

How Journalists and Civil Society View Gender Portrayal in Editorial Cartoons in Kenya's *Daily Nation* and *Standard* Newspapers

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Abstract: Diverse views by scholars, policy makers as well as readers of newspapers and magazines, point to one critical issue that the media have of late become conduits for gender stereotyping not only in Kenya but the world over. This fact has been affirmed by public uproar against specific media houses in recent years after publishing cartoons that appeared offensive to sections of society. In some cases, such protests and reactions were very violent and claimed lives besides causing the destruction of property. Hinged on the Agenda setting theory, this paper refers to Kenya's *Daily Nation* and *Standard* newspapers cartoon column in seeking to highlight what journalists and civil society consider to be the position of gender portrayed in editorial cartoons and whether by extension these cartoons subtly or unconsciously promote gender bias and stereotypical overtones. The qualitative case study was guided by the interpretivist philosophical paradigm. Besides the secondary data drawn from the two dailies, semi-structured interviews that targeted cartoonists, human rights, and gender activists from six purposely selected organizations were applied and analysed. The study finds bias and increased stereotypical overtones occasioned by a lack of resolve by the two media houses to adequately embrace gender sensitivity focus in the manner editorial cartoonists portray both men and women in the news. To cure the gender portrayal bias in the selected cartoons, there is a need for specific in-housed editorial guidelines that will guide its creators.

Keywords: Activists, Cartoonist, Gender, Media, Stereotypical overtones.

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Introduction

The need to establish different forms of imagery as reflected in print media presentations is critical in understanding the hidden perceptions that are accorded to each gender appearing in editorial cartoons. Such interrogation is valid on the principle of the fact that imagery, substitution, or illustrational capacities are weighty matters in regard to cartoons and what they mean to the readers is too critical to ignore at any given time. Indeed, cartoons like news stories and the meaning they assign to each gender either serves to promote integration or escalate gender disparity in the affected society. In other words, it is the understanding or interrogation of such assigned imagery or illustrational capacities that further create the perceptions of the readers about each gender that has been highlighted. These capacities that lead to perceptions are critical in telling what the overall society think of a particular gender.

Cartoons do not just appear serious or even stern, rather they are laced with laughter-some form of amusement that make it exciting to look for what has been ridiculed in the newspaper. This explains why Radcliffe (2004) argues that the first rule of a cartoon is to be funny because if one doesn't laugh, then it hasn't worked. With or without laughter, fair and balanced portrayal of either gender in cartoons effectively informs, educates and entertains society. When there is fair and balanced gender portrayal, it becomes easier for the nation to move together in a united front against any whirls such as hunger, floods, conflicts and even underdevelopment.

Despite having one of the most progressive Constitution which promotes equality and women's empowerment, gender inequality remains a key concern across all the sectors in Kenya. The patriarchal social order supported by statutory, religious, and customary laws and practices; and the administrative and procedural mechanisms for accessing rights continue to inhibit realization of gender equality and women's empowerment. Progressive provisions in law have not delivered gender equality in practice raising the need to develop a policy that addresses various forms of gender discrimination and inequality (NPGAD, 2012). It is against this background that this paper sought to examine how journalists and civil society view gender portrayal in editorial cartoons published by the top two dailies in Kenya, that is, the *Daily Nation* and *Standard* newspapers, as an effort to determine to what extent equal or unequal representation by both men and women is demonstrated in the two dailies.

Agenda Setting Theory

The agenda setting theory as coined by McCombs and Shaw (1972) is critical in describing how the media puts premium on certain issues that ultimately affect the thinking and sometimes action by some of the audience. McQuail (2000:455) called it "the power to structure issues," just like politicians, from their individual and party standpoints go out of their way to convince voters about what the most important things or issues are. This attempt is what finally makes it possible for some politicians to win and others to lose elections.

Accordingly, there is a link between important issues raised by the media and the importance attached to the same issues by the general public and politicians. Thus, in the agenda setting environment there is connection between the priority of the media, that of the public and the priority of the policy makers. However, even more importantly, is the media that attaches priority to issues by highlighting them for the public to listen, read and watch. As the media constantly attach importance to the same, the policy makers find it necessary to pick them up, escalate them for relevant actions. Although the public may not necessarily share same values about news items as highlighted by the media, it nevertheless gets influenced by the same in the final end. Therefore, in agenda setting framework, which is a process by which awareness and attribution of significance is evident, the prime responsibility of the media is to make it possible for the public to begin debating on the issues that have been identified as important.

