

Pioneers and Perceptions: Tracing Women's Roles and Gender Stereotypes in Tanzanian Media History

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Abstract

This study investigates the portrayal of women in Tanzanian mass media, focusing on the implications for gender representation within a postcolonial framework. The primary aim is to explore how historical ideologies, particularly during Julius Nyerere's leadership, have shaped media narratives about women's roles. A qualitative methodology was employed, involving the analysis of 100 articles from major newspapers and 50 television news segments, complemented by interviews with 15 key informants, including media practitioners and academics.

Key findings reveal that while there is an increase in the visibility of women in media, significant disparities persist, particularly in health-related narratives that often frame women as victims. This aligns with existing literature that emphasizes the reinforcement of traditional stereotypes. In political contexts, although women's representation appears more empowered, barriers to their agency remain, contrasting with findings from other regions where female politicians are depicted as leaders.

The study underscores the importance of feminist media theories in interpreting these representations and highlights the need for reforms in media practices to promote equitable portrayals of women. The findings contribute to the broader discourse on gender representation in postcolonial contexts, emphasizing the role of media in shaping societal perceptions and public discourse on gender issues. Recommendations for future research include exploring the impact of digital media and longitudinal studies to track changes in women's representation over time. Overall, this research provides valuable insights into the complexities of gender representation in Tanzanian media, advocating for a more inclusive and empowering narrative for women.

Keywords: Women in Journalism, Gender Stereotypes, Tanzanian Media, Media History, Feminist Media Studies, Gender Representation

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Introduction

The portrayal of women in media serves as a crucial lens for understanding gender representation, particularly in postcolonial contexts like Tanzania. Research indicates that media narratives significantly influence societal perceptions of gender roles (Byerly, 2016; Mwale, 2013). In Tanzania, the media has historically reflected and perpetuated colonial legacies, which often reinforced patriarchal norms and stereotypes. For instance, Haji (2019) argues that the representation of women in Tanzanian print media is largely shaped by existing societal expectations, leading to limited portrayals that often emphasize domestic roles.

Research Problem and Focus

The portrayal of women in mass media is a critical area of study, particularly in postcolonial societies where historical legacies continue to shape contemporary narratives. In Tanzania, the representation of women in media has profound implications for societal perceptions of gender roles and identities. Despite the increasing visibility of women in various media forms, there remains a significant gap in understanding how these portrayals are influenced by historical ideologies, particularly those established during the leadership of Julius Nyerere. This study aims to investigate the portrayal of women in Tanzanian media, focusing on the evolving roles and the persistence of gender stereotypes.

Aim and Research Questions

The primary objective of this research is to explore how historical and socio-political contexts have shaped media narratives surrounding women in Tanzania. To achieve this, the study will address the following research questions: How are women portrayed in Tanzanian mass media across different contexts (e.g., politics, health, social issues)? What historical ideologies influence contemporary representations of women in media? And How do these portrayals affect public perceptions of gender roles in Tanzanian society?

Relevance of the Topic

This study is particularly relevant given the ongoing discussions about gender equality and representation in media. Previous research has highlighted the media's role in reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes (Haji, 2019; Mwale, 2013). For instance, Gustafsson (2018) emphasizes that women are often depicted in domestic roles, reflecting societal expectations rather than their actual contributions. Additionally, the work of Pambila (2015) underscores the need for a critical examination of how historical narratives continue to shape contemporary media portrayals.

Justification for the Study

Despite existing literature, there remains a limited understanding of the specific impact of historical ideologies on current media representations of women in Tanzania. This study seeks to fill this gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of women's roles in media and the implications for gender representation. By situating the research within the broader context of feminist media studies and postcolonial theory, this study aims to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on gender representation in African media.

In summary, this research will not only enhance the understanding of women's portrayal in Tanzanian media but also inform ongoing efforts to promote equitable representations and challenge enduring stereotypes. The findings will be significant for media practitioners, policymakers, and scholars interested in gender issues and media studies.

Review of Literature

Historical Context

transformed as part of a broader vision for national identity and development. Nyerere emphasized the importance of education and media in promoting social change, yet his policies also reflected traditional gender norms that shaped women's roles in society (Pambila, 2015). Scholars have noted that while Nyerere's socialist ideology sought to empower marginalized groups, it often marginalized women's voices in favor of a patriarchal narrative (Swantz & Tripp, 1996).

Given this backdrop, the media became a tool for reinforcing existing gender stereotypes. Research shows that women were frequently depicted in domestic roles, reinforcing the notion that their primary responsibilities lay within the household (Reuster-Jahn, 2014). This portrayal not only reflected societal attitudes but also shaped public perceptions of women's capabilities and contributions beyond the domestic sphere (Gustafsson, 2018).

