ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Perception of Women FM 91.7 among Female Undergraduates of the Department of Mass Communication, Lagos State University

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Abstract

The struggle for gender equality has been ongoing in the society for centuries and scholars have perceived that the gender equility advocacy message will be quickly received through a mass medium like the radio. Though many radio stations broadcast women-related programmes in Nigeria, none has dedicated its resources solely to female issues. Women FM is thus the first popular radio station to solely cater for women-related programmes round the clock. Unlike other stations which allot infinitesimal time to female issues, Women FM dedicates its time and resources to female-related issues in the society on a twenty-four-hour schedule. To have such a great means of enlightenment to the female populace of a society is one thing but it is another thing for the female populace to understand and accept the means as their own. Upon this thought, this paper attempted to find out what the young women who are the target of this specialized radio station thought about Women FM. The population was narrowed down to female undergraduate students of Lagos State University. The female students of the Department of Mass Communication were selected to ascertain their disposition towards the radio station. A purposive sampling method was adopted and 240 female students, cutting across 100, 200, 300, and 400 levels were presented with a 13-item questionnaire. Their response were collated and presented in a simple frequency table. The study is backed by the Perception theory.

Keywords: perception, orientation, women empowerment, gender issues, inequality

Introduction

The struggle for gender equality has been going on for ages; however, it was until the 18th century before an organised form of effort began. Before this time, the struggle for women equality in the society was not taken seriously. But in the 18 century, the term feminism became more pronounced and the struggle started taking form. Mukherjee and Ramswany (2011, p. 45) believe that feminism has enabled us to take a fresh look at the gender issues with certain questions in mind like the position accorded to women , perception regarding sexual relations, the home as a place of equality and justice. This idea, which started during the enlightenment period in Europe, is a struggle for recognition of the rights of women, for equality between sexes and a re-definition of womanhood. Feminism is bothered with terms like sexism, patriarchy, matriarchy and gender. These terms which sound harmless have caused and defined pain for women since the existence of human society. Patriarchy, a term which literally means rule by father, is a form of social organisation in which the males dominate the females. Though there is the concept of matriarchy, this later idea has no case in most human societies (Macionis, 2005, p 382). By implication, this social stratification has over many years caused unequal distribution of wealth, power and privilege between men and women. This idea or social thought has affected the opportunities and constraints people face in life as men and women are situated in society not only differently but unequally. Women get less of the material resources, social status, power and opportunities for self-actualization than men who share their social location (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2014, p 452). This inequality in society ignores many

important variables like potential and trait, making it difficult for the female sex to measure their potential.

The patriarchy system is deeply rooted in the principles of gender differences. Though sex means the physical difference in men and women, gender refers to the personal traits and social positions that members of a society attached to being female or male. Macionis (2005, p 325) explains that gender involves hierarchy making men and women differently in terms of power, wealth and other resources. It is a common belief among people that there is something 'natural" about gender distinction. For instance, women are treated with contempt because many people assumed that they "naturally" are inferior and lacked sufficient intelligence, physical strength, and political interest in the society. Healey (2006, p 19) writes that from birth the biological difference between sexes forms the basis for different gender roles or societal expectations about proper behaviour, attitudes, and personality traits. He added that, in virtually all societies, adult work roles tend to be separated by gender, and boys and girls are socialized in preparation for these adult roles. For example, in our traditional African society, boys are trained for physical labour jobs like farming, hunting, fishing, and logging whereas girls are trained in skills like selling, cleaning of homes, cooking and in other domestic chores considered feminine. Boys are motivated or encouraged to exhibit aggressive attitude which is required for roles like leadership, providers for family, combat and other machismo endeavours. These gender roles entrenched in our society led to inequality and placed women at a disadvantaged position as the men typically claim more property, prestige and power. The male dominance in our society has deeply wiped away humane reasoning and placed men at the helms of the economic, leadership, religious, political and other social institutions. Consequently, women are relegated to the background and are largely unappreciated in the society. Ritzer and Stepnisky (2014, p.452) states that "to say that there is gender inequality is to claim that women are situationally less empowered than men to realize the need they share with men for self-actualization."

Research Questions

The following are some of the questions this study seeks to find answers to:

1. To what extent do female undergraduates listen to Women FM?
2. To what extent are the female undergraduates aware of what Women FM represents in our society?
3. What benefits have female undergraduates derived from watching programmes aired on Women FM?
4. How do the female undergraduate students perceive some of the anti-male gigs presented in Women FM?

