

Influence of Gender Appeals on Audience Consumption of Television News

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Abstract

The assumption that gender plays a crucial role in broadcasters' persuasive skills and the view that female or male broadcasters face differing gender-based challenges all require critical enquiry. Also, the extent to which these gender issues propel broadcasters to go to any length in order to put up a persuasive appearance can no doubt be equally interesting in research. Therefore, this study examined the research areas and scholars' opinions about the influence of vocal dexterity and physical appearance of male and female broadcasters. The study was survey based and used the questionnaire and in-depth interview to solicit opinions of audience as well as broadcast scholars and professionals. The multistage and purposive sampling techniques were employed to select 219 respondents from Calabar Metropolis and six broadcast communication scholars in tertiary institutions. The Elaboration Likelihood Theory served as the theoretical framework. Result of the study revealed that female newscasters are not more credible than their male counterparts and that physical appearance does not have much significance on the audiences' preference for news consumption. It is recommended that audience should be persuaded at all times to appreciate broadcast contents and not the gender-based issues associated with such contents.

Keywords: Appeal, Audience, Broadcasting, Competence, Consumption, Credibility, Dexterity, Gender, Journalism, News, Persuasion.

Introduction

It is a truism that our participation in different events in the society is directly or indirectly influenced by gender appeals, and television news consumption is not an exception. Visual aesthetic elements of broadcast media do not only play significant role in adding meaning to the message they send to viewers, but they also determine the level of persuasiveness of the message to the viewers (Machin and Polzer, 2015, p.1). They opined that in contemporary broadcast media practice, messages are built mostly around visual images and content are shaped to fit already formed visual identity and this cannot be achieved by mere conjecture. Machin and Polzer (2015, p.2) also explained that, “These visuals are not simply mere style or presentation but form part of the way in which news creates meaning and also about the social relations they set up with readers, users and viewers”.

From the above assertion, visual journalism or communication design is not just about looks; it is about performance – what role is performed by the design in communicating a message or what impact do the design created in the readers or viewers? Visual journalism is more about actions than about objects and part of this action is imbedded in research about such visuals and how they appeal to viewers particularly, in television broadcasting. The visual journalist has the onus of generating the communication by researching into the audience and designing a message in which the audience can interact with contents meaningfully. The responsibility falls on him or her to research into the best way(s) of enhancing a visual communication situation that has impact on the audience's behaviour and attitudes.

It has been observed that most television news media promote the appearance of one gender over another. Warhurst and Nickson (2009, p.385) argue that “broadcasting institutions, often promote idealised images of women – a glamorised version of attractiveness - through employing women with the right look and sex appeal”. On his part, Gill (2003) cited in North (2009, p.198), added that “news reading is an area that focuses on the physical appearance of the newsreader. Whether the emphasis should be more on female than male readers or vice versa, requires research and if this is ignored, it will end in the bias of preferring one gender to another. There is a 'deliberate re-sexualisation and re-commodification of the bodies, including those who are newsreaders”. In other words, beauty and sexuality have consciously or unconsciously become part and parcel of persuasive television messages in contemporary times.

Owing to this, there seem to be more female newscasters than male in most broadcast stations in Nigeria and all over the world. Van-Zoonen (1998, p.43) argues that female newscasters are portrayed in the media as objects meant for men to view and get pleasure from. This is perhaps what Holland (1987, p.133) meant when he also pointed out that “women newsreaders were 'seen as an opportunity for jokes, pictures and suggestive comments' as 'every detail of their dress and appearance was commented on, their styles were compared, their sexuality stressed”.

There seems to be a general belief that sex stereotyping is creeping into broadcast newsrooms and the media in general. Beliefs and discussions transmitted through the media spread to everyday life, and because television is still the medium that provides news for a majority of people, there are strong cases for continuing to explore the ideologies of beauty in particular and gender in general underlying the selection of its newsreaders (Mitra, Web & Wolfe, 2014, pp.45-46). Citing Strickland (1980), Weibel, Wissmath and Groner (2008, p.470) aver that in broadcasting institutions, old women with grey hair are discriminated against. They are perceived as not being presentable; compared to their male counterparts whose grey hair suggests that they are more credible than the female. Older women are easily replaced by younger women in broadcast stations.

Generally in journalism practice, what counts more in deciding who qualifies to practice is competence. But this trend appears to be threatened in recent time as beauty and sexuality attributes of female and male broadcasters seem to command more attention and interest to the viewers than their competence or even the news content. This has also gone a long way to influence the recruitment process of journalists by media executives, who prefer to hire beautiful and good looking ladies. This they do without recourse to professionalism and competence of the persons concerned.

