture", the news room is theirs and they guard the parameters from "outside", allowing some in, but rarely to the core, where power is experienced, wielded and often homo socially shared (Reich, 2014).

Gender imbalance and role differentiation in the media is a stable, worldwide phenomenon. Numerous analyses of media role and assignment in Cameroon and other African countries have documented the fact that, for the past several decades, men have dominated the mass media. This is true of both radio and

television, and of various type of programme roles and assignments like drama, news, sports, children's programme and so on.

In an analysis of gender perspective in the roles and assignments in CRTV in 1999, Edie (1999) cited in Endeley (2004), revealed the following findings: men relative to women occupy top management policy influencing positions (i.e., Station Manager, Editor in Chief, Chief of Service for Programme and Technical Services, Assistants to the Bureau and Relay Centres). By implication most women occupied lower positions; staff showed lack of interest in women and gender issues according to Akum (1999) cited in Endeley (2004). Although the Cameroonian newsrooms have seen some progress over the past few decades, there is little doubt that inequities still exist in terms of role, assignment, equal pay, appointment to top positions, and overall work dynamics between women and men (Tambenkongho, 2009).

Research on the Cameroon news agency found that women, who are more than half of the population, are assigned to report stories at a substantially lower rate than men. In evening broadcast news, women are on-camera 25 percent of the time; in print news, women report 31 percent of the stories; on the internet women write 40 percent of the news; and on the wires women garner only 29 percent of the bylines. With the 2018 presidential elections in Cameroon, it was regrettable that women were reported to cover 35 percent of the news stories, while the men covered 65 percent of the political stories. This is also the case with reports and media coverage in the municipal and legislative elections of 2020.

3.4. Gender, Media Practice and Conflict

In the last decades, media studies of gender have looked beyond the percentages of women and men in the media work force to analyse how gender shapes their roles, experiences, and professional identity (Byerly, 2013; De Bruin & Ross, 2014; Tsui & Lee, 2012). Gender and media research has been a central field of academic inquiry since the 1970s. Two distinctive and yet often overlapping approaches characterised this field. The first is that of mainstream form of gender and media studies research, which has been grounded in large part by assumptions about the way in which the media contribute to the individual acquisition of gendered attitudes and behaviours and how sex-roles can impact negatively on a person's self-worth, chances and social perception of career prospects.

The other field is that of feminist media studies which is characterised as a political movement for gender justice; how gender relations are represented, the ways in which audiences make sense of them, and how media practitioners contribute to perpetuating gender injustice (Gill, 2006; Thornham, 2007; Van Zoonen, 1994). At the centre of this is the view that hierarchical gender relations (re)produce social inequalities across time and cultures. This study will clearly bring out realities of women and men who work in the media from their roles and assignments in the media practice from a gender-based perspective unlike the Gill (2006)'s assumptions.

Gender representation is an issue that has plagued journalism practice for years, especially reporters covering fields that are typically dominated by men. In 2016, Adrienne LaFrance, editor of TheAtlantic.com, published a piece in which she analysed her reporting for gender bias. LaFrance found that women made up only 22 percent of the individuals she named or quoted in her work. "These numbers are distressing, particularly because my beats cover areas where women are already outnumbered by men," LaFrance wrote. "This means that, by failing to quote or mention women, I'm one of those forces actively contributing to a world, in which women's skills and accomplishments are undermined or ignored, and women are excluded." In this light, Bloomberg's 2019 goals included: improving gender representation and diversity in the newsroom, in addition to continuing to increase source diversity. "It's important who's writing and editing the stories," Laura Zelenko explained (Hawkins-Gaar, 2019).

White (2009) highlights that although the number of women working in the media has been increasing globally, the top positions (producer, executives, chief editor, and publisher) are still very male-dominated. This disparity where cultural impediments to women fulfilling the role of the journalist (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) is common in African countries like South Africa and Nigeria (Kassova, 2020) with likewise Cameroon as this research has shown. The Global Monitoring Project (GMMP) affirms that throughout the world, female journalists are more likely to be assigned "Soft" subjects such as family, lifestyle, fashion, and arts and less likely to cover and write on "hard" news such as politics and the economy.