Literature Review

In the midst of all the human society which is largely patriarchal by social construction, some people feel that things are not balanced and have made their thoughts known. Through critical thinking, people have come to realize the integral role women play in human society. In spite of how they are marginalized, women have worked to sustain and recreate the society we live in (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2014, p. 442). Some have reasoned that while women play indispensable role, they warrant better opportunities than what the society subjected them to.In spite of the differences in physical abilities between the sexes, some women given a fair opportunity have excelled in male dominated society, and no research has pointed to superior male intelligence over female mental ability.

Gender Inequalityin Nigeria: The Media Landscape

Azeez and Doghudge (2016, p. 117) observes that in our traditional society a public life was virtually impossible for women and so if a woman had a pubic reputation, it meant the woman was involved in scandal. Women were usually valued for their physical features and beauty and nothing more, nothing less. The scholars add that the praised feminine virtues were obedience, silence, sexual chastity, piety, humility, constancy and patience. Sadly, this stereotype against women and gender

imbalance still persist in our modern time. Gwan-Nzekwu (2008, p. 167) believes that gender roles and perceptions are usually tied to cultural beliefs and as such emanate from them. She asserts that video films have fostered these gender disparities and inequalities. These inequalities as perceived in our society are considered as some of the hindrances to our development. Theyhave made women vulnerable and define how they are treated, which are mostly in degraded form. In all these unfair treatment against women, our society suffers in the overall view.

Ekhareafo (2011, p. 103) believes that the level of women's rights violation in Nigeria continues to pose serious challenges to the nation's quest for development. He writes that a sizeable number of women continue to groan under excruciating conditions that violate their dignity as human, as a result of the traditional and social practices which limit their capacity to evolve out of poverty and participate meaningfully in the quest for a sustainable future for all. He traces the unfair treatment against women to the dominant social and traditional pattern within the society which reinforces the idea that women lack the potential to excel in formal organisations or play active role in their development. Citing other authors, he agrees that the traditional social pattern and norms have resulted in all forms of prejudice against women in formal organisations. Nwagbara (2005, p. 60) observes that stereotypes of women being portrayed in the media are usually based on prejudice with such presentation of women as incompetent workers, people preoccupied with beauty and trends, who not involved in making important decisions or doing important things but are dependent on men. Nwagbara believes that a portrayal of this nature reduces the three dimensional quality of an ideal woman to a one-dimensional form, leaving her with no depth and a distorted picture of what she represents. These unfair and unreasonable stereotype has been opposed by concerned people across the globe. The opposing idea is known as feminism.

Feminism: The Call for Gender Equality

Feminism is a collective term for systems of belief and theories that pay special attention to women's rights and women's position in culture and society. Feminists are united by the idea that women's position in society is unequal to that of men, and that society is structured in such a way as to benefit men to the political, social, and economic detriment of women (Microsoft Encarta, 2009). According to Burkett (2020),feminism is the belief in social, economic, and political equality of the sexes. Convinced that the full and complete development of a country, the welfare of the world and the cause of peace require the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all field, the United Nations convention instituted the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against women (Daramola, 2005, p. 296). The organisation was convinced that establishing new international economic order based on equality and justice will contribute towards the promotion of equality between men and women to enjoy their rights as humans. The Universal Discrimination of Human Rights affirms the principle of the inadmissibility of discrimination and proclaims that every human being is born free and equal in dignity and that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth therein, without distinction of any kind including distinction based on sex.

Today, feminism is manifested worldwide and is represented by various institutions committed to activity on behalf of women's rights and interests. However, feminists have used different theories to explain these inequalities and have advocated different ways of redressing inequalities. There are marked geographic and historical variations in the nature of feminism. We have various types of feminism which include but not limited to liberal feminism, radical feminism, cultural feminism, socialist and Marxist feminism, ecofeminism, womanism, etc. Olayiwola (2016, p. 379) observe that African feminist scholars attempt to differentiate the African women's quest for liberation from the Western version. He notes that like Euro-American feminists, African feminists also looked forward to ending sexism and

oppression of women, but their approaches differ. Our local women at the forefront of gender struggle include Chikenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, Alice Walker, Grace Whyte, Buchi Emecheta, Nnaemeka and, recently, Chimamanda Adichie. They have propounded and embraced ideologies like Gynalism, Femanalism, Motherism, Stiwanism, Nego-Feminism, and Intro-Gender conflict theories. However, regardless of the style of feminism, they all aim at achieving one common goal – equality of both sexes. To a large extent, they are making headway in the struggle.