One then begins to wonder whether such decisions on gender appreciation are just based on arbitrariness or on scientific research to determine what appeals to the audience! The news managers, presumably, make such decisions believing that the audience are more attracted to women newsreaders than men because of their beauty. They no doubt, experience difficulty in the selection process, and additional performance requirements are exacted on them; but if such managers are armed with scientific research tools, such difficulties would be overcome. For example, Mitra, Webb and Wolfe (2014, pp.45-46) once quoted a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) journalist, Kate Adie, as saying that “they want people with cute faces and cute bottoms and nothing else in between ... they are more concerned about the shape of your leg than professional ability”. This is a thing of great concern in the journalism profession; and we believe that only scientific research can truly prove the veracity or otherwise of these gender-related assumptions.

Therefore, this study focuses on research implications and influence of gender appeals on audience consumption of television news; with selected broadcast stations in Calabar Metropolis in Nigeria in focus. In other words, the work investigates the implications of gender issues on persuasive television broadcasts and how the audiences view the presentation of the physical attractiveness of male or female newsreaders in news reporting. Specific areas of focus include: to examine what guides television content designers and broadcast executives in deciding whether to feature a male or female presenters in their programmes and if the audience members respond differently to news reports presented by a male or a

female newsreaders in selected television stations. The basis of the investigation is to find out whether the dominant gender stereotypes become associated with the journalism profession and to determine what influence this has on viewers and their television news consumption patterns.

Specific objective of the study include to:

1. Investigate whether or not the audiences of the selected television channels in Calabar Metropolis regard female newsreaders to be more credible than their male counterparts.
2. Ascertain how the physical appearance of a female or male newsreader in the selected television stations influences the audiences' preference for news consumption.
3. Investigate whether it is the physical appearance of the newscasters that makes a news programme persuasive/credible or the content of the news itself.

The following research questions were also formulated to guide this study:

1. In what ways do the audiences of the selected television channels in Calabar Metropolis regard female newsreaders to be more credible than their male counterparts?
2. To what extent does the physical appearance of a female or male newsreader in the selected television stations influence the audiences' preference for news consumption?
3. Is it the physical appearance of the newscaster that makes given news item persuasive/credible or the content of the news or itself?

Gender Issues in Nigeria and Media Representation

Gender issues in Nigeria and elsewhere in the world are guided by cultural, religious, social and political practices which relegate, deprive and deny one gender or otherwise of their human rights. A significant lesson one tend to learn from feminist media theory for instance, over the past twenty years has been that women's experiences of discrimination, and indeed of identity itself, is heavily determined by differences in terms of class, economic status, age, sexuality, religion, race and nation. The inadequacies of women and media studies that conflate the condition of white heterosexual, middle-class women with the condition of all women are now acknowledged, and contemporary media research has tried to grapple with more complex understandings of gender identity and experience (Gallagher, 2001, p.2).

Women for example, have been stereotyped and misrepresented in many respects, especially in the media, and that greatly influences the kind of perception the public have about them. The mass media are replete with several female stereotypical representations ranging from the “bra-burning feminists to housewives, from sex-crazed seductresses to neurotic career women” (Macdonald, 1995, p.13). With regard to the above assertions, Ugwulor (2009, pp. 43-44) argues:

Each of these representations has generated one form of stigma or the other and with a negative image. Women are portrayed as sex objects, especially teenage girls, whose function is to satisfy the sexual desire of male partners or matrons whose only duty is house-keeping, would deceive the women into believing that the most they can accomplish in life is becoming housewives, mistresses or homemakers. Such representations can also lead them into seeing themselves as incapable of making significant contributions to society including persuasive news reporting.

What this entails is that the mass media, especially the television, tend to legitimise the kind of image the society paints about the female folk by projecting them in such light.

Several researches have shown that female newscasters are portrayed as objects of laughter, while their pictures, appearance, dress, sexuality and styles are commented on and compared with the male. Values and discourses disseminated in the media, especially television has continued to examine the belief in attractiveness in choosing the news reporter. The mass media and television in particular, play a significant role in perpetuating myths and stereotypes about physical attractiveness. It tends to present a narrow image of gender, focusing on visual appearance, and indeed emphasises appearance above other qualities (Mitra *et al* 2014, p.46). “Organisations, including broadcasting institutions, often promote idealised images of women – a glamorised version of attractiveness - through employing women with the ‘right look’” (Warhurst and Nickson, 2009, p.385) and sex appeal. Although news-reading for both sexes is a platform where audience attention is sometimes focused on physical appearance; but this is more prevalent with the female presenters.

