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An Assessment of the Representation and Portrayal of Women in Gambian Media Ecosystem

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Abstract
Despite comprising more than half of the population and having more than two-thirds of enrolment in journalism training programmes, Gambian women remain underrepresented in media operations. Consequently, this study examines the representation and portrayal of women in the Gambian media, focusing on their participation in media organizations and their framing in Gambian media. The examination rests on the foundations of the Feminist Media Theory and Media Framing Theory. The study employs a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative content analysis with quantitative data from major Gambian media houses using a thematic data analysis method. Findings reveal that women hold less than 2% of leadership roles, with most confined to junior or supporting positions. Media narratives frequently reinforce traditional gender roles, depicting women as caregivers, victims, or passive figures rather than as leaders or professionals. However, digital media platforms such as Kerr Fatou and The Fatu Network offer emerging opportunities for women's visibility and influence. The study concludes that addressing gender disparities in Gambian media requires policy reforms, institutional support, and mentorship programs that promote female leadership. Implementing gender-sensitive reporting and creating opportunities for women in decision-making roles are essential steps toward a more equitable and inclusive media landscape.

Keywords: Representation, Feminism, Gambian Media, Thematic Analysis, and Leadership.

Introduction

The media in The Gambia plays an indispensable role in shaping public discourse, defining societal norms, and amplifying the voices of its citizens. Yet, it remains a space marked by deep gender imbalances. Despite women accounting for 51% of the population (GBos, 2024), they are arguably underrepresented in media operations and management. Furthermore, when women appear in the media, their portrayals are often limited to traditional, passive, or stereotypical roles, reinforcing outdated gender norms.

Like many others across the globe, the Gambian media industry is dominated by male leadership, with ownership and decision-making largely resting in the hands of men. Prominent media houses, such as Foroyaa, The Standard, and Q Television (QTV), are primarily led and/or owned by men. However, exceptions like Kerr Fatou, a media platform founded by Fatou Touray, and The Fatu Network, established by Fatou Camara, offer a glimmer of hope for a more inclusive media landscape. Women are often underrepresented in media ownership, leadership, and content creation roles. Women make up only 37% of media workers in The Gambia, with less than 2% holding leadership or ownership roles (Sabally, 2023). This vast inequality underscores how women's voices are systematically marginalized, ultimately influencing how society perceives gender roles.

Globally, gender inconsistencies in the media are pervasive. For instance, a study by UNESCO revealed that across 100 countries, women represent only 27% of top management positions in media organizations. Even in progressive regions like Western Europe, women hold only 33% of decision-making positions, highlighting a global pattern of exclusion. In Africa, the situation is even more pronounced. Cultural expectations and entrenched patriarchal systems continue to limit women's involvement in key decision-making roles, not just in media but in various other sectors. Despite these challenges, women's media initiatives across the continent are emerging as powerful platforms for advocacy and change (UNESCO, 2017).

The Gambian media industry is marked by a significant underrepresentation of women in key roles, including ownership, decision-making, and content production. This gender imbalance reflects broader societal structures where women are often marginalized in leadership positions. In a sector that plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion and societal norms, the lack of women's voices has profound implications for gender equity in the country.

Women in The Gambia face numerous barriers to accessing ownership and leadership positions in the media. These barriers are rooted in historical patterns of male dominance, compounded by economic and social limitations that prevent women from accessing the resources needed to establish or sustain media enterprises. As a result, women's perspectives are frequently absent from

media narratives, reinforcing gender stereotypes and limiting the diversity of voices that contribute to public discourses. Furthermore, the portrayal of women in Gambian media is often influenced by entrenched biases and stereotypes, leading to a limited and often negative representation of their roles in society. Women are frequently portrayed in traditional or passive roles, which does not reflect the full spectrum of their contributions to Gambian society. This misrepresentation contributes to the perpetuation of harmful gender norms, which restrict the opportunities available to women in other areas of life as well.

The broad objective of this study is to explore the representation of women in Gambian media organizations and interrogate the resultant effect of the representation on the framing and narratives used when women appear in Gambian media contents. By critically analyzing the representation of women in media ownership, decision-making, and content production, this research seeks to contribute to the broader conversation on gender equality in The Gambia and provide actionable recommendations for fostering a more equitable media landscape.

