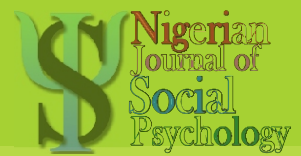


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AUDIENCE PERCEPTION OF FEMALE JOURNALISTS IN EBONYI STATE: A STUDY OF ABAKALIKI URBAN

Nweze Samuel

Department of Mass Communication, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State

Ewa-Ibe Blessing

Department of Mass Communication, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State

Chinwe Patience Anyachonkeya

Department of Languages, Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic, Unwana, Afikpo, Ebonyi State

Akpama Alice Mbang

Department of Mass Communication, Cross River Institute of Technology and Management (CR-ITM) Ugep.

Kaanapera Linda Nancy

Department of Mass Communication, Cross River Institute of Technology and Management (CR-ITM), Ugep.

Ogbeche Louisa Owochie

Department of Mass Communication, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State

Mba Precious Idongesit

Department of Mass Communication, Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Ikot Osurua, Ikot Ekpene, Akwa Ibom State.

Abstract

This study examined Audience perception of female journalists in Ebonyi State: A study of Abakaliki. The feminist muted theory was used as the theoretical framework, with a projected population of 170,974. The Taro Yameni formula was used to derive a sample size of 399. The non-proportionate quota sampling and purposive sampling techniques were used. Findings revealed that 52% of the respondents have negative perception of women in journalism; further findings showed that 53% strongly agreed that the discrimination against female journalists to a very large extent affects their contributions to the media. It was recommended that media houses should portray women in good light to change the negative perceptions of the public about female journalists. Female journalists should belong to a functional professional body that will fight their interest.

Keywords: Journalism, Female Journalist, Gender, Perception, Abakaliki

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Global agitations on the participation of women in governance, politics, journalism have continued to be on the rise. Not until after the Nigerian independence, journalism has been the preserve of men who highly dominated the profession while women were restricted; by custom, norms and religion to other professions and faced significant discrimination within the profession until about nineteenth century when women began to agitate for a right to work as professional journalists (Christopher, 2021).

Christopher (2021) states that the prescription of various roles for men and women by social norms which sometimes present claims of primary and secondary roles might have contributed to the discriminations. Since most societies see men as bread winners and providers for the family,

they are assigned primary roles, while women are saddled with secondary roles giving birth to babies and taking care of the house. These roles determined to a large extent the type of job men and women did and to an extent, still do in the society.

The case of gender seems to promise a good test of the proposition that personal characteristics will influence content, since it has been a claim of a part of the women's liberation movement that the media have been in various ways on the "other side" in numerous campaigns throughout the gender war. There is an empirical correlation between the relatively low numbers and low occupational status of women in journalism (Gallagher, 2019). Zoonen (2018) has also argued that a more fundamental approach to the development of gender is required. She points out to basic inconsistencies in the assumption that having more women in journalism would change the news (for the better). For one thing, on close inspection, the available evidence does not give good empirical support for this assumption.

There have been significant increases in female participation in journalism without noticeable changes in the nature news reports. From the 1950s when only a couple of women ventured into and became active in Nigerian journalism, they were used more as women page editors till the 1960s. The practice changed in later years after they (women) began to assume different and tougher roles as features editors and columnists. By the 1980s, there was an unprecedented surge in the employment of women as journalists- reporters, sub-editors, women page editors, etc. (Franklin, 2021). Thus, from the 1950s and 1960s, women launched an invasion into the areas of print and broadcast journalism once considered as men's preserves. The invasion reached a climax in the 1980s. They later in 1987 launched associations like National Association of Women Journalists (NAWOJ) and Women in the Media (WIM) which in conjunction with the National Council of Women Society (NCWS) have fought steadfastly to inculcate a public re-examination of the stereotyping of women in the media. Therefore, this study sought to examine Audience perception of female journalism in Ebonyi state: a study of Abakaliki.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Statistics have it that 63.7% journalists are male, while 36.3% are female (Franks, 2022). This, therefore, gives a perceived notion that the journalism profession is predominated by the male folk and fondly called "masculine profession." Also, according to Rajeev, Midhila & Karthika (2019), in the field of journalism male domination is still much alive. They went further to argue that in the technical part of media, men are more active than women; thus, men are likely to produce better results than their female counterparts; hence, the reason they are rarely given hard news beats to cover. Therefore, could it be that this long-lasting disparity between the genders is the likely explanation for the seemingly negative public perception of girls within the field of journalism. This study tends to find out the public's view of women practicing journalism. The usage of new media instruments in today's universe of correspondence, particularly news coverage among writers can't be over-looked. Since the landing of new media engineering, for example, the advanced mobile phone, it has surely changed the way columnists work furthermore how stories are created and spread. Online networking have had positive effects. However, there are likewise worries about their effect on profit and antagonistic impact it could have on writers working examples. New media have made a reliance among those working in the media and a lot of people are not able to manage without them.