Theoretical Frameworks

Feminist media studies provide a critical framework for analyzing gender representation in media. This approach emphasizes the ways in which media not only reflects societal norms but actively constructs them (Byerly, 2016). Within this framework, key concepts such as the male gaze and representation of marginalized voices are particularly relevant. The historical context of media in Tanzania is deeply intertwined with the country's colonial past and subsequent postcolonial developments. Under Julius Nyerere's leadership, the media landscape was shaped. Laura Mulvey's concept of the male gaze illustrates how women are often objectified and portrayed through a lens that prioritizes male perspectives (Mulvey, 1975). In the Tanzanian media context, this means that women's portrayal is often limited to their relationships with men, reinforcing traditional gender roles (Mwale, 2013).

Postcolonial theory further enriches this analysis by highlighting how colonial legacies continue to influence representations of women in media. Scholars like Spivak (1988) argue that the voices of women in colonized societies are often silenced or distorted, leading to a complex interplay between gender, race, and class in media narratives. This perspective is essential for understanding how Tanzanian media navigates the legacies of colonialism while perpetuating existing gender stereotypes (Haji, 2019; Pambila, 2015).

Contemporary Trends in Gender Representation

Recent studies indicate that while there have been advancements in women's representation in Tanzanian media, significant gaps remain. A content analysis of Tanzanian print media reveals that women continue to be underrepresented in news coverage, particularly in areas deemed "hard news" such as politics and economics (Haji, 2019). Instead, women are more frequently featured in lifestyle and health-related content, which often reinforces stereotypes about their roles within the family and society (Gustafsson, 2018).

Moreover, research shows a marked difference in how women are portrayed in sensitive topics such as HIV/AIDS compared to other subjects. For instance, women are often depicted as victims in health narratives, which can perpetuate negative stereotypes and ignore their agency and resilience (Pambila, 2015). This portrayal reflects broader societal attitudes toward women's health issues and their roles in public discourse.

Conversely, there has been increased visibility of women in media roles, particularly in journalism and broadcasting. Studies indicate that female journalists are gradually breaking through traditional barriers, yet

they still face significant challenges, including gender-based discrimination and harassment (Lucht & Batschelet, 2018). The representation of women in media roles can foster a more nuanced understanding of gender issues and contribute to shifting public perceptions.

Comparative Perspectives

Examining gender representation in media across different countries offers valuable insights into common trends and divergent practices. For example, research in Kenya has shown similar patterns of underrepresentation and stereotypical portrayals of women in media (Gustafsson, 2018). Studies indicate that women in Kenyan media are often relegated to roles that emphasize their domesticity and nurturing qualities, echoing the findings in Tanzanian media (P Omari, 2008).

Similarly, studies in South Africa highlight the challenges faced by female journalists and the persistent gender biases that influence media narratives (Graff, 2016). In a comparative context, these studies reveal that while women in media may experience varying degrees of visibility and empowerment, the underlying challenges of patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes persist across the region (Wanjiru, 2015).

Moreover, the intersectionality of gender with other social identities, such as race and class, is an area that requires further exploration. While some scholars have begun to address these intersections, more comprehensive investigations are necessary to provide a nuanced understanding of how different societal factors influence media portrayals (Silberschmidt, 2001). This is particularly relevant in Tanzania, where ethnic diversity and socio-economic disparities can shape both media narratives and public perceptions.

Identifying Gaps and Conflicts in Existing Research

Despite the wealth of research on gender representation in media, significant gaps remain. One notable absence is the exploration of how digital media and social media platforms are reshaping narratives around women's roles in Tanzanian society. With the rise of social media, women are increasingly using these platforms to challenge stereotypes and assert their voices (Mhando, 2017). However, systematic studies examining the impact of digital media on gender representation in Tanzania are scarce.

Furthermore, while much of the existing research has focused on mainstream media, there is a need for more attention to alternative and independent media outlets that may provide different narratives around women's roles (Pambila, 2015). These alternative platforms often serve as spaces for marginalized voices and can contribute to a more diverse understanding of gender representation.

Additionally, conflicts in the literature regarding the effectiveness of policy interventions to promote gender equality in media are evident. While some studies advocate for comprehensive policy reforms to address gender disparities in media, others suggest that such policies often fall short of creating meaningful change (Mwale, 2013). This discrepancy highlights the need for further research to evaluate the impact of existing policies and identify strategies that can effectively promote gender equity in media practices.