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. However, not all women working in the media are gender aware and prone to cover women's needs and perspective; and it is not impossible for men to effectively cover gender issues. Recent research for eighteen (18) disparate countries shows that male and female journalist attitudes do not differ significantly (Hanitzsch & Hanusch, 2012). None the less, 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 female audience (Byerly, 2011). Research in journalism and gender to date has found somewhat contradictory evidence as to the ways in which women and men practice journalism. Some scholars claim that women have inherently different concepts and practices of journalism and that this has led to a feminisation of certain roles and assignments in journalism practice (Hanitzsch & Hanusch, 2012; Ross, 2001; O'Brien & Suiter, 2017).

Unlike their male counterparts, female managers are faced with problem of dual responsibilities. They are required to fulfil their traditional obligations as home makers and function effectively as media managers. Geisler & Pardiwalla

(2009) observed that the problem is compounded by the cultural definition of femininity and masculinity within the African family system which fosters a disproportionate distribution of house hold tasks and duties between the sexes. The unequal division of labour also liberates men from responsibilities at home and facilitates their career development. According to some female managers, one of the main factors "within self" which blocks career development is "conflict within one self about career and family"; as such women prefer lower roles that will enable them manage their multiple roles.

4. Theoretical Framework

Three theoretical premises guided overall discussions in this research: Agenda Setting, Framing, and Psychoanalytic theories. The Agenda Setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), highlights media's ability to influence the importance placed on certain issues and shape public perception. It suggests that frequent and prominent coverage of certain topics leads audiences to consider them more important. In the context of gender-based roles and assignments in media practice, the media's emphasis on specific gender stereotypes can perpetuate certain roles and assignments for women.

Framing theory (Goffman, 1974) explores how media reporting angles and contextualisation shape public perception. It focuses on the essence of issues and how they are presented, rather than specific topics. Its use in this research suggests that the media's portrayal of stereotypical roles and assignments for women can influence public perception and limit their opportunities in different areas like their engagement in hard news.

The Psychoanalytic theory suggests inherent differences between women and men, which can influence their career choices and comfort levels in handling certain roles and assignments. This theory explains strong foundations of the potential impact of early identification and socialisation on gender roles.

These theories are relevant in understanding how gender roles and assignments are shaped and provide a context within the media landscape in Cameroon; identifying potential biases, stereotypes, and limitations faced by women in media practice. Their use remains instrumental in examining gender equality, challenging existing norms, and advocating for more inclusive and diverse roles and assignments in the media industry.

5. Explanation of the Operational Model

The operational model for this study in Figure 1 above suggests that feminist perspectives are divided on the roles and assignments of media practitioners in the media. The model is illustrated in three (3) parts: A: Interaction, B: Resolution and C: Outcome.