Theoretical Foundation

This study is built on the foundations of the Feminist Media theory and Media Framing theory. The Feminist Media Theory critiques how media reinforces patriarchal structures, often marginalizing women's voices and perpetuating gendered stereotypes. The foundational works of Laura Mulvey's "male gaze" (1975) and Gaye Tuchman's "symbolic annihilation" (Tuchman, 1978) are central to this theory, offering insights into the unequal representation of women in the media. Feminist Media Theory originated in the late 20th century as part of broader feminist movements critiquing how media representations reinforced patriarchal values. While no single "author" founded Feminist Media Theory, key contributions came from scholars such as Laura Mulvey and Gaye Tuchman. In her 1975 essay Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema, Laura Mulvey introduced the concept of the male gaze, which asserts that media, particularly film, is typically constructed from a male perspective. Mulvey argues that women are "objectified" in film, positioning them as "passive objects of desire" for male viewers, while male characters are depicted as active, subject positions (Mulvey, 1975). This framework critiques the way that visual media often reduce women to passive roles, reinforcing patriarchal power dynamics. In the Gambian media ecosystem, similar patterns can be observed, with women often portrayed as passive, sexualized figures or secondary characters, thus limiting their agency and depth in media narratives.

The media "symbolically annihilate" women by excluding them from significant roles and reducing them to stereotypical functions, such as being mothers or victims (Tuchman, 1978). Such portrayals reinforce the notion of women as caregivers or objects, rather than agents of change (Lauzen, 2018). They are largely featured for their physical appeal rather

than their intellect or professionalism (Eisend, 2010). Although women account for about 50% of the global population, they "occupy only 27% of managerial roles in media organizations" (UNESCO, 2020). In The Gambia, women constitute a mere 2% of media leadership (Sabally, 2023). This underrepresentation extends to content, where women are often cast in stereotypical roles. The minimal visibility of women in media managerial roles can be attributed to the patriarchal structure of most societies, which inadvertently creates a "glass ceiling" for women in media (Krijnen & Van-Bauwel, 2022). This lack of representation contributes to the normalization of traditional gender roles. In The Gambia, this dynamic is reflected in how women are frequently relegated to secondary, passive roles, both in media content and production.

Media Framing Theory was introduced by Erving Goffman in 1974. It builds upon Agenda-Setting Theory by explaining how media influence public perception through the framing of issues. Framing involves selecting certain aspects of reality and presenting them in a way that highlights specific interpretations, moral evaluations, and treatment recommendations (Entman, 1993).

Rooted in Goffman's work on frame analysis, the theory suggests that frames are tools that help organize social meaning, shaping how audiences understand events and issues. In the context of gender, media framing often perpetuates societal stereotypes, presenting women in passive roles that reinforce traditional gender norms.

Framing theory assumes that media do not merely reflect reality but actively construct it by selecting and emphasizing certain events or elements. Frames serve to "organize or structure social meanings," guiding how issues are interpreted (Goffman, 1974). It also assumes that the way the media presents an issue influences how the audience perceives it. Framing often reinforces existing power structures by presenting issues in ways that align with dominant societal values, including gender norms that frequently position men as leaders and women as passive or supportive figures.

Female politicians in The Gambia are often framed not as political leaders but as exceptions or figures whose success is attributed to their ability to balance family and work responsibilities. These frames create barriers for women to be seen as equals in leadership, public life, reinforcing traditional gender roles that limit women's social mobility and access to opportunities.

Despite the challenges posed by traditional media, digital media offers an opportunity to challenge these restrictive gender frames. Online platforms allow women to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and share empowering narratives that emphasize their contributions to various sectors, such as politics, business, and education. Social media campaigns advocating for gender equality in The Gambia focus on portraying women as leaders and change-makers, presenting them as active participants in national development rather than passive beneficiaries of empowerment initiatives. These alternative frames

challenge traditional gender narratives by shifting the focus from family roles to professional achievements.

Empirical Review

The representation and portrayal of women in Gambian media highlight the intersection of global and local challenges. While systemic barriers persist, initiatives such as digital media platforms and gender-sensitive policies offer pathways for progress. Addressing these issues requires sustained efforts at multiple levels, including policy, organizational practices, and cultural attitudes. The Gambian media gives heavy coverage to programmes implemented by development agencies on gender-based violence. However, they do "not give adequate attention to sensitizing and educating the public on gender-based violence and are also wanting in the area of following up cases of GBV, while cases of online GBV are not given the required attention" (Adekunle, 2022). This buttresses the position that women are perpetually framed as victims and recipients of actions carried out by men.

Ama-Asare and Agomor (2023) observed that despite the contribution of women to political development in Africa, Ghanaian media rarely project the intellectual contributions of women in the political space. Rather, media reports focus heavily on their physical appearances as well as their family and social connections. This is a reductionist practice that dissuades many women from political participation, thus conferring undue political advantage on men. (Ama-Asare & Agomor, 2023). The authors did not examine the causes of this misrepresentation of women.