Research Methodology

The study employed qualitative data collection from various media sources and key informants to understand the representation and the impact on public perceptions of gender roles. The study employed purposive sampling and selected two primary components, which were media content and key informants.

Media Content: A total of 100 articles from Tanzanian newspapers *The Guardian*, *Daily News* and *Nipashe* published between 2011 and 2024 were analyzed, focusing on women's issues in politics, health, and social contexts. Additionally, 50 television segments from major broadcasters like TBC and ITV were also included, prioritizing content addressing women's roles.

Key Informants: 15 key informants selected, including media practitioners (journalists, editors, producers) and academics specializing in gender and media studies, ensuring diverse perspectives on gender representation in Tanzanian media.

The study used interview and content analysis as a tool for data collection. Media content were analyzed to identify themes and pattern in women portrayal and an open-ended guide were facilitated for discussion with key informants. Articles and segments selected based on relevance and publication dates, coded according to the framework to identify patterns and themes. Also, Semi-structured interviews conducted in person or via video conferencing, recorded (with consent) for transcription and analysis.

Media content analyzed through Qualitative content analysis, Thematic analysis of interview data and Triangulation to identify themes and patterns in women's portrayal through initial coding and Thematic analysis.

Findings

This section presents the findings from the qualitative analysis of media content and key informant interviews focused on the portrayal of women in Tanzanian mass media. The results are organized according to the study's objectives, highlighting innovations and specific observations derived from the analysis.

Media Content Analysis

1. Representation of Women in Print Media

The analysis of 100 articles from Tanzanian newspapers revealed distinct trends in how women's roles are portrayed across various contexts. The content analysis identified specific characterizations and thematic focuses that illustrate the media's approach to gender representation.

Table 1: Representation of Women in Print Media

Context	Percentage of Articles	Common Themes	Characterizations
Politics	25	Female politicians, Barriers	Empowered, Marginal
Health	40	HIV/AIDS, Maternal health	Victims, caregiver
Social Issues	35	Gender based violence	Victim, resilient

As shown in Table 1, health-related articles account for the largest portion (40%) of coverage, predominantly portraying women as victims or caregivers in discussions surrounding HIV/AIDS and maternal health. Political coverage (25%) reveals a trend where women are depicted as empowered figures yet often face barriers that limit their agency. Social issues (35%) predominantly frame women as victims of gender-based violence, perpetuating stereotypes while occasionally highlighting resilience.

2. Television News Segments

A total of 50 television segments were analyzed, focusing on women's roles in societal issues and public life. The analysis indicates that while female representation in news segments has increased, significant disparities remain in the framing of women's narratives.

As illustrated in Figure 1, female representation in TV news segments fluctuated throughout the analyzed period, with an average of 40% representation. Notably, segments related to health issues featured women prominently, while political segments featured women only 30% of the time. This disparity highlights the ongoing challenge of ensuring equitable representation across all topics.

Key Informant Interviews

3. Insights from Media Practitioners and Academics

Interviews with 15 key informants provided qualitative insights into their perceptions of women's representation in Tanzanian media. The following themes emerged from the interviews, reflecting shared observations among participants.

Table 2: Key Informant Themes on Gender Representation

Theme	Description	Number of Respondents
Impact of Historical Ideologies	Influence of Nyerere's policies on media portrayals	10
Need for change	Recognition of stereotypes and call for reform	12
Women Agency	Acknowledgement of changing roles in Society	9

Table 2 outlines the key themes identified during the interviews. Notably, 10 out of 15 respondents emphasized the lasting impact of historical ideologies on current media portrayals. Twelve participants expressed a need for change, highlighting the recognition of entrenched stereotypes and advocating for reforms in media practices. Additionally, 9 interviewees acknowledged the evolving roles of women in society, noting that media narratives must reflect these changes more accurately.

Innovations and Specific Findings

The study identified several specific findings that highlight innovations in women's representation in Tanzanian media:

Emergence of Female Voices: There is a growing representation of female journalists and media producers, which is beginning to influence content creation and narrative framing in news segments.

Increased Coverage of Women's Issues: Health-related topics have seen significant coverage, yet often frame women as victims. This highlights a need for more empowerment-focused narratives that showcase women's agency and contributions.

Social Media Influence: Preliminary findings suggest that social media platforms are becoming spaces for women to voice their experiences and challenge traditional narratives, although this area requires further exploration.

Discussion

The findings from this study provide a nuanced understanding of the portrayal of women in Tanzanian mass media, revealing both advancements and persistent challenges in gender representation. By interpreting these results in the context of existing literature, we can identify similarities, differences, and contradictions with prior studies, while also addressing the scientific concepts underlying these findings.