New media have ended up journalistic vocabulary and it appears sourcing data has overwhelmed self-advancement as an essential social action. Columnists are becoming refined in their utilization of social networking, and are for example, utilizing an extraordinary mixed bag of devices to source news. A few writers are less positive about a portion of the ways online networking influences their journalistic exercises, their engagement with their group of onlookers, their profit and the nature of their work. In light of these differentiating perspectives, the issue this exploration tries to answer is how successful the utilization of new media engineering device among reporter in Ebonyi State.

1.3 Objective of the Study

The general objective of this study is to examine Audience perception of female journalists in Ebonyi state: a study of Abakaliki. The specific objectives are:

1. To find out the views of the public concerning female practicing journalism.
2. To determine the extent to which the discrimination against women in journalism affects their contributions to the media.
3. Ascertain the challenges facing women journalists as a result offender disparities.

1.4 Research Questions

1. To what extent does the view of the public concern female practicing journalists?
2. To what extent does discrimination against women in journalism affects their contributions to the media?
3. What are the challenges facing women journalists as a result of gender disparities?

1.5 Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses guide this study

1. H_0 : Public are not concerning female practicing journalists.
 H_1 : Public are concern with female practicing journalists.
2. H_0 : There is no discrimination against women in journalists that affects their contributions to the media.
 H_1 : There is discrimination against women in journalists that affects their contributions to the media.
3. H_{0r} : There are no challenges facing women journalists as a result of gender disparities.
 H_{0r} : There are challenges facing women journalists as a result of gender disparities.

1.6 Significant of the Study

This study will be unlimited in it essentiality to journalists, media associations, news organizations, editors, instructors and undergraduates in the field of news-casting and mass correspondence and also different scientists who will need to leave on same study as this. The study will help columnists to source valuable data, utilizing social networking, systems administration apparatuses and in addition furnish them with an aide on the most proficient method to compose online stories. It will likewise help writer to collaborate with their gathering of people and recognize their data needs. The study will likewise help columnists who have infrequently grasped new media to do so as to build their profit.

1.7 Scope of the Study

Audience perception of female journalists in Ebonyi state: a study of Abakaliki

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Conceptual Review

Journalism practice at the first stage remained the only domain of men. People like Ernest Ikoli, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Eronsile Anthony Enahoro, Chief Akintola, Lateef Kayode Jakande, Peter Enahoro, Babatunde Jose, Abiodun Aloba, Alade Odunewu, Duro Onabule, Smart Ebbe, Horatio Agedah were at the centre stage of journalism then. For several decades, women were nowhere to be found within the practice of journalism in Nigeria. The increase in global agitation for gender equality and empowerment in most of the sectors led to the changes in gender role in journalism practice as more women-oriented stories started appearing in Nigerian newspapers of the early 50s.

The journey for women in journalism profession in Nigeria began thus: the first breakthrough for women during this period of male-dominated profession was in feature writing with the establishment of the *Nigerian Daily Times*, when lively feature articles began to come with boxed title-heads (Ikem, 2022). In the 50s when women started venturing into journalism practice, they were restricted mainly to women and domestic issues and sometimes, they wrote under pseudonym to cover their identities mainly due to the prevailing social and cultural milieu of that period. Mrs. Doyin Abiola (1986), a pace setter in women journalism of her era sees the era as an era when the women's page is exclusively reserved for ladies regardless their educational background and qualification. They believed that the entry point for a woman journalist was via the women page (Nicholson, 2019).