In the part A of the model, which describes the Interaction, there is interplay of media theories, psychology-based theories, and feminist perspectives, within an environment (Society). The Agenda Setting theory has been used at both the
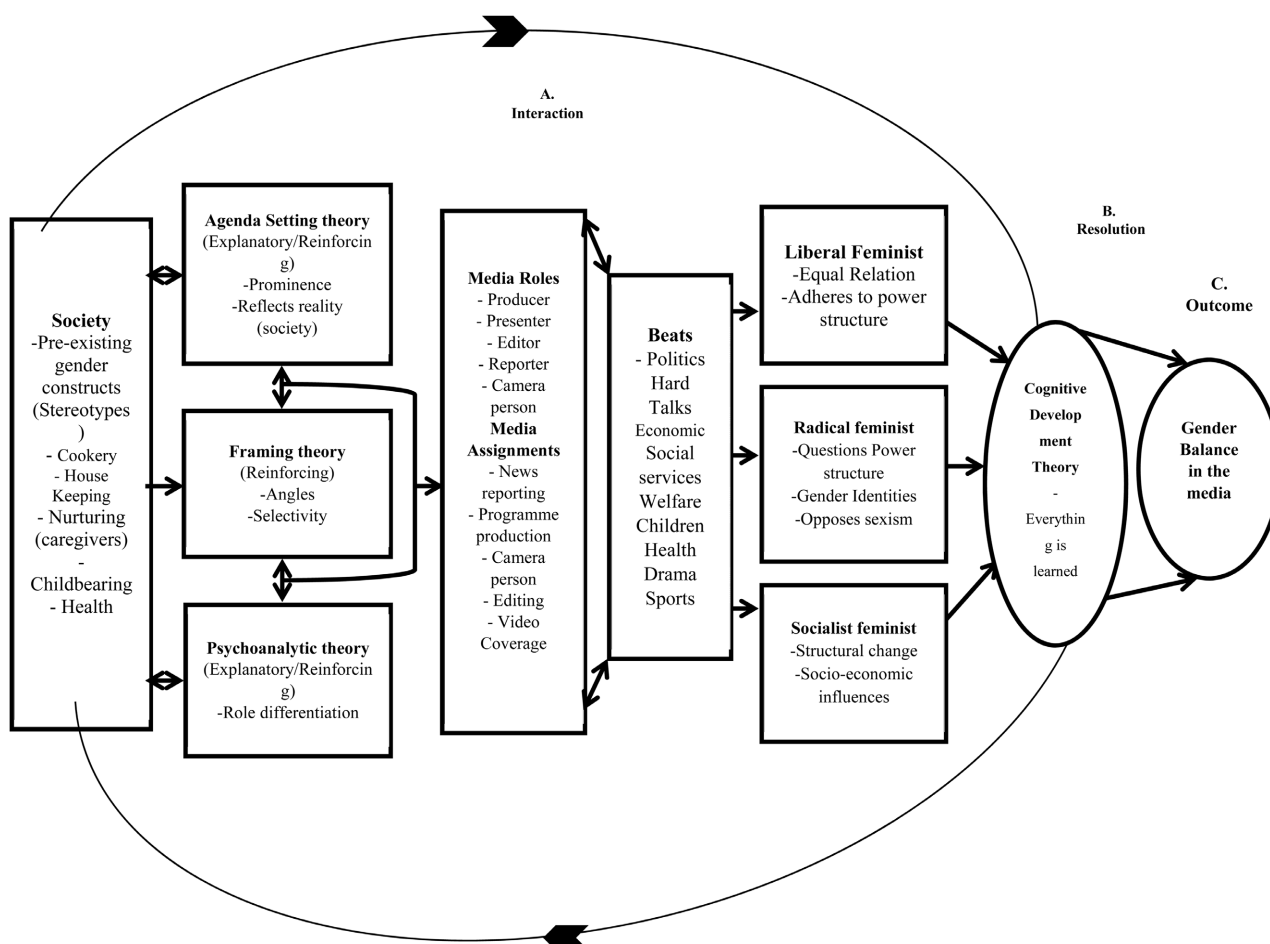
Source: Field data, 2020.

Figure 1. Operational model (gender balance in the media).

explanatory and reinforcement levels. This is because through the importance and reflection of roles, the media sets agendas from pre-existing societal norms on what is the role of women in society. Also, through Framing, agendas are selectively positioned by the media. The angle from which the media reports or looks at existing definitions of women in society is invariably transferred to media incorporation.

The Psychoanalytical theory explains and reinforces role differentiations that society has set on gender. For example, men are seen as those who do the heavy jobs (splitting of wood), while women do the lighter work (washing of dishes). The theory further explains sex-role development that arises from behaviour that society defines as appropriate to each sex. As gender roles have been differentiated, people grow to learn that such differentiations should be respected. For instance, a boy's cloth should not be worn by a girl and vice versa.

Thus, the orientation of society plays on the nature of agenda that the media sets, to suit its context as explained by the psychological theories. Consequently, the initial outcome is seen in the different roles and assignments that would obtain in media practice.

This initial outcome comes under varied interpretation which the researchers define as "Feminist Approaches" in this study. This study considered three feminist paradigms: the Liberal, Radical and Socialist feminist perspectives. These perspectives have opposing views on their approaches to women in the society, in this case, the presentation of women in the media.