This has made many people to believe that women reporters are frequently relegated to soft news stories, like health and entertainment news, whereas their male counterparts are given stories of political and international importance. Women have also been underrepresented as sources on news programs. According to Irvin (2013, p. 39), “male experts are often used as sources than female experts, and female experts are used less in hard news stories than men”. The above assertions represent the different views people have about female broadcasters and such impressions go a long way to determine how the audiences consume news items on television.

Review of Empirical Studies

Different studies have been carried out with the bid to ascertain the persuasive power of gender, sexuality and physical appearance of the female broadcasters in broadcasting. Most of the researchers have come up with claims in support of the idea that the physical appearance of female newscaster has great influence on viewers' news in-take as they appear to be more persuasive than their male counterparts; while some other disagree, stating that other variables like vocal dexterity and competence also contribute to determine whether a news presentation is persuasive or not. A few

of such studies have been reviewed in this section in order to put claims and assumptions of this study in the right perspective.

To clearly understand the subject matter of beauty and persuasiveness, it is very necessary to begin the review with Nancy Etcoff's views about beauty. In 1999, Etcoff, an American Psychologist, made an inquiry into what we find beautiful and why - what in our nature makes us susceptible to beauty, what qualities in people evoke this response, and why sensitivity to beauty is ubiquitous in human nature (*The New York Times*, 1999). Etcoff's views were presented in a book she titled: *Survival of the Prettiest: The Science of Beauty*. She argued that beauty is neither a cultural construction, an invention of the fashion industry, nor a backlash against feminism – it's in our biology. For instance, Etcoff asserts that although racism and class snobbery are reflected in images of beauty, beauty itself is indifferent to race and thrives on diversity. She explained that beauty is an essential and ineradicable part of human nature that is revered and ferociously pursued in nearly every civilisation and for good reason.

Contrary to the views held by many experts and scholars that beauty is inconsequential since it explains nothing, solves nothing, and teaches us nothing; and as such, it should not have a place in intellectual discourse, it has been argued that outside the realm of ideas, beauty rules as nobody has stopped looking at it, and no one has stopped enjoying the sight of beauty. Consciously or unconsciously, people admire and revere beauty. According to Etcoff (1999), beautiful images (e.g., people) serve as models for others to follow. The *New York Times* (1999) puts it this way: “A crowd-pleasing image becomes a mold, and a beauty is followed by her imitator, and then by the imitator of her imitator” (<http://www.nytimes.com/books/first/e/etcoff-prettiest.html>).

This explains the reasons why people can afford to go to the extreme in their bids to make themselves look good. They invest so much of their resources in beauty and risk so much for it to the extent that one would think that their lives depended on it. Even the mass media industries have become susceptible to this craze for beauty. Aside from serving as platforms and channels for the fashion industries to showcase their wares, the mass media, especially the television, portrays images of beauty as a tool of persuasion for their audience members through feminine representations. Thus, Etcoff's propositions about beauty has great significant to the broadcast industries in the contemporary time.

In 2014, Mitra, Web and Wolfe carried out a study on the responses of television audience to the external looks of TV newscasters in the United Kingdom. It investigated the opinions of television viewers with regard to the outward looks of newsreaders. The researchers interviewed 20 respondents (10 females and 10 males), through quota sampling technique, and distributed 167 copies of questionnaire to television viewers consisting of 94 female and 72 male. Findings revealed that the respondents perceived that female newscasters were selected because of their

physical outlooks. In terms of credibility of the presenters, it was acknowledged that men were more credible even if they were old, young and appeared nicely. In situations where females appeared attractive, they were often derided and considered less important with regard to abilities and intelligence. The study further indicated that viewers were more interested in the content of the news than in the appearance of the newsreader.

Another study was conducted by Toro (2005) on “Public Perception of Credibility of Male and Female Sportscasters in Virginia, USA”. The study used the Impression Formation Theory as the theoretical framework. The researcher adopted the survey research design and administered 192 copies of questionnaire, out of which 85 respondents were males and 107 female students who offered communication courses at South-eastern University in the spring of 2005. Sixteen sessions of experiments were conducted by a female experimenter. Each session used the printed questionnaire and a PowerPoint presentation to gather data from the respondents. Thirty-two photographs of different sports presenters selected from local TV stations in the country were given to each student and they were told to do a report about their views of each presenter. They wrote their views by rating the presenters on a scale of '0 to 100', where 'Not Very Credible at All' was rated on a scale of 0; while 'Extremely Credible' was on a scale of 100.