The Microsoft Encarta (2009) summarizes some of the achievements recorded from feminists. According to them, feminist thinking has succeeded in drawing public attention to inequality between women and men and to the structures within society that belittle and work against women. It has led to a reconsideration of women's role in the workplace, resulting in policies that promote equal pay and equal opportunities. And it has identified and tackled the problem of sexual harassment at work. Feminism has also succeeded in challenging perceptions of women's skills, with the result that some women are entering nontraditional areas of female employment such as the construction industry. Feminism has influenced culture, resulting in greater coverage of women's interests and concerns, particularly by the mass media. Through conference, books, music, movies, newspaper, magazine, TV and radio programmes, feminist's ideas are propagated in our society. One of the media platforms which was recently established to propagate feminist programmes in the country is Women 91.7 FM. We shall briefly outline its philosophy.

Women FM 91.7: Station Ideology

Unverified sources gave a rough description of Women FM in a simple order. WFM 91.7 MHz (Women 91.7 FM) is a Nigerian gender sensitive and specialized radio station licensed by Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC) to broadcast programmes for women and their family. It is the first female-oriented radio station in Sub-Saharan Africa. The station is owned by the duo of Dr. Babatunde Okewale and Toun Okewale Sonaiya and operated by Ive's Communication. It is headquartered in Arepo community, Ogun State, South West, Nigeria. The broadcasting equipment was supplied by Clyde Broadcast, Glasgow, Scotland. The test transmission of the station started on 29 October 2015. In the same vein, the first programme of the station was aired to Nigerians on 16 November 2015. The station showcased Abisola Grace Aiyeola, Funmi Jinadu, and Bolatito Bez Idakula as the pioneer on-air personalities (OAP) for the station. The station was launched on 18 December 2015.

The station believes in keeping listeners company throughout the day with quality, relevant, informative and entertaining programmes that cut across business, politics, education, sports, music, news, current affairs, relationships and family entertainment from the woman's perspective. Their vision as spelt out in their corporate profile states "To use WFM91.7 as a tool for women development and become the most reliable, trusted and leading source of information." Their mission statement reads, "To continue to create more female-centric programmes that will amplify the voice of women and foster national development." The core values of the station speak volumes of what they represent which include Gender Equality, Integrity, Respect, Fairness, Teamwork, and Accountability. The station clearly outlines its ideals and declares that women destiny is in their hands and prides WFM 91.7 as the Nigeria's 1st female-centric radio station designed to inspire and empower women in the country. The station is a veritable tool for women emancipation and development. Considering the world of information we are today, the station is considered a platform to celebrate the roles women play as power decision makers and change agents of society. Women FM symbolizes a movement on all matters of interests to women and all that pertains to their families. WFM 91.7 unapologetically bears the tagline: "The Voice of Women".

The following statistical facts gathered on the lack of women enlightenment programmes gave the backdrop for the station's women-centric

programme. Only 17% of existing radio shows are targeted at women. 73% women complained of unbalanced and relevant women focused programmes on existing radio stations. They want more programmes to discuss business, money matters, politics, career, sports, etc. from the woman's perspective in addition to the usual relationship programmes. 75% did not like the contents of most of the female oriented programmes on existing radio stations. "They are prejudiced, one sided and non-representative of the total woman." "Presenters should be facilitators, not judgmental. Programmes should inspire debate and not be narrow-minded" many said. 85% women said radio is a companion and can be a key source of information for them if the contents are relevant and are more female-centric. 77% of women said if radio programmes focus more and cover wider ranges of topics to represent a complete picture of women's roles and interests, listenership will increase and they will participate more. 73% will contribute if women are more involved in the production and presentation of programmes. Particularly, women from different backgrounds should represent the variety of women's experiences, perspectives and interests better. 68% women agreed that radio can be a useful tool for women development compared to other more expensive ICTs like the Internet, mobile phones, etc.(www.wfm917.com, 2020). Upon these findings and belief of Women 91.7 FM, this study examines some of the facts by focusing on younger girls.

Theoretical Framework

The theory selected for this study is the Perception theory. This is because the entire argument about gender discrimination and equality are human perspectives. The struggle for equality and other feminist movements are largely based on the various perception of people in the society.