Dearing and Rogers (1996:15) in McQuail (2000: 456) note that agenda setting is connected to other media effects theories such as bandwagon, spiral of silence, diffusion of news and media gate keeping responsibilities. They further argue that different media tend to agree about the relative salience that seems to be priority. The media agenda do not closely match real world indicators; thus, in the agenda setting arena, the media attaches importance to certain issues that seem to make sense to real

world of the audience. Therefore, as the media does this, there is also a section of the public who would only be convinced to take certain action based on what their friends and contemporaries have decided to do, hence the bandwagon framework that makes people do only what others are doing. In agenda setting, public debate is represented by a set of salient issues. This agenda originates from public opinion and the political class. Ultimately the media may rarely cause change independently, but they in most cases provide channels, the means, and the platform for playing out of events in which many actors and interests are actively involved in competition with each other.

McQuail (2000) argues that most researchers assume that news either reflects or distorts reality which is made up of facts and events that exist independently of how news workers think of them and treat them in the news production process. To the contrary, although to some extent news is manufactured by reporters and editors based on the way they treat them, it is almost impossible to think of fiction in news. In other words, even when treatment may be exaggerated in favor of certain truths, it is unlikely that facts and events can be created to suit news. In other words, it is upon the reporter and editor to ensure that news that reach the audience is as authentic as possible in order to remain alive with the realities of fairness and objectivity, which sometimes are so elusive to some media practitioners and by extension their organizations.

In the context of gender perception by journalists and the civil society, the framing of key characters highlighted in the editorial pages of the two newspapers carries a lot of weight and makes indelible sense to the reader. That such framing is what makes it easy for the readers to have a positive or negative perception of the character in question. Therefore, agenda setting theory gives this research a theoretical strength in the sense that it does confirm that what is on the editorial pages of the newspapers is indeed urgent and important to the readers and that is why it is highlighted. Once it is highlighted, it is bound to impact either negatively or positively to the readers. Although not specifically focused on Africa, GMMP findings provide us with the most reliable disaggregated data on how gender is represented in African news. The 2010 GMMP report, for example, contains data on 26 African countries and like other regions of the world provides a separate report on Africa. The GMMP is coordinated not in an academic institution, but by the World Association of Christian Communicators (WACC), a global network of communicators promoting communication for social change. GMMP research is led by Margaret Gallagher, one of the foremost contemporary researchers on gender and media, with the help of a worldwide team of volunteer researchers drawn from both academia and civil society. Billed as the “world’s longest-running and most extensive research on gender in the news media”, the first GMMP report came out in 1995, and served to underscore the call for action made during the Beijing conference (GMMP, 2010). There have been three other reports since then – in 2000, 2005 and 2010.

There are other regional research initiatives on media content being undertaken by civil society organizations. The Eastern Africa Journalists Association (EAJA), in collaboration with the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) Africa office, has published a study titled “Enhancing Gender in the Media in East Africa,” in 2008, involving 10 Eastern Africa countries. Another innovative example of a research initiative located outside academia is the Gender Research in Africa into ICTs for Empowerment (GRACE) project. Initiated in 2005, GRACE is an IDRC (International Development Research Centre) research program for African researchers interested in information and communication technologies (ICTs) and women’s empowerment in 12 African countries. The project encourages researchers to adopt a critical action research approach using qualitative research techniques. GRACE research articles are accessible through the book, *African Women and ICTs Investigating Technology, Gender, and Empowerment* (Buskens & Webb, 2009). The articles interrogate the various ways in which women in Africa use information and communication technologies (ICTs) to empower themselves, the external, structural barriers as well as the internal factors which prevent or enable them to use ICTs to their advantage, and the strategies they employ to overcome these impediments.

According to the UN Report (2015), women make up to more than 50 percent of the world population. However, a paltry 24 per cent end up being heard, seen or read about in the mainstream media. Interestingly, the same trend seems repeating itself in the digital media particularly the internet. As a result of this imbalance, it was found that there is deliberate efforts that seem to frustrate female gender from effectively being part and parcel of the media today. The report

observes that the way the female gender is depicted in the media has a profound impact on the societal attitudes as well as reinforcing traditional gender roles. Given this type of environment, it becomes important to narrow down to the interface of the gender and editorial cartoons.

Maina and Mberia (2014) observed that women in politics were drawn frightened, weak, smaller and fearful indicating that they were living under attack of the male gender in perceived male dominated society. Gakahu and Mukhongo (2007), argued in their study that the inside pages of newspapers are filled with stereotype roles of domesticity, beauty, and fantasy regarding women present in media today. This study goes beyond telling whether there is a dominant gender portrayed in editorial cartoons than the other. Indeed, both the United Nations Report on Gender and the Media Council of Kenya reports of the 2015 firmly point out a major discrepancy in gender representation within the media in general. Therefore, the reports provide the foundation for further investigation into the matter at such time. This explains why in its conclusion, the Media Council report emphasizes that "In a society where gender equality is greater with regard to both opportunities and benefits, the result is a better quality of life" Which means that gender equality is a foundation for making life better in the society. This comes by way of both genders enjoying equal treatment which ultimately enhances production. In fact, former Mozambique President Joachim Chisano in his wisdom was categorical as to the importance of women and girls as the greatest untapped resources that Africa has ever had.