Despite the shaky and limited opportunities for female journalists, they have made continuous progress both in number and contribution to the expansion of the profession. From just being women or gossip columnists, many of them have gone into mainstream genre of journalism and a few have gone to become editors and publishers (Ikem, 2022). Among the first pioneers were: Adora Lilly Ulasi; women's page editor of *Daily Times*; Theresa Ogunbiyo, succeeded Ulasi; Ronke Ajayi, editor and publisher of the *Nigeria Daily Herald* (Ikem, 2022); Dr. Doyin Abiola; First female editor of a national newspaper (*National Concord*) and Toyin Johnson; Editor *Women's World*. More women than ever are working in the media now. They form a majority of the journalism workforce but they do not play equal role in the reporting process (Bistand, 2019). In line with the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP, 2021), a global survey taken every five years since 1995, by 2005, 57% of all television news presenters were women yet only 29% of the news items were written by female reporters.

Meanwhile, only 32% of the "hard" news were written or covered by women. Women are more often found reporting on "soft" subjects, like social issues, the family, or arts and "living". Statistics' show that more and more women are training and entering the profession, the number of women producers, executives, chief editors and publishers remain shockingly low. Nwabueze (2021) states that gender disparity or difference is incredibly obvious among reporters in television, radio and newspapers. The mass media organs have more male reporters than female reporters. According to Nwabueze (2021), the implication is that men will not pick interest in women-oriented reports. GMMP (2010) states that only 24% of the people heard or read about in print, radio and television news are female in contrast, 76%-more than 3 out of 4- of the people

in the news are male. On the other hand, the pace of increase in women's visibility in the news has been maintained over the past decade. In 2005, women's presence within the news had risen to 21%-a change of three percentage points from the research administered in 2000. From 2005 to 2010 there is a second change of three percentage points, evidencing a persistently slow, but constant pace of progress. Macharia, Ndangam, Saboor, Franke, Parr & Opoku (2021), state that women make up only 24% of the persons heard, read about or seen in newspaper, television and radio newscasts exactly as they did in 2010. Only 37% of stories in newspapers, television and radio newscasts are reported by the feminine gender.

Bistand (2019) noted that in most countries, the gender pay gap between the male and female journalists still exists, the term "sticky floors", and "glass ceilings" are used to describe how and why the gender pay gap increases with age, as women are overlooked for promotion in favour of male colleagues. In most cases the high stress level, bullying and harassment, unacceptable workloads, and anti-social working hours, pressure working mothers into part-time, temporary or freelance positions. These factors highlighted tend to put them in even more vulnerable positions in terms of job security, promotions, legal status and ability to share similar rights as contracted male colleagues. The media have an excellent potential to push the advancement of women and also the equality of women and men by portraying women and men in a very non-stereotypical, diverse and balanced manner and by respecting the dignity and value of the human person (Barnett, 2010). Media gender stereotypes are generally understood as caricatures of femininity and masculinity in portrayals of women and men in respect to one another. Various empirical studies have revealed how such stereotypes shape societal attitudes, behaviour and expectations as well as structure the experiences of people and whole groups (Macharia *et al* 2021).

Gender stereotypes have constantly remained firmly embedded in news media output over the past years. Only 4% of stories clearly challenge such stereotypes, reflecting a one percentage point change since 2005 when this indicator was first introduced into the global media monitoring project coding instrument. Within the main topics, the most important change has been in science and health news: 5% of stories clearly challenge gender stereotypes compared to only 19% in 2005. This subject in truth has the narrowest gender gap in news subjects-women comprise 35% of the people in science (health news and is closest to parity in terms of reporters-49% of the stories are reported by women. Over 10 years, hardly has there been progress in the proportion of political news stories that clearly challenge gender stereotypes. The stereotypes appear to have increased in social and legal news (Macharia *et al* 2015). The extent to which gender differences affect the news agenda continues to be subject to vigorous and ongoing debate (Liao & Lee, 2021). Overall, research shows that the business of organised journalism is a man's world; concluded Massey and Elmore during a 2011 study which looked at why numerous women were leaving journalism.