The imbalance in decision-making and leadership is also evident in academia, where there is "a widespread dominance of men in the management of scholarly journals … despite the considerable presence of women in academia" (Mwaura & Balliah, 2024). If women are given the power to make decisions and, in the authorship, positions, they are "more likely to produce research articles that have more women in total authorship, as well as discuss sex/ gender differences" (Merriman, et al., 2021). The representation of women in the print media is still a great concern because they feature in fewer stories and "the prominence of newspaper representation of women was less" (Aladi & Okoro, 2021). Women are also objectified in advertisements and movies, leaving them insecure and disempowered by the narratives surrounding their roles in society (Sharma & Bumb, 2021). This is evident of the power of the media in socio-cultural change (Zilola, Barchinoy, & Muhammad, 2023). Women are often "required to suppress their feelings and limit their authentic online presentation to maintain the outward countenance that matches the stereotypical gender roles in audiences' state of mind" (Ghaffari, 2020). This fosters "sexism, harassment, and violence in men and stifling career-related ambitions in women" (Santoniccolo, Trombetta, Paradiso, & Rollè, 2023). It is observed that "media discrimination hinders progress towards putting femininity on an equal footing with masculinity in the political domain" (Haraldsson, 2022).

The media often provides an indecisive model of female portrayal. On one hand, they "emphasize women's ability to assert themselves as ambitious, professionally autonomous and free-choosing subjects (as post-feminist culture prescribes), but on the other hand, they exploit the spur to female self-fulfillment for marketing aims, turning it into a self-branding tool" (Roberti, 2022).

Methodology

This study employs a mixed research method. The mixed method. The numerical representation of women in journalism practice and administration is measured quantitatively, while the portrayal of women in Gambian media content is interrogated through thematic analysis. The population for the quantitative aspect is 37 editorial staff from 5 media houses (QTV, Kerr Fatou, The Fatu Network, The Standard, and Foroyaa newspapers), while the population for the qualitative aspect is 319 editorial materials (news, feature articles, editorials, and discussion programmes) on women between 2022 and 2025.

The sample for the quantitative aspect is all 37 personnel on the staff lists from the media organizations. Fifteen editorial materials were purposively selected for the qualitative sample. The data was collected through a validated coding sheet. The numeric data was analysed statistically, while the qualitative data was critically analysed.

Data Presentation

The data for this study was collected from records of the editorial staff in media outlets as of 2025, as well as editorial content from various media houses covering the period from 2023 to 2025. The study focused on three (3) broadcast media and two (2) newspaper outlets in The Gambia. The selected broadcast media outlets are QTV, Kerr Fatou, and Fatu Network, while the newspaper outlets are The Standard and Foroyaa. Nine (9) broadcast content pieces and six (6) news articles were selected from these news outlets. The editorial staff, selected news stories, and articles are presented below.

Table 1: List of Editorial Staff

S/N	Name	Gender	Rank/Designation	Organization
1	Seringe St Touray	Male	Editor-In-Chief	The Fatu Network
2	Hadram Hydara	Male	Deputy-Editor	The Fatu Network
3	Alieu Jallow	Male	Reporter	The Fatu Network
4	Dawda Baldeh	Male	Reporter	The Fatu Network
5	Ousman Ceesay	Male	Editor	Kerr Fatou TV
6	Buba Gagigo	Male	Sub Editor	Kerr Fatou TV
7	Ramatoulie Jowe	Female	Reporter	Kerr Fatou TV
8	Fatou Sillah	Female	Reporter	Kerr Fatou TV
9	Lamin Fatty	Male	Reporter	Kerr Fatou TV
10	Mammie Ngum	Female	Reporter	Kerr Fatou TV
11	Landing Ceesay	Male	Reporter	Kerr Fatou TV
12	Alieu Ceesay	Male	Reporter	QTV
13	Lolly M Camara	Female	Reporter	QTV

S/N	Name	Gender	Rank/Designation	Organization
14	Jainaba Sonko	Female	Reporter	QTV
15	Juldeh Njie	Female	Reporter	QTV
16	Momodou Gajaga	Male	Reporter	QTV
17	Ansumana S. O. Nyassi	Male	Reporter	QTV
18	Mam Nabou Kah	Female	Reporter	QTV
19	Pa Kaba Suso	Male	Reporter	QTV
20	Babucarr Ceesay	Male	Deputy Editor	QTV
21	Ade Daramy	Male	Editor-in-Chief	QTV
22	Lamin Cham	Male	Editor In Chief	The Standard Newspaper
23	Omar Bah	Male	Deputy Editor in Chief	The Standard Newspaper
24	Tabora Bojang	Male	Chief Reporter	The Standard Newspaper
25	Arret Jatta	Female	Senior Reporter	The Standard Newspaper
26	Amadou Jadama	Male	Senior Reporter	The Standard Newspaper
27	Olimatou Coker	Female	Reporter	The Standard Newspaper
28	Fatou Bojang	Female	Intern	Standard Newspaper
29	Fatou Saho	Female	Intern	The Standard Newspaper
30	Zeina Mendy	Female	Intern	The Standard Newspaper
31	Aminata Kuyateh	Female	Freelancer	The Standard Newspaper
32	Samuel Osseh Sarr	Male	Editor-in-Chief	Foroyaa Newspaper
33	Tijan Njie	Male	News Editor	Foroyaa Newspaper
34	Yankuba Jallow	Male	Assistant Editor	Foroyaa Newspaper
35	Muhammed S. Bah	Male	Assistant Editor	Foroyaa Newspaper
36	Mamadou Dem	Male	Assistant Editor	Foroyaa Newspaper
37	Biran Gaye	Male	Proofreader	Foroyaa Newspaper

