

Nigerian Newspapers and Opinion Columns: Where are the Muted Female Voices?

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Abstract

This study examined male dominance and female placement in the Nigerian newspaper columns and opinion pages. Content analysis was employed to analyse the opinion and column pages published by major 14 Nigerian newspapers (The Vanguard, The Punch, The Guardian, This Day, The Sun, Leadership, The Nation, New Telegraph, Daily Trust, Nigerian Tribune, People's Gazette, The Cable, Premium Times, and Sahara Reporters). The study adopted a purposive sampling in identifying each column or page, including articles written by newspaper staff, regular columnists and contributors. The study codes and analyse contents from three years (June 2020 to July 2023). It is found that there are 232 columns/opinion pages and 572 columnists and opinion writers in the Nigerian newspaper industry. This includes 93 females (15.7%) and 479 (84.3%) males. The researchers conclude that 15.7% of female contributors is manifestly inadequate and proportionally unbalanced to create gender equality and harmony in this aspect of newspaper offering. It is recommended that newspapers give more space in opinion and op-ed pages to women and they (female) should be encouraged to contribute. It is also proposed that journalism institutions groom male and female students to understand the essence of gender equality in the newsroom and female students in particular be trained to understand their roles in newspaper opinion pages writing.

Keywords: Gender-equality, Columns, Nigerian Newspapers, Columnists, Opinion Pages

Introduction

The media remain the most significant information source for society, and the industry, especially newspaper has always been male dominated like most aspects of human lives where men are seen as the super-heroes, ones with the superior acuity, strength, character and capacity to handle nearly all affairs. Societal gender stratification conveniently restricts the role of women to domestic duties and responsibilities such as housekeeping and childbearing. Women are left with very limited choices and say regarding their place in society and what they could do with skills and aspirations. Discrimination was an accepted code in most parts of the globe, and in societies where religion gained ground, scriptural obfuscation advanced the practice (Aladi & Okoro, 2021).

Though since the industrial revolution, the place of women in the workplace outside of their gender-assigned roles have increased, discrimination against women and the disparity of income, promotion and opportunities compared to men has not abated. Women have had fewer shots at certain jobs or positions due to low education and societal and cultural favoritism. The aftermath is that in most of the 19th and 20th centuries, women were limited to lowly occupations and small-income jobs. Researchers have blamed these on various reasons, which ranges from disparities in career and industry choice in both genders elect to work, racial consideration in employment, discriminatory promotion cultures, discrepancies in job evaluation, hours of work and many more (Sweet, 2021).

To close the gender gap, several efforts have been considered and promoted. To get rid of existing discriminatory social practices, forms of group exclusion and disfavour, affirmative action in general, involves measures, policies, programmes, initiatives, strategies or interventions geared towards addressing discrimination and inequality against a category of people with protected features in the workplace and access to services (Archibong & Utam, 2020). While among a significant number of scholars, stakeholders and employees, gender affirmative action represents a heated debate, a considerable number support its implementation as an avenue for maximising the presence of women in the workspace (Furtado et al., 2021).

Additionally, while developing policies to increase women's opportunities and freedoms and improve their well-being, the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, comprising 169 objectives of a universal plan of action for people, planet, and prosperity, has gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls as one of the key 17 goals. Hence, the target of gender

equality delineated as the equal share of men and women in positions of power, career, and decision-making continues to gain traction worldwide (United Nations, 2015).

Around the globe, fostering an egalitarian society where there is parity between men and women in terms of jobs, leadership positions, and politics has been given wide focus. The European Union's founding values include equality among genders. One essential principle is the promotion of "equal pay for equal work", which has formed a significant part of the European Treaties since 1957 (Schonard, 2023). Nonetheless, efforts have evolved past employment possibilities in access positions. At the same time, the EU has always promoted equality among genders by advancing identical possibilities for men and women in company boardrooms and decision-making or at different job levels (Kyaw et al., 2017).

In addition, the discourse on gender parity on corporate board representation has attracted attention in places like Norway, where the country declared a policy in which a gender quota for boards of directors comprises 40% of women. Other countries such as Sweden, France and Spain have assigned a 25% quota as representative of females on corporate boards (Galbreath, 2018). In the same direction, the Canadian government enacted the Employment Equity Act 1986, which mandated federal employers to implement employment equity in terms of affirmative action through provident means. Despite some accompanying criticism, this effort has improved women's representation in the intended areas since its introduction.