Materials and Methods

The aim of this study was to examine the how journalists and the civil society view gender portrayal by editorial cartoons of two selected newspapers; *Daily Nation* and the *Standard* newspaper that are published in Kenya. This study was informed by the relativist philosophical leaning which always emphasize that there is no one single truth that exist for a particular problem. The study adopted the relativist-interpretivist paradigm which is embedded in qualitative analysis arising from the interviews and secondary data which were applied in this study. Additionally, the interpretive paradigm is associated more with methodological approaches that provide an opportunity for the voice, concerns, and practices of research participants to be heard (Cole, 2006). The study takes a qualitative approach which believes that studying social systems and problems cannot be sufficient without giving voices to those being studied (Ong'ondo and Juan, 2011). This forms the strategic ingredient in making objective view by the civil society about gender portrayal by editorial cartoons in print media. The voices of the cartoonists, the representatives of the gender focused institutions and the finer details of the editorial cartoons as data sample vividly show how characters are framed and presented to the readers qualifying it for qualitative interpretation. The qualitative approach depicted flexibility in the research undertaking for effective exploration of gender portrayal sensitivity to contextual factors; ability to study symbolic dimensions and social meaning; increased opportunities to develop empirically supported new ideas and theories as well as for in-depth and longitudinal explorations of leadership phenomena; and for more relevance and interest for practitioners (Alvesson, 1996).

The study used a case study design that enabled opinions of civil society and journalists about two cases. Thus, the *Daily Nation* and the *Standard* newspaper in which selected cartoons formed the basis for analysis, interpretation and opinionated responses from the civil society.

Besides the secondary data drawn from the two dailies for analysis, this study benefited from the information that was sourced from the key informant interviews of the selected individuals working in gender focused institutions. Further, key informant interviews were also conducted with the cartoonists, who develop and finally produce the cartoons for the editorial pages of the two daily newspapers. This aimed at capturing some of the values and beliefs that inform cartooning work. Additional key informant interviews were done for individuals working for the Federation of Women Lawyers in Kenya (FIDA), Gender and Equality Commission, Media Council of Kenya, and the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights. Selection of these organisations was based on the fact that they have consistently and persistently championed gender, human rights and equal rights for many years. Furthermore, they have also documented many issues around girl child and rights of the marginalised in Kenya.

The study sample was drawn from the total population to represent the large population (Bryman, 2012). The paper therefore utilized purposive sampling technique, which according to Silverman (2008) calls for critical thinking about the parameters of the population under study. A sample size of 252 cartoons were selected out of the population of 2184, representing 11.5%, were analysed during the study period.

Key informant interviews with the representatives from gender focused institutions was used to demonstrate the likely varied views and concern of the various readers over the way gender was portrayed in editorial cartoons in the two dailies. Thus, institutions concerned with gender equity were identified and at least one official from each organisation interviewed to complement the data that was adduced from the sampled cartoons.

Results and Discussion

The data analysis was done based on themes that included corruption, bribery, leadership and integrity, governance, sports, and land grabbing. Others were examination cheating which was also linked to electoral cheating, election malpractice, science and innovations and individual achievement in life. On the other hand, the key informant interviews were analyzed by coding into various themes that defined the different views held by journalists and members of the civil society. The study was grounded on the principle of trustworthiness with key focus on ensuring that all the data in terms of information was derived from the cartoons through the suggested methodology besides ensuring that originality is the foundation of the whole study. The author critically considered each cartoon to ascertain the contents therein based on the research question,

Most of the cartoons capture the male gender positively because most of the cartoonists are men and therefore this bias is always reflected not only in cartoons but also in news. This scenario is likely to persist for some time if women do not join the media and more so the cartoon world. If this happens, the perspective and perception will obviously change for better. Federation of Women Lawyers has not in the past engaged the media over this glaring concern, but time is ripe for this to happen. Nevertheless, the Federation has noted that the media is consistently biased against the female gender particularly as they are negatively portrayed in certain contexts such as prostitution and beauty. Federation of Women Lawyers is also in agreement that women are always the face of the society. That is the reason why when the media puts emphasis on issues such as hunger/famine or even war, the focus is put on a woman and a child strapped on her back to emphasize how serious the issue is. This means that in certain issues, the portrayal of the female gender cannot change even if there were female cartoonists. FIDA also argues that involving women in cartooning will make caricaturing more exciting and perhaps inclusive in terms of perception and perspectives. It will also be more exciting if the male gender involved in cartooning will become more objective in capturing gender in various thematic areas. This trend is bound to change especially if deliberate efforts are done to highlight the female gender in newspapers. The Federation of Women Lawyers further argues that the female gender is an important part of the society and must be captured in the news in a manner that is objective and highly inclusive. Such measure according to FIDA will do away with cases of discriminate portrayal of gender in cartoons and by extension to the newspapers.