The next level of the model indicates a divide between the "Interactions" and "Resolutions". At the level of the resolution, the model suggests a return to thought processing, through the Cognitive Development theory to address gender talks in the media. Since everything is learned, as the Cognitive development theory suggests, then there are two options: Unlearn or maintain the learned. This, as indicated by the model, is possible by upsetting pre-existing societal constructs on gender. The model further suggests that an interaction of the theories and feminist perspective should result in balance within the media.

6. Methodology

Through quantitative research approach, 134 media practitioners were surveyed from a population of 208 in 37 media organs (14 newspapers, 12 radio stations and 11 TV stations) in Fako Division, South West Region of Cameroon. 81 respondents of the 134 returned valid questionnaires giving a response rate of 60.4%. The choice of this quota sampling is based on Creswell (2013), Molem, Afuge, & Dobdinga (2020) and Ndue (2017) who hold that quantitative strategies, casual designs, and the survey method (through a questionnaire) are ideal for sampling opinions of a large audience. The seven sub-divisions in Fako with the population of media practitioners for this study included: Limbe 1, 2 & 3, Buea, Muyuka, Tiko, and Idenau. Producers, presenters, reporters, editors, layout/other design officers, camera persons and technicians constituted media practitioners in this study.

The presence of multiple-audio-visual and print media houses in Fako Division, provides a fresh perspective on media stereotypes, relevant for this study. As Ngange (2012) puts it, Fako Division is a major player in South West region, which is one of the media-rich zones in Cameroon. The study considered a midpoint sample size of 134 media practitioners. Quota sampling was used to select media practitioners from all media organs that consented to participate in the research process. According to Molem, Afuge, & Dobdinga (2020), quota sampling is a non-probability method involving individuals who are representative of an entire population. The 134 was evenly distributed amongst the 35 media organs. This gave a score of 3, meaning each media organ was expected to have at least 3 respondents. All media organs with less than 3 practitioners operating within Fako division were not considered. For media organs with more than three practitioners, the remainder of the population was shared amongst them with each organ represented at increasing ratio. For instance, CRTV was sampled on 7 respondents because it had the most media practitioners.

From quotas attributed to the various media organs, media practitioners were further purposely sampled, with the exclusion criteria of "absent during the

process of data collection and not directly involved in news production". This purposive sampling provided inclusiveness for all media practitioners as opposed to random sampling for instance, which, though it includes everyone, but would leave much room to chance (Amin, 2005). The choice of this sampling technique was also because the researchers found out that media practitioners can develop independent programmes which are not necessary an attribution from management. Whereas roles and assignments designation especially for purposes of the news are directly sanctioned by management, no matter the beat.

The data collection processes lasted from June 23rd 2020 to July 10th 2020. Data was analysed with the SPSS software version 21.

7. Findings and Discussions

Demographic analysis

81 respondents' socio-demographic profiles indicate that, 48 (59.3%) respondents were female while 33(40.7%) were male. Also, a majority (77, 95.1%) of respondents were aged between 18 - 40 years and 4 (4.9%) aged between 41 - 60 years. On level of education, 54 (66.7%) respondents were holders of a University First degree; 12 (14.8%) had Master's degrees; 7 (8.6%) were the GCE Advanced Level holders and 5 (6.2%) had HND or Diploma. 3 (3.7%) respondents did not say what their educational qualification was.

Furthermore, the respondents' profiles show 69 (85.2%) were single at the time of this study, 11 (13.6%) were married and 1 (1.2%) respondent living in co-habitation. While 79 (95.2%) respondents were Christians, 1 (1.2%) was Islam and another 1 (1.2%) respondent was in some other religion.

According to findings, most respondents were Reporters/Journalists (52, 62.2%). This was followed by Presenters (11, 13.6%), Editors (7, 8.6%), Desk Editors and Technicians (2, 2.5%), Producer (1, 1.2%), Publisher (1, 1.2%), Designer (1, 1.2%) and Director of Communications (1, 1.2%).