Table 2: List of Qualitative Sample

S/N	Date	Media Platform	Title	Resource Person
1	6/7/24	The Fatu Network	Gambian Women Address Female Circumcision Concerns, or GWAFC, calls for external pressure	Dr. Fambaye Seya Almada and Awa Drammeh
2	21/10/24	The Fatu Network	Breaking Barriers: Fatou Jammeh Paves the Way for Women in Gambia's Car Wash Industry	Fatou Jammeh
3	26/08/24	The Fatu Network	The Gambia's 25-Year-Old Female Barber Redefining Gender Roles in a Male-Dominated Industry	Hawa Makasuba
4	11/04/24	QTV	NDEY OLEY TAAL SHOW WITH KABA GIRL	Mariama Jabang
5	15/12/22	QTV	ASK BAJEN SHOW	Isatou D.A. Sawaneh
6	31/01/25	QTV	JIGEEN SHOW	Nyima Jorbateh
7	08/09/24	Kerr Fatou	Women's Rights Advocates Call On The Government To Enforce The Law Against FGM/C	Fatou Baldeh &Yadicon Njie
8	07/07/24	Kerr Fatou	'Kutubung Daala' SO4 EP23 Katacorr Women Gardeners Appeal for Water and Farming Equipment	Sirreh Bojang and Aminata Sanyang
9	02/10/23	Kerr Fatou	Two Widows Narrate Ordeals To Kerr Fatou After The Demise Of Their Husbands	Amie Ceesay
10	12/12/24	The Standard	Beijing +30: Unite to end violence against women and girls	By Fatou Kinteh, Minister of Gender, Children, and Social Welfare & Ms Mandisa Mashologu, Resident Representative, UNDP
11	22/12/25	The Standard	US-based Gambian Women Uplifting Lives Of Underprivileged Families	Hannah Senghore
12	24/01/25	The Standard	FAO, UN Peacebuilding Fund Shaping Lives Of Women Gardeners In Misera	Penda Sowe
13	24/12/24	Foroyaa	FALSE! FGM Has Profound Health Implications For Women, Girls	Dr Samuel Kimani and Fatou Sanu
14	14/08/23	Foroyaa	Tujereng Women Gardeners Plead for Support after Flood Destroys Their Garden	Lamin Sonko
15	15/12/23	Foroyaa	How journalist-turned-entrepreneur set up Musu's Spice	Musu Bah

Data Analyses

The Percentage of Women in the Gambian Media Ecosystem

The data collected from the media houses shows that women are underrepresented in the Gambian media ecosystem. Kerr Fatou, with a total of seven staff members, employs three women, which constitutes 42.8% of its workforce, while men make up 57.2%. However, none of these women occupy a leadership or editorial role, suggesting that their contributions are limited to non-decision-making positions. Similarly, The Fatu Network employs only four staff members, all of whom are male, making up 100% of its workforce. This complete absence of female representation highlights a significant gender disparity in its workforce. The gender disparity in the combined workforces of The Fatu Network and Kerr Fatou is significant because both media organizations are owned by women. This suggests that they do not find women adequately qualified and/or equipped for the rigors of journalism and media management. QTV has ten staff members, four (40%) of whom are women, while men constitute 60% of the workforce. While this demonstrates a relatively higher percentage of female staff compared to some other media houses, all editorial roles are held by men.

Foroyaa newspaper has six editorial staff and none of them is a woman. The organization may have female freelancers and interns, but they are not considered part of the organization. Similarly, The Standard newspaper has 10 editorial workers. Four (40%) of them are male, while 6 (60%) are female. While this is remarkable, this ensuing enthusiasm is doused by the reality that none of these six women is a management staff. They hold reportorial positions while the men occupy the editorial cadre.

Approximately 35.1% of the staff across these selected Gambian newspapers and broadcast stations are women, while the remaining 64.9% are male, mainly in editorial roles. This indicates that, despite their presence, women are excluded from decision-making and leadership roles, relegating them to subordinate positions within the organization.