It became very obvious from the findings that gender discrimination exist in public view of both men and women sports presenters. Male sportscasters were judged as most credible overall. The sportscasters' sex was found to be the most powerful indicator of credibility. The above study appeared to be scientific in terms of research effort as indicated by the methodology adopted. The result, however, indicated that female and male used gender discrimination to form their opinion on sports news anchors. In other words, the study confirmed the biased tendency that a woman sports presenter is not chosen because of her knowledge in sports broadcasting, but her physical attractiveness.

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on the Elaboration Likelihood Theory (ELT) propounded by John Cacioppo and Richard Petty in 1986. ELT is a persuasion theory based on dual process of describing change of attitude forms. Cacioppo and Petty explained the different ways of processing stimuli or messages by the receivers and their effects on attitude change. They posited that a receiver of a persuasive message processes information on central or peripheral routes toward attitude change.

The central route to persuasion involve a high level of message elaboration, a situation whereby the information recipient carefully and thoughtfully considers the true merit of the message before deciding whether to act in a prescribed manner or not. That is, in the central route, a message recipient is persuaded when the message is in line with his or her attitude. If the message receiver discovers that the message is

important to him or her, his assessment of the message will be high. The increase in the message evaluation will likely cause attitude change that will have a lasting effect on his or her behaviour. Here, only the quality of the message arguments determines the extent of attitude change (Cacioppo and Petty, 1986, pp.132-133).

In the peripheral route to persuasion, the decision is not based on the message itself. Peripheral cues consider such variables as the credibility of the source of message, the format and style of the message, as well as the receiver's mood. The likableness, consensus and credibility factors are considered. There is the likelihood that a message recipient will believe a source that is credible. Moreover, it is natural for a message recipient to believe and be persuaded by an individual he or she likes (Cacioppo and Petty, 1986, p.134).

Cacioppo and Petty assumed that an attitude formed through the central route rather than the peripheral route is stronger and more difficult to change. By implication, in the television industry, newsreaders are perceived differently by different segments of the audience. From studies, it has been established that television audiences are sometimes engulfed in captivating reportorial than the presenters' physical look; while others concentrate on physical appearance of the broadcaster. In the selected television stations for example, they may be audience members who may not be interested in the newsreaders' physical appearance, but would pay attention to the news report probably because of their preference for the TV channel. Others may be attracted to or persuaded by the physical features of the male or female newsreaders than the news.

Methodology

The survey research design was used to gather data for this study. The design enabled the researcher to select the respondents for this study from the entire population of viewers of Cross River Broadcasting Corporation Television (CRBCTV), the Nigerian Television Authority Channel 9 (NTA channel 9), African Independent Television (AIT) and Channels Television in Calabar Metropolis. The choice of the TV stations was based on their viability and state-wide coverage.

A total of 250 respondents were sampled for this study. The population consisted of all categories of people of eighteen years and above. In the end, out of the 250 copies of questionnaire distributed, 219 were returned by the respondents. The purposive and multi-stage sampling techniques were used to select the respondents of the study. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling procedure that involves selecting elements based on the researcher's judgment about which elements will facilitate his or her investigation.

The four TV stations selected for study here were purposively selected on the basis of their relevance to the study. According to Adler and Clark (2011, p.122), "multistage sampling is a probability sampling procedure that involves several stages, such as randomly selecting clusters from a population, then randomly

selecting elements from each of the clusters.” The multistage sampling approach was employed in this study, because the purposive sampling technique, simple random sampling as well as availability techniques were required to select a certain number of television stations, streets, houses and then individual respondents from the different houses from Calabar Metropolis, the area of the study. This is because it was not possible to study all the television stations, streets and houses or individual respondents in the area.

The multistage sampling approach was necessary because the study involved progressively narrowing down TV stations and Calabar Metropolis into manageable sizes. For instance, four TV stations were purposively selected, a few number of streets were chosen using the same purposive sampling, while systematic sampling technique was also used at the third stage involving selecting houses and the actual respondents from those houses. This was done by first, arbitrarily selecting the first house in the streets involved, and afterwards, other houses were selected at certain intervals to avoid bias. In addition to the use of the questionnaire to collect data from respondents, the researcher interviewed six media experts to understand their position on the subject matter. Thus, even the selection of the media executives for the interview was done purposively, because of their relevance in providing the response solicited by the researchers.