In Nigeria, in a bid to promote gender equality, the government developed a National Gender Policy document which targets commitment to gender mainstreaming as a development tool for achieving its economic reform agenda. Statistics representing workplace gender parity indicate that women represent 39% of employment worldwide. It was noted (SDG Knowledge Platform, 2019, cited in Archibong & Utam, 2020) that women were only engaged in 27% of executive positions globally as of 2018—a marginal increase from 26% in 2015.

Columns and columnists

A significant content newspaper offer readers is the opinion columns or articles written by their regular writers or contributors in a relaxed, detailed and analytical style on topical and trending issues of societal importance. A column is a regular article in a newspaper and other allied publications, giving a writer the platform and leeway to express their opinion in the space assigned to them by the editor or the newspaper organization (Foran & Jefferson, 2022).

Columnists are often established voices who have gained some reputation in their chosen fields or journalism. Editors typically give this category of newspaper content creators more freedom and are offered the authority to pick topics and navigate their columns as desired.

Newspaper and Women Journalists

Even though a few women have participated in journalism as writers, editors, reporters and analysts in some countries before the 18th century (Brown, 2016), their contribution to the male-dominated newsroom messages for a long time were restricted to the peripheries of such media offerings. They are conventionally given assignments, columns or sections in a newspaper whose handling is mundane or less demanding such as relationship, fashion, entertainment and others. Moreover, journalism is considered a high risk profession and women as the 'softer' gender needed protection from the dangers of the work.

Regarding appreciation of the work of journalists, which is manifested in terms of awards and recognition, male journalists have regularly dominated the list of nominees and winners. It is no surprise since men predominate in the newsroom. These awards see women journalists occupy the fringes, and their addition to the lineup is only seen as an afterthought. This was why there was public upbraid and backlash against the 2019 journalism news website's (Press Gazette) Words By Women (WBW) awards—a recognition for public interest journalism. Additionally, journalists expressed outrage because the various categories of awards meant to appreciate the work of female journalists lacked women nominees.

Statement of the Problem

The media enormously influences people's perception of the world and their picture of reality. Newspaper represents a key instrument of the media use in framing and shaping this reckoning. Moreover, newspaper columns and opinion pages are key factors available in projecting these stereotypes, social engagement and prejudices.

This study is focused on exploring the significant aspect of the newspaper's daily offering, which deals with hard news, exposition and analysis of divergent issues and events by columnists and opinion page writers.

Research Questions

RQ1: How many columnists, opinion writers and columns/pages are available in the Nigerian newspaper sphere?

RQ2: How gender-balanced are Nigerian newspaper columns and opinion pages and what kind of topics each gender writes on?

RQ3: What is the newspaper with the largest number of female columnists and opinion writers?

Literature Review

From the rudimentary first newspaper, the Romans ActaDiurna, or daily doings of 59 BCE, to today's internet-enabled news publications, newspapers have remained an essential news source for the media audience.

Accordingly, as journalism grows as a profession, women traditionally continue to be restricted in contributing to core newspaper content, and they still face significant prejudice in the profession. The need to expand their opportunities and open up the horizon for more inclusive engagement of women in jobs and decision-making, specifically communication, prompted the Beijing International Conference on Women's Rights, which was held in the middle of September 1995 in China and was targeted at enhancing the welfare of women. Its Item 44 called upon governments, the international community, civil society organisations and the private sector to become strategic partners and take action in critical areas of inequality concerns such as the persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women, unequal access to or inadequate educational and training; opportunities of good quality at all levels of economic structures and policies and the productive process itself; inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels and many others (United Nations, 1995).

In order to evaluate how far nations have embraced the Beijing Declaration, the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP), a monitoring and advocacy programme arm of the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC), whose major objective is to seek equal involvement of women in and promote participatory structures of communication, conducted a study few years after the Beijing Fourth World Conference where the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were outlined. The research was to ascertain the extent of global engagement of women in the media industry. Findings showed that gender inequality still persists in the media in Nigeria. The overwhelmingly content in the mass media was male-produced, while an astounding number (95%) of reporters in radio, television and newspapers in the country were male (Gallagher, 2005)

Female Journalists: Harassment, Prejudice and Threat

Perhaps women are considered a delicate species not fit for minatory roles, or they need to be protected from those life-threatening positions—journalism inclusive.

Like their male counterparts, female journalists, whether working on the field in an insecure environment or a supposedly secured newsroom, encounters series of attacks and are vulnerable to job-related risks such as rape, sexual assault and harassment which stem from individuals, colleagues or entities attempting to silence their voices in the line of duty or the coverage of specific stories (Edison, 2017).