Analyses of Reports at the Fatu Network

i. **Gambian Women Address Female Circumcision Concerns**

The first entry selected from The Fatu Network is a story titled "Gambian Women address Female Circumcision concerns or GWAFC, calls for external pressure". The story was published on the 6th of August, 2024. The story is an account of the advocacy for female circumcision in The Gambia. In the report, the spokesperson of the organization alleged that Western donors and United Nations agencies put undue pressure on the Gambian National Assembly to ban the cultural practice of female circumcision in The Gambia and the definition of female genital mutilation (FGM) is an inaccurate and misleading explanation of female circumcision in The Gambian context. "The definition is demeaning to

African women who are circumcised… We are in full support of the repeal of the female circumcision ban and any form of criminalization of African or Muslim women" (Almanda, 2024). "We don't have any issues with the government, but instead with national assembly members… and we want them to repeal the bill on FGC" (Drammeh A. , 2024). The report portrays women as advocates of female circumcision and protectors of indigenous Gambian cultural practices against foreign social, economic, and political influences.

ii. **Breaking Barriers: Fatou Jammeh Paves the Way for Women in Gambia's Car Wash Industry**

The second entry selected from The Fatu Network highlighted the challenges of youth unemployment in The Gambia, and emphasized the performance of young Gambian women, in male-dominated fields. It focused on Fatou, who is the first Gambian woman to venture into the car wash business. Fatou's curiosity landed her on YouTube where she was inspired by a phenomenal Nigerian lady, "this has dared me to be the first Gambian woman to venture into the car washing business. I am able to support myself financially and have also created employment for two young women. I hope to inspire more women to do the same" (Jammeh, 2024) and she added that "Gambian society does not support women, but I will continue pushing myself to create positive change in The Gambia" (Jammeh, 2024). The report frames the Gambian woman as a resilient character who is not afraid to make a foray into fields that are dominated by men. The report also portrays Gambian women as industrious people who contribute to the nation's gross domestic product (GDP) and reduce unemployment through their economic activities.

iii. **The Gambia's 25-Year-Old Female Barber Redefining Gender Roles in a Male-Dominated Industry**

The third entry from The Fatu Network highlights Hawa Makasuba's journey as a female barber. She recounted, "I chose barbing as a career because I am passionate about it. During the feast, I invite my male counterparts to come assist me" (Makasuba, 2024). The report portrays how a female could shine in traditionally male-dominated professions and contribute to the economy of the country through entrepreneurship.

Analyses of Reports by Kerr Fatou TV

i. **Women's Rights Advocates Call on the Government to Enforce the Law Against FGM/C**

The first entry selected from Kerr Fatou is titled "Women's Rights Advocates Call on the Government to Enforce the Law Against FGM/C". The story is a reaction to the legislative attempt to decriminalize female circumcision in The

Gambia. The advocates noted that despite the criminalization of all forms of female circumcision, some people still practice and promote the harmful practice. They called on "the Ministry of Justice to impartially uphold the law so that those who partake in or advocate for FGM face appropriate consequences" (Baldeh, 2023). This report portrays women as human rights advocates working to protect girls from harmful traditional practices. It positions them as leaders in the fight for gender justice and policy enforcement.

ii. **Kutubung Daala': Katacorr Women Gardeners Appeal for Water and Farming Equipment**

The second entry selected from Kerr Fatou showcases the challenges faced by women gardeners in Kuloro, who struggle with water scarcity, pest issues, and difficulties in selling their produce. Despite these hardships, the women continue their work to support their families and communities. The gardeners call for government intervention to provide the necessary resources to improve their farming conditions. They revealed that "before, our problems were the cows. In Adama Barrow's era, we thank God that Amie Fabureh has built a fence to protect them from the cows" (Sirreh, 2024). "We face many challenges like selling our products and pests. We have been doing this because it's one of the ways we can fend for ourselves and our families" (Sanyang A. , 2024). The report portrays women as hardworking providers, sustaining their families through agriculture despite numerous challenges. The story highlights their resilience and the urgent need for government support.

iii. **Two Widows Narrate Ordeals After the Demise of Their Husbands**

The third entry selected from Kerr Fatou is a story focuses on the struggles faced by widows in The Gambia, who not only deal with emotional loss but also face financial hardships and societal challenges. Amie Ceesay and Awa Sonko share their experiences, highlighting the need for better support systems for widows in the country. Awa explained that "I am the one taking care of the family by selling to fend for us, and when other relatives help me, it's all we can do to survive" (Sonko A. , 2023). Amie also revealed that "I always go to the market and sell to buy food for myself and my kids. It's hard, but I want them to have a good education and better opportunities" (Ceesay A. , 2023). In the report, widows are portrayed as vulnerable yet resilient, struggling against financial and social hardships after losing their spouses. The story underscores the lack of systemic support for widows in Gambian society

Analyses of Reports at QTV

i. **NDEY OLEY TAAL SHOW with KABA GIRL**

The first entry selected from QTV features Mariama Jabang, popularly known as "Kaba Girl", who turned her early life challenges into a source of inspiration.