The questionnaire was closed-ended in structure, and was divided into two sections; with Section One containing information about the demographics of the respondents; while the second section was meant to elicit certain degree of uniform information from the respondents with regard to their opinion about Influence of Gender Appeals on Audience Consumption of Television News in the selected television stations. The descriptive method of data analysis was employed. The data gathered were presented in tables and the frequency of occurrence was calculated using simple percentage statistical method.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

The data generated from the respondents were presented in tables and the simple percentage statistical method was used to analyse them in line with the research objectives and questions formulated for the study. The tables are presented below:

Table 1: Sex Distribution of Respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	96	43.8
Female	123	56.2
Total	219	100

Source: Field work, 2017.

Table 1 indicates that there were 123 females, representing 56.2% of the entire sampled population of 219 respondents, while male respondents were 96, representing 43.8%.

Table 2: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
21 – 30	39	17.8
31 – 40	36	16.4
41 – 50	48	21.9
51 – 60	60	27.4
61 and above	36	16.4
Total	219	100

Source: Field work, 2017.

Table 2 above indicates that respondents within the age bracket of 51 – 60 are 60, representing 27.4 percent of the entire sampled population of 219. This age bracket is dominant in sample respondents.

Table 3: Respondents' Perception that Female Newsreaders are more credible than their Female Counterparts

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	30	13.7
Agree	36	16.4
Disagree	51	23.3
Strongly Disagree	51	23.3
Neutral	51	23.3
Total	219	100

Source: Field work, 2017

Table 3 above indicates that 51 respondents, representing 23.3 percent disagree that Female Newsreaders are more credible. Another 51 (23.3%) of the respondents strongly disagree that female newscasters are more credible than the male newscasters. Similarly, 51 (23.3%) of the respondents were neutral.

Table 4: Respondents' Opinion on whether female newsreaders are more intelligent than their male counterparts

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	15	6.85
Agree	21	9.59
Disagree	96	43.8
Strongly Disagree	36	16.4
Neutral	51	23.3
Total	219	100

Source: Field work, 2017

Table 4 above indicates that 96 respondents representing 43.8% out of the entire sampled population of 219 disagree that female newsreaders are more intelligent than male. The figure topped the table.

Table 5: Respondents' Opinion that female newscasters are more honest than their Male Counterparts

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	18	8.22
Agree	24	10.9
Disagree	87	39.7
Strongly Disagree	33	15.1
Neutral	57	26.0
Total	219	100

Source: Field work, 2017

As shown by the result presented in Table 5 above, of the 219 respondents, 87 of them, representing 39.7% disagree that female reporters are more honest than their male counterparts; while 33 respondents representing 15.1% strongly disagreed. The result is that the study did not see honesty as gender-based issue.

Table 6: Effects of the Appearance of Female Newscaster on Audience's News Consumption

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Attracts attention	47	21.46
No effect	93	42.5
Persuasion	26	11.87
Increase desire	26	11.87
Inspires and motivates	29	13.24
Total	219	100

Source: Field work, 2017.

Table 6 indicates that 93 (42.5%) of the respondents dominated the sample and they claim that the appearance of the female newscaster has no effect on their news consumption in the four television stations studied.

Table 7: Respondents' Opinion about what attract them to Newscasters in of the Selected TV Stations

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Beauty	30	13.7
Mode of Dressing	42	19.1
Make-up	21	9.6
Voice	90	41.1
Others (Eloquence, pronunciation, appearance, etc)	36	16.4
Total	219	100

Source: Field work, 2017.

Table 7 reveals that 90 respondents, which represent 41.1% indicated that they were attracted to the reporters because of their voice, indicating that the quality of voice, a natural personality was scored the highest compared to other artificial personality of the newsreaders.

Table 8: Respondents' Opinion about the Observable Qualities of a Newscaster that make News Report very Persuasive

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Mode of Dressing	39	17.8
Facial Expression	27	12.3
Mode of Presentation	6	2.74
Physical Appearance	27	12.3
Voice	72	32.9
No Effect	3	1.37
Pronunciation	39	17.8
Comportment	6	2.74
Total	219	100

Source: Field work, 2017

Table 8 indicates that 72 respondents representing 32.9% of the respondents out of the entire sampled population of 219 claimed that the visible feature that made news reporting by the male or female newsreader more persuasive was the voice.

Table 9: Respondents' Opinion on whether or not they are persuaded by the Content of News Broadcast or the Physical appearance of the Male/Female News Presenter

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
News	144	65.8
Physical appearance	60	27.4
Neutral	15	6.85
Total	219	100

Source: Field work, 2017

Table 9 indicates that 144 respondents, representing 65.8% dominated the result expressing the opinion that they were persuaded by the news and not the physical appearance of either male or female newscaster.