Perception Theory

This theory was propounded by B. Berelson and G.A Steine in 1964. They state that perception is the complex process by which people select, organize and interpret sensory stimulation into meaningful and coherent picture of the world. Bennett, Hoffnan and Prahash (1989), as cited by Folarin (1998), state that perception is notable activities. It involves updating perspective and interacting with the observed. Halley (as cited in Folarin, 1998) defines perception as the process by which we interpret sensory data. Sensory data come to us through our five senses; research has identified two types of influences on our perception. They are:

Structural influences: This type of perception comes from the physical aspect of the stimuli to which we are being exposed. Functional Influence: These are psychological factors that influence perception and therefore introduce some subjectivity into the process. The Ukessays (2017) explains that Perception is often influenced or even biased by our expectations, experiences, moods, and sometimes cultural norms. This is where the mind comes in, not just the brain. We are even able to fool ourselves due to our expectations. Our eyes play a role in perceiving information to our brain, but really, our mind has the most power. Our perceptual set is the psychological factors that determine how we perceive the environment. For example, our perception can be influenced by our mood. The status of women among men is a matter of perception. At least the society has evolved into a stage where women are to be perceived with a new perspective.

Research Method

Though the population of this research is the entire young Nigerian girls, we narrowed the scope down to students of Lagos State University, Ojo,who were presented with a set of prepared questionnaire to elicit their response on the research objectives. Furthermore, the population was narrowed down to the Department of Mass Communication of the university. We focused our attention on all female students in this department because this is the gender mostly affected by the issue discussed. The students were picked using convenient sampling. The first sixty students were picked from each level (100, 200, 300,and 400 levels)**.**The questionnaire contained 12-item questions presented in two sections, A and B. The items in section A contained

the demographic variables which was based on optional system in which respondents were to tick the one that applies to their disposition, while section B looked at how they view the research questions. The second section is based on the research question of this study and the Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neutral (N), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (DA), which allows us to develop a number of statements with respect to our research topic, by offering the respondents the opportunity of selecting from the options which best explain their dispositions.

Data Analysis

Only 174 out of the 240 questionnaires distributed were duly filed and returned. Thus, the percentage of returned questionnaire was 72%, which is still a good response ratio to work with.

Table 1. I listen to Women FM

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agreed, SA	108	62
Agreed, A	40	23
Neutral, N	12	7
Disagree, D	10	6
Strongly Disagreed, DS	4	2
Total	174	100

63% of the respondents strongly agreed that they listen to Women FM. 23% of them agreed that they listen to it. 7% maintained a neutral disposition, and 6% disagreed while 2% strongly disagreed.

Table 2. I know what Women FM represents in the society.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agreed, SA	35	20
Agreed, A	95	55
Neutral, N	30	17
Disagreed, D	6	4
Strongly Disagreed, SD	8	4
Total	174	100

About 55% of the respondents agreed they know what Women FM represent in the society. 20% strongly agreed. 17% of them were neutral on this point while 4% disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively.

Table 3. Women FM is the best means to reach females with gender-based messages.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agreed, SA	75	43
Agreed, A	47	27
Neutral, N	38	22
Disagreed, D	11	6
Strongly Disagreed, SD	3	2
Total	174	100

43%of the respondents strongly agreed that Women FM is the best means to reach females with gender-based messages. 27% agreed. 22% were neutral on this while 6% disagreed, and 2% strongly disagreed.

Table 4.Women FM has finally come to give a voice to the suppressed females in our society.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agreed, SA	56	32
Agreed, A	58	33
Neutral, N	34	20
Disagreed, D	21	12
Strongly Disagreed, SD	5	3
Total	174	100

33% agreed that Women FM has finally come to give a voice to the suppressed females in our society. 32% strongly agreed. 20% maintained neutral position on this. 12% of them disagreed while 3% strongly disagreed.

43% of the respondents strongly agreed that they enjoy programmes aired on Women FM. 29% percent agreed. 19% were neutral on this. 6% disagreed while 3% strongly disagreed.

Table 5. I enjoy programmes aired on Women FM

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agreed, SA	73	43
Agreed, A	51	29
Neutral. N	34	19
Disagreed, D	10	6
Strongly Disagreed, SD	6	3
Total	174	100

Table 6. Ever since I started listening to Women FM, my knowledge of female issues has broadened.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agreed, SA	63	36
Agreed, A	66	38
Neutral, N	28	16
Disagreed, D	9	5
Strongly Disagreed, SD	8	5
Total	174	100

About 38%of the respondents agreed that their knowledge of gender issues has broadened since they started listening to women issues. 36% strongly agreed. 16% were undecided while 5% disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively.