From supporting her education and family at a young age to becoming a symbol of independence and perseverance, Mariama's story encourages young women to embrace self-reliance and resilience. She said that "I am very happy with what I am doing because I am independent, helping my siblings and my employees to step out of their comfort zones" (Jabang, 2024). She added, "No one should be ashamed of what they are doing. Know what you want and go after it". Mariama Jabang is portrayed as a symbol of resilience and independence, inspiring young women to pursue self-reliance. The story highlights how women overcome hardships and redefine success on their terms

ii. ASK BAJEN SHOW

The second entry selected from QTV is an episode of "Ask Bajen Show", which featured Isatou D.A. Sawaneh. She reflects on how women's contributions span every aspect of life, from family caregiving to professional achievements, and emphasizes the evolving roles of women across generations. "I believe that as generations change, we, as women, also change. A woman's job is everything from A to Z …Women always stand up for their children when they are sick, stand up for their husbands, and even stand up for themselves, even when they are sick" (Sawaneh, 2022). Women are framed as the backbone of Gambian society, responsible for caregiving, economic contributions, and social stability. The story emphasizes the evolving roles of women across generations while reinforcing their traditional responsibilities.

iii. JIGEEN SHOW

The third entry selected from QTV is an episode of the "JIGEEN SHOW". The episode featured Isatou Njie, Aji Kumba Daffeh, and Jane Mendy. The women highlighted the importance of women's contributions to the economy and emphasized the need for women to defy societal expectations and take leadership roles in various sectors. "Gambian women are bold and confident because they are the breadwinners of most families. I want to extend a very big thank you to all of them, I'm so proud of what they have achieved" (Njie I. , 2024). Mendy advised, "Never limit yourself by societal expectations. We defy all odds and proudly showcase the Gambian fashion industry to the world" (Mendy, 2024). The portrayal of women in this episode highlights their growing role as entrepreneurs and economic contributors. It challenges societal norms, showcasing women as bold leaders who shape industries such as fashion and business.

Analyses of Reports in The Standard Newspaper

i. Beijing +30: Unite to End Violence Against Women and Girls

The first entry selected from The Standard is a story on the pervasive issue of violence against women and girls in The Gambia and globally. In the article,

Fatou Kinteh, the Minister of Gender, Children, and Social Welfare, highlighted the significance of this issue in the Gambian context: “In The Gambia, violence against women and girls remains a significant barrier to gender equality, economic development, and social well-being, hindering the progress we have collectively committed to achieving” (Kinteh, 2024).

Ms. Mandisa Mashologu, Resident Representative for the UNDP, called for collective action: “Ending violence requires a collective, united approach from all sectors of society. Governments, civil society, international organizations, and individuals must collaborate to dismantle systemic inequalities and ensure justice and safety for all women and girls” (Mashologu, 2024). This story demonstrates efforts directed at putting an end to gender-based violence, which is a significant human rights issue and a barrier to gender equality. It also shows that women continue to be disproportionately affected by violence, mostly perpetrated by men and condoned by society.

ii. US-Based Gambian Women Uplifting Lives of Underprivileged Families

The second entry from The Standard is titled “US-Based Gambian Women Uplifting Lives of Underprivileged Families”. This story showcases the efforts of Gambian women living abroad who are working to support underprivileged families back home. It highlights the role of the diaspora in fostering community development in The Gambia. Hannah Senghore, a key figure in the story, explains the holistic approach her foundation uses to empower young people: “The foundation’s commitment goes beyond mere academic support; it adopts a holistic approach that integrates vocational training, life skills development, and mentorship programs” (Senghore, 2025). This story portrays the role played by women in supporting their fellow women. It also reinforces the adage that “he who feels it knows it more”. Women know the ordeals of their fellow women more than anyone, hence the need to lead the crusade for women's empowerment.

iii. FAO, UN Peacebuilding Fund Shaping Lives of Women Gardeners in Misera

The third entry from The Standard focuses on how access to efficient agricultural resources can transform the lives of women farmers in rural Gambia. It highlights the role of international organizations in empowering women through practical support. Penda Sowe, one of the gardeners featured in the story, shared the transformative impact of the project: “This project has made our work so much easier. Before, we had to fetch water from the well, which was exhausting. Now, with the reticulation system, we simply fetch the water and use it to water the beds, which makes everything much faster and less stressful” (Sowe, 2025). This story portrays the importance of supporting women gardeners in their efforts to emancipate themselves from economic hassles.