A 2016 Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers report adopted Recommendation CM/Rec (2016) on the protection of journalism and the safety of journalists and other media actors. The resolution, in particular, noted gender-specific dangers that faced many journalists and called for necessary action. Also, UNESCO (2017) reports that female journalists and other female media workers encounter gender-bound risk and are specifically targeted for their sexual orientation and ethnic identity. They also experience attacks such as intimidation, degrading abuse, threats, harassment and sexual aggression. The Organisation said these violations continued to increase online and demand an urgent, resolute and systemic response to combating them.

Likewise, a September 2017 report by the United Nations Secretary-General encapsulates a roadmap towards a gender-sensitive approach to enhancing the safety of female journalists. The report observed that though women constitute a small percentage of journalists, the trend may gradually have changed. It further reiterated the adverse impact of the poor representation of women in journalism, media decision-making and leadership, and the overall "effect on the type of information that is conveyed as news, as well as in the portrayal of women in the media"(United Nations, 2017).

Furthermore, a December 2017 release by the Committee to Protect Journalists showed that 42 journalists were murdered on account of their work globally, with a usually large percentage of those killed being women. The report claimed that the year was specifically deadly for women journalists, with a 19% historical average of female journalists killed. The increase in women journalists losing their lives on the job might be because more women were assigned to dangerous beats and regions. It suggested that engaging more women in top management positions may help the media provide a secure working environment for women journalists (Beiser, 2021).

The report by Green (2019) pointed out that a study by the Women In Journalism (WIJ) network showed that in 2017, UK national newspapers were male-dominated by an average of two-thirds while just 25% of front-page stories were written by women.

Writing for Reuters Institute's factsheet, an annual report of the Reuters Institute For the Study of Journalism (RISJ), Andi et al. (2020) made a gender breakdown of top editors in a strategic sample of 200 prominent offline and online news publications in ten different media milieu in four continents. Their analysis revealed that in a sample of the leading ten online and ten offline news outlets in each of the ten markets, "only 23% of the top editors across the 200 major outlets in our sample are women, although, on average, 40% of journalists in the ten markets are women."

The report found that in most countries, men still dominate editorial and senior managerial positions, even though the number of women journalists has increased. For instance, media markets such as Germany and South Korea that have high marks on the UN Gender Inequality Index have very few women among senior editorial personnel, while even in places like Brazil and Finland where females outnumber male journalists, including all the markets studied, men still dominate as senior editors.

Globally, women journalists remain victims of prevalent harassment online, even as journalists in general continue to face high rates of physical attack, intimidation, harassment and imprisonment, according to an April 2022 UNESCO report. Teched (2022) submitted that almost three-quarters of women journalists interviewed had encountered work-related attacks online. Besides, another UNESCO (2022) study declared that in 2021, the number of women journalists killed almost doubled, from 6% the previous year to 11%.

Conclusively, because journalism is considered violence-prone, society expects women to steer clear as they may not possess the enduring patience, stability and perseverance to face danger and excel on the job adequately. Women themselves, having been conserved to cultural and religious categorisation as 'weaker sex', may have concluded that risk-prone jobs such as journalism are not suitable for their gender. The preceding is, therefore, the major reason few women venture into journalistic writing, especially newspaper columns or contributions.

Regarding media jobs, the industry over time has been male dominated. Cultural, societal and religious norms across the globe, which tend to relegate female voice and promote male opinion, have been replicated in the media industry as represented in masculine dominance. Media production and participation over time and in various phases of technological growth of the industry have been male dominated. Scholar (Davtyan-Gevorgya, 2016) has opined that the media is male-chauvinist, as press offerings are male-produced in accordance with their taste. Even in cases where women produce messages, the framework for such content is still patriarchal.

Furthermore, Ukozor (2004) in Aladi & Okoro (2021) suggests that women have been marginalized and denied proper consideration in media while suppressing their voices or have presented them as entities lacking personal opinions or only fitting as objects of media commercialization. Affirming this position, Asiyan bola (2005) proposed that coincidentally, the dominant patricentric system have trampled upon women's economic, social and political rights, which women's liberationist has described "as any historical forms that patriarchal dominance takes in society either through feudal, capitalist, or socialist system.

Also, in the media, when the place of the female gender is to be accommodated, they are presented as weak, dependent, superficial, and the subject of masculine gratification and sexual objectification in varied forms without consideration for feminine interest. Because the media exercise enormous influence in shaping public perception through its concretization mechanisms, how women are portrayed has been a matter of significant interest to media researchers over time. Ultimately, the quality of news presentation in the media is the prism through which public perceptions about the world and gender are filtered (Kangas, et al., 2015).