2.1.1 War Journalism and Its Antidote

There are deep-seated reasons, then, why these are the dominant conventions in journalism, but, taken together, they mean that its framing of public debates over conflict issues is generally on the side of violent responses. It merits the description "war journalism" (Noakes, 2014). Take the dualism first. If you start to think about a conflict as a tug-of-war between two great adversaries, then any change in their relationship - any movement - can only take place along a single axis (Gillespie, 2014). Just as, in tug-of-war, one side gaining a meter means the other side losing a metre, so any new development, in a conflict thus conceived, immediately begs to be assessed in

a zero-sum game (Gillespie, 2014). Anything that is not, unequivocally, winning, risks being reported as losing. It brings a readymade incentive to step up efforts for victory, or escalate. People involved in conflict "talk tough and often" act tough as they play to a gallery the media have created (Umeh, 2017).

Remove acts of political violence from context and you leave only further violence as a possible response. This is why there is so little news about peace initiatives if no underlying causes are visible, there is nothing to "fix". Only in this form of reporting does it make any sense to view "terrorism" for example, as something on which it is possible or sensible to wage "war" (Cohen, 2008).

And if you wait, to report on either underlying causes or peace initiatives, until it suits political leaders to discuss or engage with them, you might wait a long time. Stirrings of peace almost invariably begin at lower levels (Pruitt and Kim, 2014). There is, furthermore, a lever in the hands of governments that no one else has the "legitimate" use of military force. For all these reasons, the primacy of official sources, coupled with the enduring national orientation of most media, is bound to skew the representation of conflicts in favour of a pronounced receptiveness to the advocacy of violence (Noakes, 2014). Hence, peace journalism, as a remedial strategy and an attempt to supplement the news conventions to give peace a chance (Pruitt and Kim, 2014).

2.2 Empirical Review

Asogwa (2022) carried out a study and the findings revealed that challenges facing female journalists are: discrimination from news sources and colleagues at work, sexual harassments, and family roles. The respondents also confirmed that discouragements from members of the family also constitute a part of the challenges. Based on the results of the study, the researcher concludes that women-journalists are confronted with career-related challenges not due to their performance on the work, but due to the very fact that they are women.

Christopher (2022) conducted a study on gender representation in the editorial and reportorial staff of newspapers in Nigeria. The researcher made use of content analysis of 4 newspapers in Nigeria with a view to determining the ratio of male-female representation in editorial and reportorial capacities in newspaper journalism. The findings revealed that there is an enormous male domination at both editorial and reportorial levels in his study regardless of the observed high number of female enrolments at mass communication and journalism schools in the country and across the globe.

Macharia *et al* (2022) did a study on "who makes the news." The content analysis method was employed in carrying out the study; findings revealed that despite the fact that more women get into the journalism world, women are still misrepresented in the news as news makers and also as journalists.

Franks (2021) conducted a research on "Women and journalism". In her study, she examined the challenges women journalists face and concluded that although there have been considerable changes in the prospects for women working in the media in the past few years, women are still conspicuously in the minority in top journalistic roles. Bistand (2009) did a study on "gender equality" and concluded that gender equality does not mean that women and men need to become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend upon whether or

not they are born male or female. Nicholson (2010) did a similar study and his findings revealed that women are faced with the following challenges: irregular payment of salary, maternity leaves, harassment, etc. and at such the researcher in her recommendations encouraged female journalists to create associations where they will discuss their problems and reach common solutions.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on feminist muted theory. Shirley and Edwin Ardener in an effort to challenge gender imbalance, found explanations to the paradigm and in 1974 Cheri Kramarae propounded the feminist muted group theory, which explains the reason certain groups in the society are muted or are hardly heard. They suggest that in most societies a social hierarchy exists, that privilege some groups over others. According to Griffin (2000) as cited in Asemah, Nwammuo & Nkwam-Uwaoma (2017, p. 254), women's words are discounted in our society and their thoughts are devalued, he noted further that when women attempt to overcome this inequality, the male gender control of communication places them at tremendous disadvantage.

Asemah *et al* (2017) maintained that feminist muted theory suggests that we live in a man's world where women are considered inarticulate in our society. Even the way women are represented in the media show that men dominate. In 1981, Cheri Kramarae in her work "Women and men speaking, frameworks for analysis" used the muted group theory to seek out answers to the experiences of women. In her assumptions she maintained that: "the fact that men are the dominant group within the society, the male perception is always dominant. Meanwhile, women perceptions and systems of perceiving are seen as less competent are usually disregarded." This theory is also relevant to the present study, as this male domineering trait is also seen in the media world of which this work is centred on.