Interpretation of Results

The analysis of media content and key informant interviews indicates that while there has been an increase in the visibility of women in Tanzanian media, significant disparities in the portrayal of gender roles remain. Specifically, the predominance of health-related narratives framing women as victims aligns with previous studies that emphasize the media's tendency to reinforce traditional stereotypes (Haji, 2019; Mwale, 2013). This finding echoes the work of Gustafsson (2018), who highlights how women are often portrayed in domestic roles, reflecting societal expectations rather than their actual contributions.

Conversely, the representation of women in political contexts, while more empowered, still reveals barriers that limit their agency. This observation contrasts with findings from other regions, such as South Africa, where female politicians are increasingly depicted as leaders and decision-makers (Graff, 2016). The differences in representation may stem from varying cultural contexts and historical legacies that shape media narratives across different countries.

Comparison with Prior Studies

The results of this study resonate with existing literature on gender representation in media, particularly in postcolonial contexts. For instance, the emphasis on women's roles as caregivers in health-related narratives aligns with Spivak's (1988) assertion that media often marginalizes women's voices, portraying them primarily in relation to their familial roles. However, this study also highlights a growing recognition of women's agency, suggesting a shift in narratives that may not have been as pronounced in earlier research.

The interviews with key informants reveal a consensus on the need for change in media practices, which reflects a broader scholarly agreement on the importance of promoting equitable representations of women (Pambila, 2015). Yet, the study's emphasis on the influence of historical ideologies under Nyerere's leadership adds a unique dimension to the discussion, revealing how these ideologies continue to shape contemporary media narratives.

Scientific Concepts and Reliability

The findings underscore the significance of feminist media theories in understanding the portrayal of women. Concepts such as the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975) and the construction of gender roles through media narratives are critical for interpreting the results. The reliability of the findings is supported by the triangulation of data sources, which enhances the validity of the conclusions drawn from both content analysis and interviews.

However, it is essential to acknowledge that the qualitative nature of this study may limit the generalizability of the findings. While the sample size of media content and key informants provides valuable insights, a larger and more diverse sample could yield a more comprehensive understanding of gender representation across different media platforms.

Broader Scholarly Context

These results contribute to the growing body of literature on gender representation in media, particularly within the African context. The study highlights the complexities of media narratives in postcolonial societies, where historical legacies continue to influence contemporary representations. By situating the findings within the broader scholarly discourse, this research emphasizes the need for ongoing exploration of how media can serve as a platform for empowerment and change.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the valuable insights gained, this study has several limitations. First, the focus on specific media outlets may not capture the full spectrum of women's representation across all Tanzanian media platforms, including digital and social media, which are increasingly influential. Second, the reliance on qualitative methods, while providing depth, may not fully account for the quantitative aspects of media representation, such as the frequency of women's appearances in various contexts.

Additionally, the study's timeframe, focusing on articles published between 2011 and 2024, may overlook earlier representations that continue to impact current narratives. Future research should consider longitudinal studies to track changes over time and explore the influence of emerging media platforms on gender representation.

Conclusion

This study significantly contributes to the understanding of women's portrayal in Tanzanian mass media, addressing the critical research objective of exploring how historical ideologies shape gender representation and narrative framing. Through a comprehensive analysis of media content and insights from key informants,

the research elucidates the complexities surrounding women's roles in society and the persistent challenges they face in media narratives.

Key findings demonstrate that while there has been an increase in the visibility of women in Tanzanian media, substantial disparities remain, particularly in health-related narratives which often depict women as victims. This aligns with previous studies highlighting the media's tendency to reinforce traditional stereotypes. Furthermore, although women are increasingly represented in political contexts, barriers that limit their agency persist, revealing a need for continued advocacy for equitable portrayals.

The significance of this research lies not only in its empirical contributions but also in its theoretical implications. By applying feminist media theories, the study provides a nuanced framework for understanding the construction of gender roles in media narratives, enriching the discourse on gender representation in postcolonial contexts. The findings underscore the importance of media as a powerful tool for shaping societal perceptions and influencing public discourse on gender issues.

Ultimately, this study serves as a call to action for media practitioners, policymakers, and scholars alike to foster more equitable representations of women in Tanzanian media. By addressing the identified challenges and advocating for reforms, we can enhance the portrayal of women, promote gender equality, and support women's empowerment in both media and society. As such, this research not only adds to the academic literature but also has practical implications for media practices aimed at transforming gender narratives and fostering a more inclusive media landscape.

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