As regards gender representation in the African media, Gadzekpo (2011) posited that there has been liberalization in the media since democratic transitions in the continent beginning in the 1990s. According to him, "re-democratization in Africa set in motion an unprecedented expansion in mass media—print, radio, broadcast, film, Internet, and mobile telephony." Nonetheless, this disregards the thought that media portrayal of women connotes the patriarchal configuration of African society.

Anyanwu (2001) has earlier argued that the predominant perception among journalists in Nigeria was that women's issues were rarely newsworthy, except they had to do with amatory controversies, which invariably sell. She suggests that as a significant number of women avoid controversial issues, "they remain out of the orbit of hot news." Like in most countries in the West African subregion, the participation coverage of women and issues affecting women in Nigerian media is relatively less impressive.

Scholars and researchers (Edison, 2017; Galbreath, 2018; Green, 2019; Andi et al., 2020) have come to the agreement that the media is male-dominated, and the newsroom is a place for propagating this dominance and the relegation of the female gender's place in the communication sphere.

The patriarchal dominance in the media, especially newspapers, is a global phenomenon noticed across cultures and societies. In Africa, especially Nigeria,

several studies (Enwefah, 2016; Ibrahim et al., 2021; Oyinade et al., 2013; Osazee-Odia & Nwokoro, 2021; Sanusi&Adelabu, 2015) have been conducted examining areas like the place of women in broadcast and journalism practice, situational analysis of gender inequality, safety of female journalists, gender representation in the editorial and reportorial hierarchy of newspapers among others.

Theoretical Consideration

Feminist theories serve as a springboard for understanding female roles in journalism. Additionally, feminist media scholars have continued to interrogate the chequered history of gender and journalism, including the controversies, intricacies and prospects of a gender-balanced newsroom situation.

Feminist media theory encompasses a broad range of methodologies exploring general gender inequalities and norms in social settings and as advanced in the media. Feminist media theory ultimately relies on feminist hypothesis through the application of concepts and logic outlining feminist principles and ideas to media production intricacies like the forms of representation in news and entertainment, how they are received and hired, promotion and top-level decision making. The argument has been that if women own or control the production of media content and decision-making, the media will reflect more women's perspectives and worldviews (Steiner, 2014).

Of the platforms available to feminist liberation crusaders, the media remains a grand battleground. This is so because, despite the negative perception of society about reporters and writers in general (Mayer, 2020), the role of newspapers in highlighting gender issues, representation and stereotypes is undeniable. The preceding is reflected in the Nigerian newspaper industry as males are projected to a greater extent than females (Egwu, 2022) because they (males) occupy greater decision-making positions and invariably produce more content considered hard or more newsworthy than females.

Most often in communication, female voices are not considered significant contributors or are totally erased in public discourse. Historically, on account of religious and cultural considerations, Africans, especially Nigerian women, have been dissuaded from speaking up in public or being part of public discourse. Although significant changes are happening (Egwu, 2022), women are still confined to the perimeters of the mainstream newspaper workplace and content production, struggling for gender equality in the newsroom.

Furthermore, early feminist media theories have focused on how gender stereotypes influenced communication, with the conclusion that cultural bias

credited male for creating language and have set the standard for accepted interpersonal communication, ultimately influencing how both gender use language. This cultural bias phenomenon is corroborated by Griffin (2009), who said that the public media milieu is built on indispensable principles that deny women the opportunity of being legitimate communicators in the media space.

Symbolic Annihilation

Ultimately, this study adopts the Tuchman (2000) Symbolic Annihilation theory to holistically approach the subject of female place in newspapers opinion pages. The concept behind the theory examines the domineering social and occupational representation of male folks in a full range of roles while under-representing women in a narrow range of the same roles. This stereotypical portrayal of women in traditional roles such as housework and child-raising, among others, according to Tuchman, focuses on women's physical attributes. At the same time, their achievements, unfortunately, are less reported or downplayed.

Therefore, within a feminist theoretical framework, Tuchman's symbolic Annihilation theory could provide a leeway to scrutinise and analyse challenges discoverable in media workplace and content. Also, it affords a means to examine how to correct current stereotype practices in the media and explore alternatives that promote emancipation in the communication sphere. Hence, the theory can be relevant to the exploration of issues that withhold the feminine voice from being heard in proper numbers and perspectives in the Nigerian newspaper columnist and opinion article pages, which hold an enviable position in socio-political, economic and cultural discourse, enabling a sanctioned platform to critique, analyse, and proffer enduring solutions to relevant societal issues.