Finally, on duration of service, 40 (49.4%) respondents have been in service for one year or less. 14 (17.3%) have been in service for less than 2 years, but not less than a year; 13 (16%) respondents have been at their positions for 3 to 5 years while 7 (8.6%) have been in service for 6 years and above. 7 (8.6%) respondents did not give a measure of their duration in service.

O'Brien & Suiter (2017) have noted that media narratives (TV, Magazines, and Newspaper) are largely and still implicitly designed to be interpreted from a masculine perspective. This assertion is supported by findings of this study which sought to provide a snapshot of the issues around women's role and assignment in media practice as findings revealed that beat assignment is dependent on gender considerations; with men benefiting most. Beats like Politics (43.2%), Hard Talks (46.9%) and Sports (48.1%) which are considered as hard news have a majority male coverage as opposed to beats like social services (38.3%), Welfare (35.8%), Children (50.6%), Health (32.1%) and Drama (32.1%) which are primarily considered soft news having most of the female coverage.

Tabassum & Nayak (2021) and Becker (1999) see women's problems to be rooted in gender stereotypes and aver that women's problems as part of women and as such could be better handled by women. This is evident with programmes like "Calling the Women", "Women and Development" and "Global Voices for Women" on CRTV which are solely anchored by women. The findings are also consistent with Kosho (2019)'s monitoring of the media in Albania, where though 60% of the women and girls dominate the participation in media on morning broadcasting TV shows, women and girls speak about social, education, culture, lifestyle and health while men and boys speak about politics, economy, international issues and infrastructure.

RQ1: To what extent does the editorial policy of media organs significantly promote gender equality/inequality in role assignments of media practitioners?

H1. The editorial policy of media organs significantly promotes gender inequality.

Table 1 looks at the editorial policies of media organs on beat preference between men and women media practitioners. The masculine perspective as described by Evers (2013) which characterises the media according to respondents in this study includes reasons such as: women are not given to hard work and constant displacements and could be unreliable on deadlines. As might be expected in a society still dominated by men, men control production and programme. Influenced by these stereotypes, society unconsciously reproduces a traditional masculine perspective that perpetuates dominant gender stereotypes such as is seen in the assigning of roles and assignments of women and men in media practice, in the media landscape of Cameroon.

Also, the continued gender misrepresentation in the media has been blamed on the role of media as an institution, which does not only reflect society but reinforces stereotypes more. Commenting on the role of the media as an institution,

Table 1. Editorial Policy on beat preference (gender fit).

Beats	Gender Fit (n = 81) only positive cases reported		
	Female (%)	Male (%)	Both (%)
Politics	3 (3.7)	35 (43.2)	16 (19.8)
Hard Talks	1 (1.2)	38 (46.9)	14 (17.3)
Economic	14 (17.3)	16 (19.8)	23 (28.4)
Social services	31 (38.3)	3 (3.7)	19 (23.5)
Welfare	29 (35.8)	2 (2.5)	22 (27.2
Children	41 (50.6)	1 (1.2)	11 (13.6)
Health	26 (32.1)	3 (3.7)	24 (29.6)
Drama	26 (32.1)	5 (6.2)	21 (25.9)
Sports	6 (7.4)	39 (48.1)	6 (7.4)

Source: Field data, 2020.

Örnebring (2013) and Hanitzsch (2007) refer to the media as the mainstay of media culture, with many links to gender. To them, the media relies on the binary two-gender system upon which most modern societies have built their cultures. Findings from this study have shown that editorial policies of media organs promote gender inequality more than balance. Respondents were affirmative (Yes—43.2%; No—17.3%) that management has a hand in the allocation of presentation and production roles in the media, with Sex (32.1%) being the second highest contributor to gender discriminative tendencies after Skills (37.1%).

Table 2 analyses the factors that contribute to gender discrimination. Saarenmaa & Ruoho (2014) and Ytre-Arne (2011) and Carter & Steiner (2003) elucidate that the media as an institution is not gender-neutral; thus, understanding the institutional history of the media and its role in the formation of gendered citizenship is important in addressing such gender misrepresentations in the media. As seen in the role of the media in gender talks (media's role in enforcing stereotypes), 50.6% respondents agreed the media always associates women with soft news, 35.8% agreed it reinforces traditional stereotypes and 34.5% agreed the media promotes male dominance.