2.4 Summary of literature review

Despite the legislation and policies for promoting gender equality, the progress towards a greater equality of women in the media sector is still slow. The highest positions in the hierarchy of news organizations are still being mainly occupied by men (EIGE, 2019), even though the number of university-graduate women from communication faculties, in Spain for instance, exceeds men in a proportion of 1.7 to 1 (APM, 2019). In this country, regardless it keeps reducing progressively over the years, the pre-eminence of men in managerial positions persists and the percentage of women positioned in the lowest and minor levels of remuneration among the highest positions is also greater (de Miguel, 2021).

These indicators are only some of the arguments that have led several studies about the situation in Spain affirm that the supposed feminization of the journalistic profession is, actually, a fake feminization or pseudo-feminization (Rivero & al., 2019). Previous analysis on the state of journalism in Spain confirm that, even though in the academic field there is a confirmed feminization of studies, the practice of the journalism profession maintains a situation of inequality of opportunities and female labour precariousness (Rivero Santamarina; Meso Ayerdi; Pena Fernandez, 2022). This is manifested by the fact that women journalists, compared to their male peers, have a higher rate of unemployment (APM, 2019), a greater proportion of temporary contracts, and need to wait longer to achieve labour stability (Gomez Aguilar, 2019). Furthermore, some studies point out to the fact that most of these small number of employment opportunities, promotion and access to positions of responsibility (the latter considered as the

great professional barrier of women by journalists) (Gomez Aguilar, 2019) are due to the absence of conciliation policies (Rivero, 2014). This leads to a high rate of abandonment from women who dedicate to the most peripheral sectors of communication or who occupy positions with less visibility (Soriano 2019).

METHODOLOGY

The researchers adopted the survey method. The survey method is the most appropriate research design for this study because the study entails eliciting the opinions and perceptions of the public about women in journalism practice. Residents of Abakaliki Municipality formed the population of this study which was 127,213 according to the 2006 population census. Though, it was projected with 2.3% index growth rate for 13 years and therefore the projected population is 170,974. Using the Taro Yamani formula, a sample size of 399 was derived. The non-proportionate quota sampling and purposive sampling techniques were adopted for this study. The researchers using the non proportionate quota sampling technique divided the sample size (399) by the number of communities in Abakaliki municipal (5). i.e $399/5=80$. After the division, the researchers then purposively sampled 80 persons in each of the communities. Questionnaire was used as the research instrument. Analysis of data was done using simple percentage.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Out of 399 copies of questionnaire distributed, 385 copies were retrieved and found usable; hence, the following analyses were made based on the retrieved copies of questionnaire.

Table 1: Responses on Perception about Women in Journalism Practice

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Positive	165	43
Negative	200	52
Neutral	20	5
Total	385	100

Analysis of data from the above table 1 revealed that 52% of respondents have negative perception about women in journalism practice. This implies that most of the respondents have negative perception about women in journalism practice.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent	75	19
Very good	19	5
Good	68	18
Fair	215	56
Poor	8	2
Total	385	100

Table 2: Responses on the rating of the Performances of Female Journalists

Analysis of data from table 2 showed that 56% of respondents confirmed that female journalists' performances are fair. This means that female journalists' performance is viewed as fair in the profession.

Table 3: Responses on whether the discrimination against Women in Journalism affects their Contribution to the Media

Agree	100	26
Disagree	40	10
Strongly disagree	42	11
Total	385	100

Analysis of data from table 3 showed that 53% of respondents strongly agreed that the discrimination against female journalists affect their contributions to the media. This implies that the discrimination against female journalists affects their contributions to the media.

Table 4: Responses on Female Journalists facing challenges in the Journalism Profession as a result of Gender

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	250	65
Agree	50	13
Disagree	45	12
Strongly disagree	40	10
Total	385	100

Analysis of data from table 4 revealed that 65% of respondents strongly agreed that female journalists face challenges as a result of gender disparity. This means that female journalists face challenges as a result of gender disparity.