Methodology

The study carried out a content analysis of opinion and column pages published by major Nigerian newspapers to provide answers to the research questions. The researchers adopted a purposive sampling in identifying each column or page, including articles written by newspaper staff, regular columnists and contributors. The study opted to code and analyse contents from three years to the study period, i.e. from June 2020 to July 2023. Another significant condition was to code columns or pages penned by writers who have made more than three contributions in the period under review. This means that even if an author has written three articles in a particular publication within the period, such was not considered a regular contributor and, therefore, is ignored. This approach enables a quantitative assessment of newspaper columns and opinion articles written by men and women.

It should be noted that Nigeria's newspaper market is South dominated. Hence, most major national newspapers are situated in the southern part of the country, especially in the city of Lagos, with a few exceptions of some print-copy and online publications established in Abuja, the capital city of Nigeria. The study includes major Nigerian newspapers which are widely circulated, have a national spread and maintained strong online presence with followers. The Vanguard, The Punch, The Guardian, This Day, The Sun, Leadership, The Nation and New Telegraph are in the commercial city of Lagos. In contrast, Daily Trust and the Nigerian Tribune are located in Abuja and Ibadan, respectively. Ironically, all major Nigerian online-only newspapers, People's Gazette, The Cable and Premium Times, are Abuja-based. The only Nigerian newspaper that publishes outside the country's shore is Sahara Reporters, based in New York City.

The study coded for the number of columns and the number of columnists/contributors available in each publication. This yielded 232 structured columns/opinion pages. However, there are 572 columnists and contributors (see Table 1). It also coded for each newspaper's number and ratio of female-to-male columnists/contributors.

Four content categories was agreed on in addition to identification variables. The study codes for the pages' primary and secondary topics, such as Health (comprising all health-related matters), Lifestyles (which includes entertainment, love, relationships, food, religion and fashion), Current Affairs (which encompasses politics, economy, and education) and Expert's opinion (encompassing expert opinions on law, science and technology, motivational speakers/writers, arts, agriculture, sports).

The study looks at how the newspapers organised their columns and opinion pages and take note of publications with structured and not structured columns. The researchers look at the regularity of contributions by writers and their frequency. Certain newspapers like the Vanguard, Nigerian Tribune, Punch, The Sun and Guardian are regarded as legacy Nigerian newspapers (each having been established for about four decades, except The Sun, which is 22-year old) with hard-copy and online presence, have well established, regular and structured columns and writers who make regular contribution. Meanwhile, relatively new publications which only have an online presence, such as Premium Times, Peoples Gazette, Sahara Reporters and The Cable, have unstructured columns with irregular and inconsistent contributions from the writers.

The coding guide agreed that the presence of a female is represented with 2, and a male one (1) and where a topic is written 0. The researchers coded column title, columnist/contributor, gender, content categories, or written topics. Scott's pi formula was used for inter-coder reliability, where a score of 0.84 was achieved.

Presentation of Result

Tables 1 and 2 represent the outcome of the study. Table 1 outlines the gender distribution in Nigerian newspapers' columnists and opinion writers. Figures showed that the selected newspapers have 232 columns and opinion pages combined, while the total number of columnists and opinion writers is 572. Female writers represent 15.7%, and male contributions take 84.3%. A 479 male columnists and contributors indicate that men dominate women (whose number stands at 93) in this area of newspaper content creation.

Table 1: Gender Distribution in Nigerian Newspapers' Columnists and Opinion Writers

News paper								
	Health	Lifestyle	Current Affairs	Experts Opinion	Columns/Pages	Columnists/Contributors %	F %	M %
This Day	1	-	21	4	14	26 - 4.5	2 - 0.5	27 - 4.7
Daily Trust	1	-	38	2	13	41 - 7.1	7 - 1.2	34 - 5.9
The Sun	1	4	28	13	*45	46 - 8.0	5 - 0.8	41 - 7.2
Leadership	1	-	26	8	10	35 - 6.1	6 - 1.0	29 - 5.1
The Nation	-	-	29	-	14	30 - 5.3	-	29 - 5.1
People's Gazette	1	-	29	3	-	34 - 5.9	8 - 1.4	25 - 4.4
The Cable	-	-	38	4	4	42 - 7.3	3 - 0.5	39 - 6.8

Premi um Times	2	2	66	14	3	84 - 14.7	15 - 2.6	69 - 12.1
New Teleg raph	-	-	40	4	8	44 - 7.6	2 - 0.3	42 - 7.3
Sahar a Repor ters	-	-	53	7	2	60 - 10.4	5 - 0.8	55 - 9.6
The Vang uard	-	3	18	8	*29	27 - 5.1	7 - 1.2	22 - 3.8
The Punch	5	5	16	6	*32	32 - 5.6	9 - 1.6	23 - 4.0
The Guard ian	5	4	11	19	*25	39 - 6.6	15 - 2.6	23 - 4.0
Niger ian Tribu ne	2	11	12	7	*33	32 - 5.4	7 - 1.2	24 - 4.2
Freq uency	19	29	424	99	232	572 - 100%	93 - 15.7 %	479- 84.2%