RQ2: To what extent are beats assigned on gender preferences?

H2. Assignments in the media, given to media practitioners are significantly dependent on gender considerations.

Table 3 presents results of the role of the media in gender talks. The data shows that there is a contrast between "what is practiced" and "what is possible expectation" within media practice in Fako division as could be observed in this study. Further editorial insight on gender stereotyping in the media indicates that 75% of media managers (management) revealed women have equal access like men to production and presentation of programme and believe professionalism should be upheld over gender disparities. This contrast with the actual assigning of roles and assignments which are presented in Table 4 in favour of

Table 2. Factors that contribute to gender discrimination

Factors	Extremely Affective Freq (%)	Highly Affective Freq (%)	Affective Freq (%)	Somewhat Affective Freq (%)	Non-Affective Freq (%)	No response Freq (%)
Sex	12 (14.8)	14 (17.3)	13 (16)	5 (6.2)	4 (4.9)	30 (37)
Skills	11 (13.6)	19 (8.6)	13 (19.8)	1 (1.2)	5 (6.2)	29 (35.8)
Culture	4 (4.9)	7 (8.6)	16 (19.8)	7 (8.6)	15 (18.5)	29 (35.8)
Religion	3 (3.7)	9 (11.1)	11 (13.6)	8 (9.9)	18 (22.2)	29 (35.8)
Editorial Policy	11 (13.6)	8 (9.9)	7 (8.6)	8 (9.9)	12 (14.8)	32 (39.5)
Management	6 (7.4)	13 (16)	14 (17.3)	9 (11.1)	6 (7.4)	30 (37)
Level of Education	10 (12.3)	11 (13.6)	13 (160	7 (8.6)	8 (9.9)	29 (35.8)

Source: Field data, 2020.

Table 3. Role of the media in gender talks

Roles	Strongly Agree Freq (%)	Agree Freq (%)	Neutral Freq (%)	Disagree Freq (%)	Strongly disagree Freq (%)	No response Freq (%)
Reinforcing traditional gender stereotype	10 (12.3)	19 (23.5)	24 (29.6)	20 (24.7)	8 (9.9)	0
Always associating women with soft news	10 (12.3)	31 (38.3)	17 (21)	19 (23.5)	3 (3.7)	1 (1.2)
Promoting Male dominance	10 (12.3)	18 (22.2)	24 (29.6)	19 (23.5)	9 (11.1)	1 (1.2)

Source: Field data, 2020.

Table 4. Assignments given to female media practitioners

Assignment	Strongly Agree Freq (%)	Agree Freq (%)	Neutral Freq (%)	Disagree Freq (%)	Strongly disagree Freq (%)	No response Freq (%)
News reporting	37(45.7)	29 (35.8)	8 (9.9)	3 (3.7)	1 (1.2)	3 (3.7)
Programme production	13 (16)	31 (38.1)	25 (30.9)	8 (10)	2 (2.5)	2 (2.5)
Programme presentation	26 (32.1)	40 (49.4)	8 (9.9)	3 (3.7)	1 (1.2)	3 (3.7)
Camera person	6 (7.4)	18 (22.2)	23 (28.4)	19 (23.5)	11 (13.6)	4 (4.90
Editing	9 (11.1)	28 (34.6)	26 (32.1)	12 (14.8)	3 (3.7)	3 (3.7)
Video Coverage	3 (3.7)	21 (25.9)	21 (25.9)	16 (19.8)	9 (11.1)	11 (13.6)

Source: Field data, 2020.

men as most female media practitioners are assigned as presenters (81.5%) and in production (54.3%) over the other assignments like camera person (29.6%) editing (45.7%) and Video coverage (26.6%).

This line of thought from respondents, as seen on Table 4 above, continues as findings indicate statistical significance on the suitability of all roles t (80) = −8.885, P = .000) and assignments t (80) = −11.90, P = .000) for female media practitioners. This could be seen from the analysis on Table 5.