Analyses of Reports in Foroyaa Newspaper

i. FALSE! FGM Has Profound Health Implications for Women and Girls

The first entry selected from Foroyaa is a story that addresses the harmful effects of female genital mutilation (FGM), emphasizing the health risks and human rights violations associated with the practice. Dr. Samuel Kimani and Fatou Sanu, key voices in the article, stress that FGM is not only dangerous but also medically unsound, debunking cultural justifications often cited in defense of the practice. Dr. Kimani explains, "The cutting of women's and girls' clitoris and labia is usually done with crude, unsterile instruments and… results in immediate harm" (Kimani, 2024). Fatou Sanu reinforces this by sharing her experiences engaging with communities: "Over the past few months, I joined a team that went out to different communities and engaged women and girls on this FGM issue, but even those who were conducting it testified that the practice is harmful" (Suna, 2024). This story portrays how women are entangled as victims in the debate on culture, religion, and medicine in the matter of FGM. Moreover, it validates the argument that FGM is medically unsound and culturally unjustifiable, and the practice constitutes a violation of the human rights of women and girls.

ii. Tujereng Women Gardeners Plead for Support After Flood Destroys Their Garden

The second entry from Foroyaa highlights the plight of women gardeners in Tujereng whose livelihoods were devastated by flooding. The article underscores the vulnerability of women in agriculture, emphasizing the need for proper infrastructure to protect their work from natural disasters. Lamin Sonko, a representative speaking on behalf of the women, stated, "The women need drainage systems that will not only prevent the flooding that has devastated the garden in the past, but will also enable the women to cultivate their crops, even during the rainy season" (Sonko L. , 2023). Another gardener, identified as Njie, shared the emotional and financial toll the floods have taken: "Our garden is full of stagnant water, and the water has nowhere to go and it has destroyed all our vegetables and crops. We work in a garden to take care of our family, pay our children's school fees, but now all that is affected" (Njie B. , 2023). This story portrays the inevitable need to reinforce the empowerment of women and their livelihoods as they remain extremely vulnerable. It also portrays women as breadwinners of their families and caregivers, ensuring that their children are educated.

iii. How Journalist-Turned-Entrepreneur Set Up Musu's Spice

The third entry from Foroyaa is on Musu Bah, a journalist who transitioned into entrepreneurship by launching her own spice brand. The article highlights the entrepreneurial spirit of Gambian women and their ability to navigate and excel in diverse fields.

Musu Bah shares her motivation for making the career shift: “Life is all about taking risks and boldly overcoming daily challenges. Thus, I now follow the desire of my new aspiration, which is being an entrepreneur” (Bah, 2023). This story portrays women as career-oriented who are continuously exploring ways to excel and leave their footprint to inspire other women and young girls. It also depicts that women can choose multiple career choices and excel at both.

Discussion of Findings

The study reveals significant gender disparities in Gambian media, particularly in leadership roles and the portrayal of women in content. Across all analyzed media houses, women are either absent or underrepresented in decision-making roles. This exclusion limits the diversity of perspectives in media narratives and perpetuates male-dominated ideologies. Women’s absence from editorial leadership positions reflects systemic barriers that hinder their advancement. These barriers are rooted in deeply ingrained cultural norms and institutional practices that prioritize male leadership.

The portrayal of women in Gambian media is equally concerning. While there are instances of positive narratives, such as women breaking stereotypes and advocating for political representation, these are overshadowed by dominant portrayals that reinforce traditional gender roles. Women are frequently depicted as caregivers or homemakers, which perpetuates societal expectations and limits their visibility in narratives of leadership and innovation.

i. What is the percentage of women working in Gambian newspapers?

Foroyaa newspaper has six editorial staff members, all of whom are men, resulting in 0% female representation. The Standard newspaper employs ten editorial workers, with six women (60%) and four men (40%). This study has revealed that there are more men than women in the Gambian newspaper industry. This is ironic because a cursory look at the enrolment figures and class attendance at journalism training institutions in The Gambia shows that women greatly outnumber men. The poor numerical representation of women in Gambian newspaper operations could be attributed to the poor wage structure and the inherent stress in journalism practice, among other factors.

ii. How many percent of management staff in Gambian newspapers are women?

In the editorial teams of both Foroyaa and The Standard newspapers, all management positions are occupied by men, relegating female staff to reportorial roles. At Foroyaa, the editorial board consists of six members, all male. Similarly, The Standard's editorial team is led by male editors, with women primarily serving in reporting positions. This reality shows that professional decisions on what to cover, who to cover, as well as the framing and depth of coverage, are solely determined by men. It would therefore be unsurprising if women are given poor visibility in Gambian newspapers. It is important to note that newspaper management is a demanding job with long, unpaid hours and perpetual risk of

harassment by security forces at the prompting of government officials, wealthy individuals, and/or politically influential people. These risks could account for the dearth of women on the management teams of the two newspapers under review for this study.

iii. What is the percentage of women working in the Gambian broadcast media?