Source: Researcher's field data, 2023

Table 2: Gender Ratio of Topics Columnists Written

Newspa per	H	H	LS	LS	CA	CA	Expe rt	Expert	T
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	
This Day	1	x	x	x	1	20	1	3	27
Daily Trust	1	x	x	x	5	33	1	1	41
The Sun	1	x	3	1	x	28	1	12	46
Leaders hip	1	x	x	x	4	22	1	7	35
The Nation	x	x	x	x	1	28	x	x	29
People' s	1	x	x	x	5	24	2	1	33

Gazette									
The Cable	x	x	x	x	2	36	1	3	42
Premium Times	1	1	x	2	10	56	4	10	84
New Telegraph	x	x	x	x	x	40	2	2	44
Sahara Reporters	x	x	x	x	3	50	2	5	60
The Vanguard	x	x	2	1	2	16	3	5	29
The Punch	2	3	4	1	2	14	1	5	32
The Guardian	4	1	2	2	3	8	6	13	39
Nigeria Tribune	1	1	2	9	x	12	4	3	32
F/ %	13 2.3	6 1.0	13 2.3	16 2.8	38 6.6	387 67.7	26 4.5	72 12.6	572

Source: Researcher's field data, 2023 (H: Health, LS: Lifestyle, CA: Current Affairs)

Table 2 presents further outlined data regarding the gender ratio of topics written by columnists and opinion writers. The objective here is to juxtapose male/female differences in content contribution regarding the primary topics. It is revealed that across the board, male writers dominate each category.

Discussion of Findings

This study explored the question of the Nigerian Newspapers' opinion columns and the interplay of female contributors in the process. Accordingly, three research questions were developed to provide direction for the analysis. The columns and opinion pages in the selected sample cover a wide range of topics. However, the study coded principally for the primary topics, encompassing broad secondary topics. Health as a journalistic beat stands alone; Lifestyle topics include entertainment, love, relationships, food, romance, religion and fashion. Current Affairs encompasses politics, economy and education.

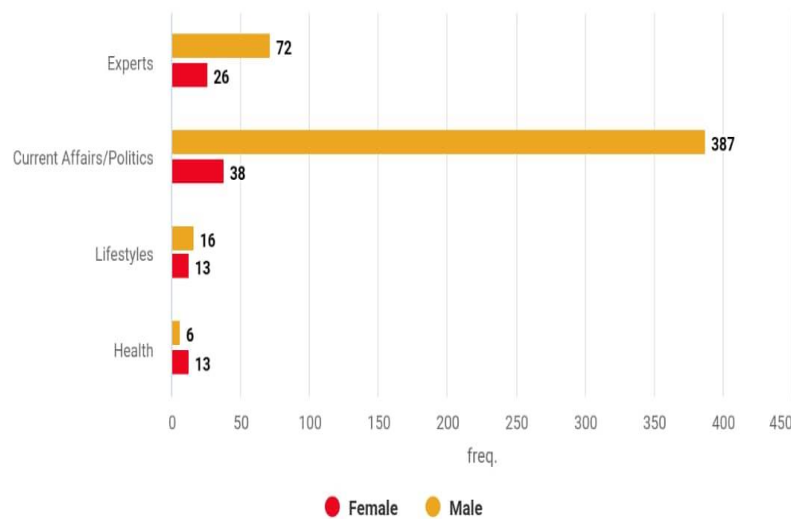
Meanwhile, Experts opinion embraces opinion on law, science and technology, motivational speakers/writers, arts, agriculture, sports and others.

Research question one inquires about the number of columnists, opinion writers and columns/pages in the Nigerian newspaper sphere. Data showed that there are 232 columns or opinion pages in the selected sample, even though there are 572 columnists and contributors. It is worth noting that there is a tendency for unstructured columns and opinion pages among online-only newspapers such as The Cable, Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and People's Gazette. While each of these newspapers has the following contributors: The Cable, 42; Sahara Reporters, 60; Premium Times, 84 and People's Gazette, 34; they maintain miserly respective columns titles or categories 4, 2 and 3 respectively, with People's Gazette having none at all. Their column or opinion pages are tagged as "opinion, column or contribution."

