

Chapter 50

Gendered Media and Political Communication in Africa: The Kenyan Experience

Juliet Wambui Macharia
Moi University, Kenya

ABSTRACT

The African media landscape has grown tremendously in the last 20 years and currently, communication channels are more accessible to various groups, even those previously marginalised in the society. Access to communication channels is important as the media sets the agenda and guides everyday discourses and interactions. However, of concern to this paper is the analysis of the African media landscape that is highly gendered; whereby media owners and practitioners are predominantly male. As a result, the message design and communication favours male over female political candidates because a lot of propaganda and persuasion is often used to entice the electorate. The chapter discusses how political images seen on television are often centered on the male dominant figure in politics, while the women are often discussed from the periphery. Due to a mainly male dominated political scene, women shy away from participating and those who chose to get involved, often have to fight against societal stereotypes enabled by the media which inovertly propagates the notion that competitive politics is a manly affair. In many African countries therefore female stereotyping is prevalent in the media during electioneering period. An analysis of news coverage shows that among the news stories reported by male journalists on television, 76 per cent were often men subjects while only 29 percent of stories reported by female journalists were about women in politics. Even when women featured in the stories in the centre pages and at the end of news bulletins, they were about them as victims of political violence during campaigns rather than males/females participating in campaigns as future leaders and decision makers.

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INTRODUCTION

Kenya has been independent for the last 52 years and with independence came political and media growth, however the growth and challenges of the media have varied during different political regimes. The country has had several elections, since independence, notable that most of the political candidates have been male, with the number of female candidates being very low. The concern is that in emerging democracies, the representation of women in politics has been dismal. However, this is not the case in western democracies such as Britain, Netherlands and Canada where females' representation is high (African Women and Child Feature Services, 2014). While Kenyan statistics might not be encouraging, countries such as Rwanda and Uganda have done better than Kenya.

Communication of political messages requires an environment where both males and females have access to the channels that enable their supporters to receive their messages. Television in collaboration with the newspapers, mobile phones, social media and radio cover political campaigns. They significantly become very influential in bringing campaign messages including party choice of candidates, their promises to the electorate, their financiers and their reliability is what they bring to the campaign table. The media coverage of these campaigns most of the times involves endless political rallies where political information is disseminated to the voters to attract their support.

In an environment where the media are dominated by males in ownership and media practice (Obonyo and Nyamboga, 2011), election reporting offers the best opportunity to assess whether the voices of women and men are captured in the news and whether journalists are able to highlight gender issues during elections. Muteshi (2006) argues that promoting women's political power is productive because it enables them access to power and participation in decision making in the country.

Kenya is a country where the population of women is 51% against that of men which is 49%. However, the participation of women in the electoral process does not reflect this demographic reality. It is surprising that such a huge constituency is unable to vote for their own. Some of the variables that hinder their effective participation in politics are gender, culture, funds and lack of access to communication channels that can disseminate their political messages to the intended publics. The gender power relations are demonstrated during political campaigns where women's issues are trivialized while those of men are seen as important (East African Journalists Association, 2008). The media play the agenda setting role among other roles of influencing the outcomes of elections through political discourse. This chapter examines the role the media played in gender representation during political campaigns to encourage the Kenyans to concentrate on activities and messages that would make the to voters to consider certain candidates or to influence others from participation during the 2013 election. It can be argued that the media failed to give the females equal opportunities to communicate their campaign messages to the electorate. Specifically the chapter covers the following: The Gendered African media landscape; Gender And Access To Political Leadership In Africa; The Kenyan Media Scene and Political Communication; Communication process and Political Discourse; Portrayal of Political Candidates in the Mass Media ;The Agenda Setting Role of the Media and The Impact of the media on Kenya's 2013 election Results.

THE GENDERED AFRICAN MEDIA LANDSCAPE

The African continent with her 55 states is a highly patriarchal society. Her combined population consists of more women than men. However when one looks at the African media landscape, one is faced with a

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