Based on the data provided for Kerr Fatou, The Fatou Network, and QTV, the combined workforce consists of 21 staff members, with 7 women and 14 men. This results in an overall female representation of approximately 33.3% and male representation of 66.7%.

iv. What is the percentage of women in the Gambian broadcast sector management roles?

The percentage of women in management or editorial positions within Gambian broadcast media is currently limited. For instance, at Kerr Fatou, women constitute 42.8% of the workforce, yet none hold leadership or editorial positions. Similarly, The Fatu Network employs an all-male staff, resulting in a complete absence of female representation. At QTV, women make up 40% of the staff, but all editorial roles are occupied by men. This trend reflects broader regional patterns.

v. How are women portrayed in Gambian newspapers

Women in Gambian newspapers are portrayed through a mix of narratives, ranging from empowerment to victimhood. The media often highlights their struggles, successes, and activism, yet traditional stereotypes persist.

- **Women as victims and strugglers:** Many stories frame women as victims of systemic challenges such as violence, economic hardships, and marginalization. For instance, articles on widows' struggles, FGM survivors, and women farmers facing difficulties emphasize their vulnerabilities. Coverage of gender-based violence (GBV) and FGM portrays women as needing protection, often without agency in decision-making.
- **Women as activists and leaders:** Some articles celebrate women leading initiatives and advocating for gender equality. For example, the Beijing +30 event and the National Gender Policy inauguration frame women as key players in development. Women-led businesses, farming cooperatives, and advocacy groups also receive attention, reflecting their efforts in economic and social empowerment.
- **Traditional vs. modern gender roles:** While some reports challenge traditional norms (e.g., female entrepreneurs, engineers, and politicians breaking barriers), others reinforce conventional gender roles by emphasizing women's domestic and caregiving responsibilities. Many articles discuss women's role in farming and market trade, highlighting their economic contributions, but still tying them to traditional labor sectors.

vi. How are women framed in Gambian broadcast content

Women in Gambian broadcast media are often framed in a dualistic manner: as pioneers breaking gender norms and as persevering victims of societal barriers.

- **Empowerment and breaking stereotypes:** Stories about female barbers, car washers, and engineers emphasize how women are defying expectations in male-dominated fields. Women entrepreneurs and business leaders are framed as symbols of resilience and role models for younger generations.
- **Cultural and social constraints:** Many discussions on FGM, early marriage, and gender-based violence frame women as individuals needing legal and societal protection. Women are often depicted as dependent on policies, male allies, or NGOs for progress, rather than being fully independent agents of change.
- **Leadership and advocacy:** Broadcast programs highlight women's contributions to political movements and social justice. Shows like "JIGEEN" and "ASK BAJEN" feature women discussing challenges and aspirations, framing them as advocates for change.
- **Economic and rural contributions:** Rural women, particularly farmers and traders, are framed as hardworking yet underprivileged, often battling economic instability and government neglect. Programs on women gardeners and cooperatives show how women navigate economic hardship, but often portray them as struggling rather than thriving.

Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight a persistent gender imbalance in the Gambian media landscape. Women's participation in media organizations remains disproportionately low, with less than 2% occupying leadership positions. This lack of representation extends to media content, where women are frequently framed within traditional, gendered narratives that reinforce societal stereotypes.

Despite these challenges, there are signs of progress. The rise of women-led platforms and the election of a female president of the Gambia Press Union reflect a growing shift toward inclusivity. However, to achieve meaningful gender parity, structural barriers such as patriarchal norms, workplace discrimination, and limited access to professional development opportunities must be addressed.

The media plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions and societal norms. Therefore, equitable representation of women in both media content and leadership is essential for fostering a more inclusive and progressive Gambian society. This study emphasizes the need for comprehensive policy reforms, gender-sensitive reporting practices, and initiatives to empower women within the media industry.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and analysis of this study, the following recommendations are necessary:

a) Policy reforms should be introduced to mandate gender equity in media organizations. Media houses should adopt internal policies that promote equal opportunities in staffing, leadership, and content creation.
b) Training and mentorship programs should be established to equip women with the necessary skills to pursue leadership roles in media organizations. Special attention should be given to investigative journalism, editorial leadership, and digital media skills.
c) Media organizations should adopt gender-sensitive reporting guidelines that ensure balanced and accurate portrayals of women. Journalists and editors should receive training to avoid reinforcing gender stereotypes and instead highlight diverse and empowering narratives.
d) Efforts should be made to include the perspectives of rural women, who are often underrepresented in national media narratives. This inclusion will ensure a more comprehensive portrayal of women across The Gambia.
e) Independent bodies should be established to monitor gender representation in media organizations and content. Regular reports should be published to track progress and identify areas needing improvement.

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