Though Premium Times newspaper particularly has the largest number of writers (84) at 14.7%, its column and opinion pages are less structured. It was observed that, unlike other publications whose columns have proper titles and regular contributors, Premium Times maintains this pool of writers who make an intermittent contribution. This is unlike newspapers such as The Punch, Vanguard, The Guardian, The Sun and Nigerian Tribune (with 5.6% (32), 5.1% (27), 6.6% (39), 8.0% (46) and 5.4% (32) respective contributors that maintain regular contribution, whose opinions are emplaced on a well-established and enduring column and opinion pages. Interestingly, of the sample, these publications are the oldest in the Nigerian newspaper industry—each being established as follows: The Punch, 1973; Vanguard, 1984; The Guardian, 1983; Nigerian Tribune, 1949—The Sun being the youngest, 2001.

Interestingly, the Nigerian Tribune has 33 column and opinion pages but maintains 32 contributors. The same situation is noticed regarding Vanguard newspaper, which has 29 columns but 27 contributors- indicating that one or two contributors must be writing for multiple categories.

Figure 1: Gender Ratio of Topics Columnists Write on



Research question two examines how gender-balanced Nigerian newspaper columns and opinion pages are and what kind of topics each gender writes on. Frequency data on Table 1 and Figure 1 provide a condensed view of information relating to this question. Of 572 contributors, female represents a meagre 15.7% (93). In addition to available data, this indicates that the Nigerian newspaper ecosystem still suffers gender inequality as the industry is steeped in patriarchal inclinations.

Furthermore, male writers still dominate the so-called hard topics while the female scratches the surface. The total of columnists and opinion writers analysed in this category (hard news—current affairs) reveals that 67.7% are male and 6.6% are female (Table 2). In an age where there is significant confidence disparity in gender roles at workplace and feminists’ quest for gender equality and the claim that women be engaged in jobs and activities traditionally reserved for men, the newsroom seems unfazed by the pursuit.

It is incongruous that even topics which are traditional areas of expertise for women writers are being encroached upon by men. Lifestyles, as a primary category comprising topics on entertainment, love, food, relationships, and fashion, among others, has only 13 (2.3%) women contributing, while male writers represent 2.8% (16). The only other category where women contributors surpassed their male counterparts is Health (where there are 2.3% (13) female and 1.0% (6) of male writers. This outcome agrees with the position of

Tomaski& Gottfried (2023) in the report for the Pew Research Center, which concluded that women, compared to men, are more likely to cover health, education, families, and social issues and policy beats.

While Current Affairs has a ratio of male-female 387:38 (the highest male dominance), Health has 6:13 (the only primary topic area where the female has the upper hand). Interestingly, Lifestyles has several newspapers such as This Day, Daily Trust, Leadership, The Nation, The Cable, New Telegraph and Sahara Reporters with no columns dedicated to this content or having opinion writers. In the few who do, such as Premium Times, two males write content, while the Nigerian Tribune male-female ratio is 9:2. Only the Punch and the Sun have a 3:1 and 4:1 female-male ratio respectively. In the male-dominated hard news primary topics of Current Affairs and Politics, newspapers like The Sun, New Telegraph and Nigerian Tribune have no female voices.

This result is consistent with the position of scholars (Makama, 2013; Aladi & Okoro, 2021; Oludiran, 2022) who posited that the newsroom is a male-dominated environment where the female place or voice is suppressed. In every beat revealed by this study, male contributors trounced the female, except in the health category.

The situation is compounded when the audience demographics of the selected sample are analyzed. According to data from Similar Web's August 2023 ranking, all the publications have female visitors below 40%, except for The Guardian, whose demographics are 58.84% and 41.16%, respectively, for male and female. Do women not read newspapers, or do the content not satisfy their information needs? The other obvious question is whether women are unprepared to write or are even unavailable (as opinions have insinuated) for the rigorous and challenging mental exertion needed to succeed in the act of columns and opinions writing. Alternatively, they (women) may feel insecure about breaking further the traditional jinx and are, therefore, shutting themselves out of the conversation that goes in the opinion article pages of newspapers. The foundation of the interrogation, as Tarpley (2011) propositioned, is not the absence of media organisations featuring female contributors but that they (women) need to contribute to the first place.

Research question three seeks to unravel the Nigerian newspaper with the most female columnists and opinion writers. Though more women journalists now hold leadership positions in newsrooms across media organisations (Egwu, 2022), this progressive change in women's place in journalism, especially in newspapers, has yet to translate to a more robust and far-reaching female voice being heard in op-ed and opinion pages. As it is observed from the data, female writers make up only 15.7% of Nigerian newspapers' columnists.