The bias against the female gender or preference for the male gender in the news arena is attributed to the nature of socialization existing in institutions. This form of socialization unfairly places the female gender on the periphery while promoting the male gender. This position according to the National Gender and Equality Commission has consequently made the cartoonists to portray the female gender as submissive, less aggressive, passive and subordinate to the active and positively portrayed male gender. One of the respondents for this study mentioned that: "You will not expect the journalists or even cartoonists who are mostly of male gender to think any different from what the patriarchal society expects of them". Women are servants and therefore when they caricature them, they are doing lesser positions. The framing nature of women in the media makes them passive and lower in the society compared to their male gender. Thus, there is great need to have gender responsiveness as the basis for socializing the society with the objective to consider men and women on equal basis. That is why Article 27 (3) of the Constitution of Kenya, both women and men have the right to equal opportunities in political, economic, cultural, and social spheres. But this is only

attained upon the parliament approving key legislative measures to ensure participation of both gender in the sourcing of news.

According to the two cartoonists (from the *Daily Nation* and *The Standard*) their best bet is focusing on matters politics where men play a dominant role in the negative manner. They said that whenever they came across a man involved in politics it was easier to associate them with vices such as greed, corruption, political violence, land grabbing to create attention with the readers. The more the male gender was involved in the making of news at the national and local levels, the more it was captured all for the wrong reasons.

The female gender on the other hand was portrayed as weak, helpless, vulnerable, most afflicted, and poor. In some cartoons though, the female gender was reduced to sexual objects and agents of beauty. In some critical cartoons, the female gender was considered the voice of reason and one that could be trusted in areas such as leadership and integrity. However, even in these areas, the female gender is lowly portrayed while the male gender features in these areas but in the negative form. In other words, there was less female gender that was associated with cases of poor governance and lack of integrity compared to the male gender. The *Hustler's Jet cartoon* (see annex 1) of 2013 served as the epitome of the sexual abuse to the female gender in the recent times. This cartoon attracted the highest number of reactions from the social media after it was published in May 2013.

Generally, the female gender receives lesser attention in cartoons. This is attributed to the fact that in most cases the female gender played a lesser role in the generation of news. That the dominance or otherwise begins from the news making level. It was revealed that the more the male gender was involved in the news, the more it was reflected in the cartoons. After all, cartooning is based on the amount of news or information generated from the current news or developing story appearing in the media. There was outright exaggeration of facts and the norms in the society as was noted in the infamous Village Market incident in which the former Deputy Chief Justice Nancy Baraza was involved in a security feud. She was later forced out of office. The cartoonist drew a naked man being frisked by a female security person. The socialization in the society will demand that the male frisk the male and the female frisk the women. The selected cartoons revealed major bias towards the male gender as the main news maker for most of the cartoons that were sampled.

Conclusion

This study underscores the importance of cartoons in general and editorial cartoon for amplifying issues for national conversation on matters critical, gender inclusive. Both journalist and the civil society perceive that what is published must be critical enough and must be carefully packaged to promote gender parity. For example, cases of corruption, land grabbing, election cheating, insecurity and poor leadership were associated with the male gender. Although in very few cartoons, the female gender was highlighted as an epitome of good governance and leadership, in many of the cartoons, women were portrayed as weak, submissive and agents of beauty.

Gender sensitivity and cartooning should be considered as a pertinent issue in print media representation. According to the UNESCO report of 2012, key issues of gender sensitivity reporting including cartooning is selection of sources and stories in a manner that targets both gender, fair portrayal of women and men through elimination of stereotypes which reinforces negative perception to the readers. There is need to utilize gender friendly and fair language that gives equal attention to both men and women, thus eliminating superiority and inferiority aspects of life. More fundamentally, gender sensitivity reporting is an important ingredient of inclusive, effective and progressive journalism in the world today. The Kenyan media need to inculcate this principle of ensuring both men and women are given equal opportunities as source of news. Furthermore, deliberate efforts to ensure female journalists also join in the bandwagon of cartooning is an important step to remove bias and stereotypical overtones in news and cartoons in particular.

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