Table 10: Respondents' Opinion on whether or not Female Newsreaders are more persuasive than their Male counterparts

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	54	24.7
No	99	45.2
Neutral	66	30.1
Total	219	100

Source: Field work, 2017.

Table 10 reveals that 99 (45.2%) of the respondents claim that female reporters are not more persuasive than male.

Result and Discussion

Discussion is carried out by matching the responses of the respondents to the interview and questionnaire instruments to the research questions in order to ascertain the implications of gender issues in persuasive broadcast journalism using selected broadcast media channels in Calabar metropolis as a case study.

Research Question One

In what ways do the audiences of the selected television channels in Calabar Metropolis regard female newsreaders to be more credible than their male counterparts?

To answer this question, results in Tables 3, 4 and 5 were used. Table 3 shows that female newscasters were adjudged to be more credible than their male

counterparts. The table indicates that out of the 219 respondents, 51 of them, representing 23.3 percent strongly disagree that the female newscasters are more credible than the male. Also, 51 (23.3%) disagreed, and another 51 (23.3%) of the respondents were neutral. This result requires further study to determine why the higher number of females in the sample did not positively affect the credibility rating of women newscasters in the four TV stations studied. Questions to be answered by such research should include questions like, if all the respondents were feminists, could the result have remained the same? Or why were there a high number of respondents sitting on the fence regarding the credibility rating of female newscasters when there were more females among the respondents?

Table 4 indicates that 96 respondents representing 43.8% out of the entire sampled population of 219 disagreed that female newsreaders are more intelligent than male. The figure topped the table. This also has a lot of research implications. First of all, since in this study there were more female respondents compared to male, it would have resulted to higher number of respondents agreeing with the statement that female newscasters are more intelligent than their male counterparts. The implications of this study is that intelligence is not determined by gender. This conclusion cannot be upheld without further research to determine public perception of intelligence. Also as shown by the result in Table 5 above, of the 219 respondents, 87 of them, representing 39.7% disagreed that female reporters are more honest than their male counterparts; while 33 respondents representing 15.1% strongly disagreed. The result is that the study did not see honesty as gender-based issue. This result also has a lot of research implications.

Generally, the findings have indicated that female newscasters are not more credible than their male colleagues. In news reporting, the credibility of a newscaster is seen through the characteristics or personal qualities that he/she portrays to enable viewers or listeners to believe in the news. Since it is difficult to know when a newscaster is credible in news reporting, more research is needed. However, personal traits like honesty and intelligence can be sure ways of ascertaining a newscaster's credibility; but questions like honesty and intelligence regarding 'what?' need to be answered in further research. Communication scholars like Perloff (2003, p.159) have identified credibility as one of the three persuasive communicator factors, along with authority and social attractiveness, which makes it a very dominant determinant of persuasiveness. However, although this study was not intended to make a comparison about the credibility of male and female newscasters, research implications are involved in determining audience perception of gender-based credibility of newsreaders.

Research Question 2

To what extent does the physical appearance of a female or male newsreader in the selected television stations influence the audiences' preference for news consumption?

Results in Tables 6, 7 and 8 have been used to answer this question. Table 6 indicates that 93 (42.5%) of the respondents, which dominated the table, claim that the physical appearance of the female newscaster has no effect on their news consumption in the four television stations studied. Contrary to the notion of Warhurst and Nickson (2009, p.385) that “broadcasting institutions, often promote idealized images of women – a glamorised version of attractiveness - through employing women with the right look and sex appeal”, a large number of the respondents said that they are not attracted to news items on television due to the physical appearance of the female newscasters. However, 47 respondents (21.4%) and another 29 (13.24) indicated the physical appearance of the female newscasters usually attract their attention to a news item or act as a motivating factor for them. The research implication of this finding is that unless otherwise proven by other researchers, attempts to employ women for the purpose of glamorised beauty in any of the four stations studied might be futile as the findings of this study has clearly debunked the notion that the use of female reporters by TV stations managers for sex appeal has significant effect on the audience.

Table 7 reveals that 90 respondents, which represent 41.1% indicated that they were attracted to a given newscaster because of his or her voice quality, indicating that voice quality, a natural personality trait was scored the highest compared to other artificial personality traits of the newsreaders. Other qualities like dressing, beauty and make-up attracted low rating. Also as indicated in Table 8, voice quality still topped the list of qualities of the newscasters that make their news presentation very persuasive as the table indicates that 72 respondents, representing 32.9% voted for it. The implication of this is that physical appearance does not have much significance on the audiences' preference for the consumption of a particular news item.

Research Question 3

Is it the physical appearance of the newscaster that makes a given news item persuasive/credible or the content of the news or itself?