Additionally, the result indicates that The Guardian and Premium Times (which has the highest number of contributors) hold a tally on the newspaper with the largest number of female writers—2.6% (15) each. The Nation newspaper does not have a female opinion writer in its lineup, while The New Telegraph has the smallest number of female writers—0.3% (2). The implication is that at 2.6%, the newspapers with the highest number of female opinion writers have only scratched the surface in balancing the gender scale in this area of journalism practice. It is appalling when attention is drawn to publication like The Nation which has a dearth of female writers, plus those (like The Cable and Sahara Reporters) who seem to merely want to fill in the gap by throwing a few women contributors in the midst.

Conclusion/Recommendations

The United Nations Beijing Declaration of 1995 laid the solid foundation for the enthronement of workplace gender equality, especially in the media environment. Therefore, newspapers have roles to play, particularly in the digital era where information access and dissemination has been liberalised. Women can now participate in the newspaper information transmission process at different levels as news sources, reporter, and above all, contributors and columnists where there exists enlarged liberty to put their opinion in better perspectives to reach a larger audience. It is expedient to note that women's participation and contribution to the newspaper content in Nigeria is instrumental to achieving the objectives or otherwise of this Declaration. Documentation of the place of the female gender in Nigerian newspapers will give insight into the understanding of how far and wide women have taken or been given these opportunities to better their lots and contribute to societal growth such as revealed in our findings.

Data from this study indicate that Nigerian newspapers' opinion pages are strewn with an avalanche of male voices—almost immersing the female opinion. There is no doubt that as scholars (Davtyan-Gevorgya, 2016; Aladi & Okoro, 2021) have argued, the media is male-chauvinistic, and press offerings are male-produced in accordance with their taste. Moreover, women have been marginalised and denied proper consideration in media issues. For instance, among journalists and their patrons in Nigeria, a culture has long been adopted as a form of salutation for reporters whenever, wherever they are gathered—male and female. The four words have become the catchphrase for whoever wants to court and patronise journalists. That salutation is: "Gentlemen of the press"—a chauvinistic appropriation designed to portray journalism as a male forte regardless of the presence of women in the profession. There is also a further pointer to this anti-feminist inclination worldwide where reporters or news people are traditionally referred to as newsmen.

It is worthy of note that head-to-head, the male-to-female ratio of the Nigerian population is almost at equilibrium. In 2021, the country's female population was approximately 105.57 million, while the male amounted to approximately 107.83 million (O'Neill, 2023)—a little over two million differences. Regardless of this huge number, gender-wise, there remained a huge gap in how information flows to the public. A meagre 15.7% of females contributing op-ed content (as against 84.3% male contribution) is manifestly inadequate and proportionally unbalanced to create gender equality and harmony in this aspect of newspaper offering—opinion pages.

Even on topics such as parenting, home affairs, and relationships, among other lifestyle subtopics that are deemed to be traditional female areas of expertise, the Nigerian newspapers' opinion pages have not given the female voices enough space, or they (newspapers) have not found enough women to take up those roles.

As society struggles with gender equality and females begin to find footing in several spheres where they have previously been denied access, it is recommended that the newspaper industry find the opportunity to contribute to opinion pages a worthwhile service to society where women, especially in the Nigerian context, play a pivotal role.

Notwithstanding that the African woman who has been held down by traditional, cultural, and religious inclinations and practices is succinctly reflected in how the media, specifically newspapers, project gender voice and balance. The female gender has unique perspectives to bring to diverse issues consequent upon their natural makeup, distinct from their male counterpart. Since newspapers, especially columns and opinion pages, represent a wide platform for interrogating issues with significant impact on society, it is argued that this essential female voice and perspectives be given a fillip through contribution.

However, to ensure this egalitarian information flows through newspaper opinion pages, the question remains that of the willingness of the female folks to spare time, effort and intellectual exercise to contribute. Also, newspaper firms should commit to engaging and offering women their platforms. As the outcome of this study is a significant platform and provides the groundwork for further research, it is recommended that future studies look at this area critically and examine more deeply the topics and subtopics and why the few women who contribute write.

Another important angle that needs further exploration is the attitude and perception of the readers towards content provided by the female folks. Do readers trust the opinions and judgment of female writers? How do readers

evaluate, and measure content written by women? Which would they want to read first if a male and female write the same topic?

Finally, it is argued that journalism institutions worldwide have a significant role in maintaining gender balance in newspapers' opinion pages. Male and female students need to be groomed to understand and appreciate the essence of this equality. Female students, in particular, should be trained to understand their roles in their larger societies via newspaper opinion pages. News reporting and feature writing classes are the ideal grounds for this all-important grooming. Analysis and commentary on news items, trending issues and matters of significance to society should serve as a template in this direction.

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