These imply that though women might not be benefiting fully from these roles (producer, presenter, editor, reporter, camera) and assignments (news reporting, programme production, camera person, editing, video coverage), according to respondents, they are suitable for women, not just men.

To these, respondents advanced reasons such as: the need to consider professionalism over gender as women also have the necessary training (53.1%) and women are better managers and coordinators and would perform better than men when committed (24.7%) for considerations on how suitable the roles and assignments are for women respectively.

Table 5. Extent of suitability of media assignment (s) for female media practitioners.

Degree of agree/disagreement	Frequency	Percent	One-Sample Statistics	One-Sample Test
Strongly disagree	3	3.7	N = 81	df = 80
Disagree	3	3.7	Mean = 3.70	t = −11.90
Neutral	17	21.0	SD = 0.98	Sig. (2-tailed) = .000
Agree	45	55.6		MD = -1.29
Strongly Agree	12	14.8		CI = 95%
No response	1	1.2	Test Value = 5	Lower =−1.51
Total	81	100		Upper = -1.07

Source: Field data, 2020.

Table 6. Reasons why the roles are suitable for women.

Reasons	Frequency	Percent
Women are more appealing than men (physically, voice, etc)	6	7.4
Professionalism over gender (Women have the necessary training)	43	53.1
Women are better managers, organisers, coordinators	20	24.7
It is so much hard work for women, they might not deliver	4	4.9
Women are unskilled and most unreliable with deadlines	2	2.5
Women don't need constant displacement	1	1.2
No response	5	6.2
Total	81	100

Source: Field data, 2020.

Furthermore, the media continues, on Table 6, to perpetuate traditional gender stereotypes as it reflects dominant social values. In reflecting them, it also reinforces them by presenting them as "natural" (as 4 respondents consider men as the stronger sex and 3 other respondents see it as the "status quo"). To ascertain "*To what extent are gender roles in the media influenced by traditional gender stereotypes?*" the researchers found confirmatory evidence that traditional gender stereotype have a significant influence on roles attribution in the media. The results from a one-sample t-test show the mean score (M = 18.62, SD = 4.08) to be lower than the test mean score of 22.5, a statistically significant mean difference of 6.12, 95% CI [5.22 to 17.03], t (80) = 13.49, P = .000. This is consistent with major descriptive findings showing more agreement (63.5%) on traditional gender stereotypes' influence on roles attribution in the media.

The manifestation of this could be seen as 53.1% respondents agreed that the media continues to thrive in the reflected Childbearing and Cookery (50.6%) roles of the woman in society in the media. These inform on the social and economic interest behind the objectification and eroticization of females by the media. The

eroticization of women is understood, as women are seen as appealing and attractive to pull audiences; a quality that managers and editors explore (7.4%; 3.7%).

RQ3: *To what extent are gender roles in the media influenced by traditional gender stereotypes?*

H3. *Traditional gender stereotypes have a significant influence on roles attribution in the media.*

Table 7 looks at the influence of traditional gender stereotypes on roles and assignments of women in the media. In strengthening the argument above, Kijem (1998) observed that in Cameroon many women's programme on media for over four decades after the Fourth United Nations Conference on women in Beijin in 1995, still concentrate on traditional images of women in welfare, social services and domestic roles (48%) while 11% of the time they are seen as educators. Kijem's findings are similar to those of this study.

Though a look at the discriminative practices that management perceived as prevalent in media organs suggest an overall preference for men over women, these reflections of stereotypes, it could be argued, are not just up shoots from society. This is because when asked the possible ways to bring about gender balance in the media, though a majority (58%) of respondents say it is necessary, two extreme respondents note that women are the cause of such imbalance, as they are not assertive and proactive to responsibilities. By and large, a way forward to the realisation of gender balance in the media is possible through the prioritisation of professionalism over gender (24.7%) and equal representation (diversity, balance in employment, 23.5%).