Data presented in tables 9 and 10 have been used to answer this research questions. Table 9 indicates that 144 respondents, representing 65.8% expressed the opinion that they were persuaded by the news and not the physical appearance of either male or female newscaster. This finding is in disagreement with those of Strickland (1980) as cited in Weibel, Wissmath and Groner (2008, p.470), who is of the opinion that “audience are more attracted to women newsreaders than male because of their beauty.” Similarly, results of this study disagrees with the assertion by Mitra *et al* (2014, pp.45-46) who quoted Kate Adie of British Broadcasting Corporation journalist as saying that “they want people with cute faces and cute

bottoms and nothing else in between ... they are more concerned about the shape of your leg than professional ability”.

These findings disagree with the views expressed by some news managers of the TV stations studied, who continue to argue the perpetuation of gender-based issues in TV news presentation. For instance, contrary to the findings, Mrs. Uduak Ikang Obeten, Assistant Director – News (CRBC) in an interview with the researchers said that the managers of TV stations believe that the female journalists either as newscasters or reporters on TV attract more attention from viewers due largely to their gender as women. She confirmed that as assistant director of news, she feels that female newsreaders should be selected based on “things like the hairstyle, dress-sense, make-up and sometimes the complexion of the female reporters which are usually visual attractive tools that make up their staying in TV journalism. She further stated that the gender of the female reporter makes them more trustworthy and therefore more believable by the audience in terms of persuasive effect.

Also commenting on the effect of the physical appearance of gender news intake, Mrs. Stella Asuquo, Assistant Director, Programmes CRBC pointed out that “female broadcast journalists are often selected because broadcast managers believe they are more attractive to viewers.” She said her 20 years experience in journalism practice makes her feel that viewers see male newscasters boring. She said: “people tell me that they prefer women because they are appealing to the eyes”. Conscious of this unscientific claimed preference syndrome, Stella disclosed that she goes out of her way to deliberately dress up to look attractive whenever she is scheduled to read the news.

In the same vein, Mrs. Evelyn Takon, a Controller of News, CRBC Television, Calabar in an interview with the researchers (2017), states that beauty is an essential part of news presentation as ugliness distracts the audience during the television news presentation. Mrs. Takon was of the view that when TV viewers tumble over ugly newsreaders, they find the news presentation boring and that this can affect viewers' interest and persuasiveness of the news reports. She pointed out that the beauty of TV newsreaders depreciates with aging. Mrs. Takon mentioned a case of a particular newsreader that had left the Channels Television for Cross River Broadcasting Corporation and was frequently featured in news presentation, but was later dropped due to complaints about her appearance from the audience.

In another interview with the researchers, Mrs. Ineji, a lecturer with the Department of Mass Communication, Cross River University of Technology observed that beauty does not necessarily play any significant role in persuasive news reporting on television. She stressed the fact that ability to induce beauty rests on presenters' voice quality and mannerism. She used one Moji Makanjuola of the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) to buttress her point. According to Mrs. Ineji, Moji Makanjuola does not depict what she refers to as induced beauty, but she is presentable and thus, well persuasive in her news presentation. Mrs. Ineji stressed that

Makanjuola, indeed, appeals to a larger audience as she knows how to carry people along in her news presentation. According to her, “when you hear her rich voice, even though she is advanced in age, her manner of presentation makes one interested to listen and watch her news reports.”

Speaking in the same vein, Professor Babson Ajibade of the Department of Visual Arts Technology, Cross River University of Technology in an interview with the researchers, clearly states that though beauty is often appreciated by viewers of television programmes, the beauty of the newsreaders alone cannot bring about persuasive journalism; stressing that the beauty of all newsreaders is part of the overall aesthetic balance in news package. He noted that when beauty is separated from other elements needed of a newsreader the aesthetics of the news presentation becomes disabled.

Dr. James E. Olayi of the Department of Special Education, University of Calabar in an interview with the researchers, observed that though beauty should always be the concern of all newsreaders - female and male alike, modest should always be embraced by all; noting that both extremes of beauty and ugliness, distract and affect not only credibility, but persuasion. Dr. Olayi, therefore, called for modesty in the appearance of all newsreaders.