Table 5: Responses on preference Index of Journalists

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Male	235	61
Female	85	22
Both	65	17
Total	385	100

Analysis of data from table 5 showed that 61% of respondents prefer male journalists to female journalists. This implies that majority of respondents prefer male journalists to female journalists.

Table 6: Respondents' response on whether Female Journalists are likely to face Sexual Harassment in carrying out their Job

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	200	52
No	165	43
Can't say	20	5
Total	385	100

Analysis of data from table 6 showed that 52% of respondents confirmed that female journalists' are likely to face sexual harassment in carrying out their job. This means that female journalists' are prone to sexual harassment in carrying out their job.

Discussion of Findings

Analysis of data revealed that 52% of the respondents were confirmed to have negative perception of women in journalism and this perception explains why they view their performance as just fair and having no significant effects, by implication women are portrayed from a negative angle and that their performances are dependent on their gender. This negative perception somehow contributes to the misrepresentation of female journalists both at the editorial and reportorial level as Christopher's (2016) findings confirmed, which is in line with this study's finding.

Corroborating this finding also, Macharia *et al* (2015) asserted that despite the fact that women get into the journalism profession, they are still misrepresented in the news as news makers and also as journalists. However, Bistand (2009) in his study argued that regardless the preference between genders in journalism, gender equality does not mean that women and men have to become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. The finding of this study is in line with the feminist muted theory which assumes that men are the dominant group in the society; the male perception is also dominant. Women's perceptions and systems of perceiving are seen as less competent. Hence the suggestion by the theory that we live in a man's world where women are considered inarticulate in our society.

Analysis of data further revealed that 53% of the respondents strongly agreed that the discrimination against female journalists to a very large extent affects their contributions to the media. The analysis of the finding showed that discrimination against women in journalism profession can limit the overall contributions of female journalists in the media. This finding is in tandem with that of Asogwa (2018) which says that female journalists face discrimination from news sources and colleagues at work. It is obvious that female journalists that face situation as this are bound to underperform in their job due to the fact that they need these people in order to perform effectively.

In view of this finding, Franks (2013) in his study noted that although, there have been considerable changes in the prospects for women working in the media in the past few decades, however, they are still noticeably in the minority in the top journalistic roles. This gives strong

backing to the assertion of Christopher (2015) where he noted that the discrimination of the female gender has led to the enormous male domination in the media without corresponding contributions from the female journalists. This finding corroborates the feminist muted theory which explains that certain groups in society are muted, silent or not heard (that is, the women). Therefore, women's words are discounted in our society and their thoughts are devalued and when women attempt to overcome this inequality, the male gender control of communication places them at tremendous disadvantage.

Analysis of findings further revealed that 65% of the respondents strongly agreed that women face challenges in journalism and these challenges may include: sexual harassment unnecessary preference of male journalists to female journalists as 61% of respondents confirmed. Corroborating this finding is the finding of Leina (2011) where she asserted that female journalists in some cases face constant sexual harassment while carrying out their assigned duties. Similarly, Nicholson's (2010) findings supported this study's finding when she revealed that women are faced with the following challenges: irregular payment of salary, maternity leaves, sexual harassment among others. Also, backing this finding, Asogwa (2018) in her study revealed that sexual harassment, family roles are some of the major challenges being faced by female journalists. It is quite obvious from the finding that the odds are against the female journalists in this male chauvinistic society where the men dominate the media as the feminist muted theory assumes.

Conclusion

The study examined the public perception of women in journalism practice. Gender disparity or stereotyping in journalism practice has caused a breach in the profession as the study observed. The study observed that women are still in the minority in the top journalistic roles. The major findings of the study conform to other empirical studies reviewed in this work. Responses expressed by respondents in the study showed that notwithstanding the fact that there have been considerable changes in the prospects for women working in the media in the past few decades women are still noticeably in the minority in the top journalistic roles.

Recommendations

Based on the above findings and conclusion, the following recommendations are hereby made:

1. Media houses should portray women in good light to change the negative perceptions of the public about female journalists.
2. Female journalists should belong to a functional professional body that will fight for their interest.
3. A mechanism or policy should be put in place to help light the scourge of sexual harassment among the female journalists. Also, the public should not see female journalists any less than their male counterparts.

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