The effects of discriminative practices and gender inequality in the assigning of roles and assignments in the media was found to have a negative effect on media output (t (80) = −8.61, P = .000). Redressing this effect, according to respondents require interventions from management to foster gender balance. To this effect, 14.8% respondents say upholding professionalism is most important, as it brings in female practitioners into previously male dominated roles (13.6%). As Belalalaieva (2019) posits, to harness the full potential of the media landscape,

Table 7. Influence of traditional gender stereotypes on roles and assignments of women in the media.

Gender Stereotypes	Strongly Agree Freq (%)	Agree Freq (%)	Neutral Freq (%)	Disagree Freq (%)	Strongly disagree Freq (%)	No response Freq (%)
Cookery	21(25.9)	41 (50.6)	10 (12.3)	6 (7.4)	3 (3.7)	0
House keeping	20 (24.7)	30 (37)	23 (28.4)	4 (4.9)	3 (3.7)	1 (1.2)
Nurturing (caregivers)	17 (21)	28 (34.6)	22 (27.2)	8 (9.9)	4 (4.9)	2(2.5)
Child bearing	43 (53.1)	20 (24.7)	12 (14.8)	2 (2.5)	4 (4.9)	0
Health	17 (21)	20 (24.7)	29 (35.8)	8 (9.9)	5 (6.2)	2 (2.5)

Source: Field data, 2020.

need exists for gender balance and especially for women to increasingly take to the front. This would further help to close the gender gap that exists in gender programme and management. More strides to addressing this gap can be made through the incorporation of social media by women in their media practice. Chahbane & Alaoui (2023) found that women's increasing use of social media (Facebook) creates a safer space, and much democratised and less stereotypical environment to thrive.

8. Conclusion

Respondents' sex did not explain above an average of 50% how media roles and assignments are suitable for women as did level of education on discriminative practices. Thus, it cannot be said that because someone is more educated, they would not discriminate and vice versa.

Examining different roles and assignments in the media and how gender considerations influence their distribution to media practitioners suggest majority of female media practitioners are assigned more to soft news while most men continue with the hardlines.

The effect of media organ's editorial policy and management's attitude towards role distribution and the implications on the roles and assignments that men and women handle in the media continue to have significant influence on role and assignment distribution in the media. Equally, traditional gender stereotypes were found to significantly influence roles attribution in the media.

Theoretically, the media, as an institution does not just reflect society. It reinforces gender stereotypes in the media, setting diverse agendas and frames. Conversely, the liberal feminists postulating equal relations can be realised through opportunities for affirmative action programmes, without necessarily questioning the power dimension in society. Focusing on sex stereotypes is evident as women, like men are challenged to be more assertive at their jobs. This is especially as radical feminists see women as the most oppressed gender. Within the Socialist feminist perspective, major assumptions of socio-economic conditions, especially comparative views of salary packages for men and women in the media were not measured in this study. Thus, core investigations cannot be made on the theory beyond their maintenance of structural change. In all, the operational model proposed for this study which suggests that feminist perspectives are at variance on roles and assignments of media practitioners in the media, has proven to be valid. The outcome of the model suggests that gender talks in the media would be most effective when the notion of equity and not equality is given prominence. Despite suggestions from respondents on gender bias, the media is caught between presenting equity by not distorting cultural norms and respecting the canons of media practice.

9. Recommendations

1) The media in Fako division and by extension Cameroon should engage

more practical steps to mainstream gender in media practice at all levels. Though Sigmund Freud's 1988 Psychoanalytic theory (Freud, 1991) proposes the existence of inherent differences between women and men, it is not a stage to explore the negatives of the difference; rather a challenge to explore the benefits of diversity. As suggested by the operational model for this study, measures should be taken to promote equity over equality.

2) Media practitioners should glide the pages of this research work to better understand the manifestations of gender discriminative practices within the media, which often go unnoticed.

3) Increase participation and access of women to expression and decision making in and through the media and new technologies of communication, and to have equal roles and assignments in media practice.

4) Development of independent code of ethics that specialise in addressing gender issues within the media. There are already media codes of ethics in existence in the Cameroon media landscape, but they need to be modified to address contemporary gender needs, inequalities and biases.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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