Table 10 reveals that 99 (45.2%) respondents stated that female reporters are not more persuasive than male. Sixty-six (66) respondents, representing 30.1 percent took a neutral position; while only 54 (24.7%) of them responded in the negative. What then, what makes a news programme persuasive or credible? Bettinghaus and Cody (1987), as cited in Perloff (2003, p.8) posited that “persuasion is a conscious attempt by one individual to change the attitudes, beliefs, or behaviour of another individual or group of individuals through the transmission of some message.” In line with this assertion, scholars have identified three core persuasive qualities of a communicator – authority, credibility, and social attractiveness. They posit that authority can influence behaviours through a process of compliance. Social attraction consists of such attributes as likeability, similarity and physical appeal. News credibility is one persuasive attribute that makes a news item believable. From the foregoing therefore, it becomes obvious that even though modest attractiveness of news presenters may be encouraged in all TV newsreaders, physical appearance alone does not play any significant role in determining how persuasive a news programme turns out to be. Other attributes such as the source of the news, general personality traits of the newscasters, voice quality, to mention but a few, also play significant role.

Suffice to point out that the fact that most of the findings of this study have sharply disagreed with some earlier findings is an indication that gender prejudice varies from one audience group to another or from society to society. It also indicates that different societies relate to the physical attributes of newscasters differently. While it may serve as a source of persuasion to some, it does not have effect on others.

The result of this finding is in line with assumptions of Cacioppo and Petty's

Elaboration Likelihood Theory. Cacioppo and Petty explained the different ways of processing stimuli or messages by the receivers and their effects on attitude change. They posited that a receiver of a persuasive message processes information on central or peripheral routes toward attitude change. The central route to persuasion involve a high level of message elaboration, a situation whereby the information recipient carefully and thoughtfully considers the true merit of the message before deciding whether to act in a prescribed manner or not. In the peripheral route to persuasion, the decision is not based on the content of the message itself, but on such attributes as format and style of the message, source of the message as well as the receiver's mood. This is why Cacioppo and Petty therefore assumed that an attitude formed through the central route rather than the peripheral route is stronger and more difficult to change. This explains why audiences attend to messages in different ways; consequently, it will take different persuasive attributes to appeal to them.

Conclusion

The study set out to examine the implications of gender issues in persuasive broadcast journalism with selected broadcast media channels in Calabar Metropolis in focus. To achieve the purpose of the study, the survey research design involving the use of questionnaire and in-depth interview to solicit opinions of audience as well as broadcast scholars and professionals was employed. The multistage and purposive sampling techniques were employed to select 219 respondents from Calabar Metropolis as the sample for the study.

Also, six broadcast communication scholars in tertiary institutions and the broadcasting industry were purposively selected and interviewed. The Elaboration Likelihood Theory served as the theoretical framework. Result of the study revealed that newscasters are not more credible than their male counterparts and that physical appearance does not have much significance on the audiences' preference for news consumption. The researchers, therefore, concluded that scientific research acquired through communication education is largely still required to prove that male or female presenters on radio or television are more persuasive and credible.

Arising from the study and the findings, therein, the researchers conclude that the implications of gender issues in persuasive broadcast journalism is widely viewed as possessing something deeper than the obvious. It can also be concluded that this study has contributed to the ongoing debate on the role of gender in persuasive communication, using evidence derived from studies about the perception of television managers and viewers regarding male and female newsreaders.

It can further be concluded that the widely-held view that attractive, youthful and beautiful appearance of female newsreaders has very significant influence on the viewers' attitude towards news consumption is not all times true. This is because, firstly, findings from the study indicated that female newscasters are not more credible than their male counterparts as there are hardly any scientific evidences to prove that.

Secondly, it was revealed that physical appearance does not have much significance on the audiences' preference for the consumption of a particular news item presented on a given television channel. Thus, from the reactions of the respondents, it is concluded that the physical appearance of the newscaster does not make a given news programme persuasive or credible, rather the content of the news plays very significant role. In this wise, it can finally be concluded that, judging from divergent views expressed by earlier studies across different climes, one can infer that the influence of physical appearance of the newscaster on viewers' preference for news consumption varies from audience to audience and society to society and requires scientific study to establish uniform effect on all viewers in all societies. In other words, they are culture specific.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Broadcast media managers should not see news reading as an area that focuses on the physical appearance of the newsreader. This notion places more emphasis on female than male presenters. Therefore, the selection criteria for newscasters should not be based on beauty or physical appearance as BBC's Kate Adie pointed out, but expertise and uncompromising professionalism should override other selection criteria.
2. Broadcast media managers and other key stakeholders in the industry should make conscious efforts to address all gender related issues associated with the broadcasting media industry. Both masculine and feminine gender should be accorded equal roles and rights.
3. Broadcast media audience, especially television viewers should be persuaded at all times to appreciate broadcast contents and not the gender-based issues associated with such contents. Appearance and sexuality should be minimally downplayed in the design of materials meant for broadcast in order to enable viewers concentrate more on the content of the news.

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