Table 7.The issues discussed on Women FM are truly inspiring and are helping me to be the kind of woman I should be.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agreed, SA	71	40
Agreed, A	52	30
Neutral, N	38	22
Disagreed, D	8	5
Strongly Disagreed	5	3
Total	174	100

40% of the respondents strongly agreed that programmes on Women FM inspire them to be better women. 30% agreed. 22% couldn't say. 5% disagreed while 3% strongly disagreed.

Table 8. I recommend that all young ladies listen to Women FM rather than other radio stations.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agreed, SA	61	35
Agreed, A	76	44
Neutral, N	27	16
Disagreed, D	8	5
Strongly Disagreed, SD	2	1
Total	174	100

44% agreed that young ladies be recommended to listen to Women FM. 35% strongly agreed. 16% remained neutral on this recommendation. 5% disagreed while 1% strongly disagreed.

Table 9. Some of the programmes on Women FM are extreme as they encourage rebellion against our male counterpart which could threaten our societal family structure.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agreed, SA	67	39
Agreed, A	67	39
Neutral, N	24	14
Disagreed, D	10	6
Strongly Disagreed	6	3
Total	174	100

39% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed respectively that some of the programmes on the radio station encourage rebellion against their male counterpart; 14% were neutral on this point; 6% disagreed while 3% strongly disagreed.

Table 10. Some of the programmes aired on Women FM should tone down the excessive anti-male gigs.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agreed, SA	57	32
Agreed, A	70	40
Neutral, N	32	18
Disagreed, D	5	3
Strongly Disagreed	10	6
Total	174	100

40% of the respondents agreed that the excessive anti-male sentiment be toned down. 32% strongly agreed; 18% were neutral; 6% strongly disagreed while 3% agreed.

Discussion of Findings

1. *To what extent do the female undergraduates listen to Women FM?*

From their response in table 5, most of the students listen to Women FM. The statistics gathered in the table highlights that 63% of the respondents strongly agreed that they listen to Women FM. 23% of them agreed that they listen to it. 7% maintained a neutral disposition and 6% disagreed while 2% strongly disagreed.

2. *To what extent are the female undergraduates aware of what Women FM represents in our society*

Responses gathered from the field survey show that most of the female students know what Women FM represents in our society. About 55% of the respondents agreed they know what Women FM represents in the society; 20% strongly agreed; 17% of them were neutral on this point while 4% disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively. In table 8, the students agreed that the station has a clear-cut focus which they are aware of. The findings read: 33% agreed that Women FM has finally come to give a voice to the suppressed females in our society; 32% strongly agreed; 20% maintained a neutral position on this; 12% of them disagreed while 3% strongly disagreed.

3. *What benefits have female undergraduates derived from listening programmes aired on Women FM?*

An overwhelming number of the respondents enjoy the station's programmes. 43% of the respondents strongly agreed that they enjoy programmes aired on Women FM; 29% percent agreed; 19% were neutral on this; 6% disagreed while 3% strongly disagreed. They added that they have been impacted positively by the programmes aired on Women FM. About 38%of the respondents agreed that their knowledge of gender issues has broadened since they started listening to women issues; 36% strongly agreed; 16% were undecided while 5% disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively

4. *How do the female undergraduate students perceive some of the anti-male gigs presented in Women FM?*

From the responses collated, the female undergraduates do not like excessive anti-male sentiment. The results show that 39% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed respectively that some of the programmes on the radio station encourage rebellion against their male counterpart; 14 were neutral on this point; 6% disagreed while 3% strongly disagreed. 40% of the respondents agreed that the excessive anti-male sentiment should be toned down; 32% strongly agreed; 18% were neutral; 6% strongly disagreed while 3% agreed.

Conclusion

This paper has revealed that women suppression is a substantiated phenomenon. We cannot deny how women have suffered and are still suffering in a world they help to build (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2014, p.442;Macionis, 2005, p. 382).Even in the media, such unfair treatment still exists (Azeez & Doghudge, 2016, p.117;Gwan-Nzekwu, 2008, p. 167). The focus of this paper is not only to establish the fact that women are being subjugated in the society but also to draw people' attention to the fact that the feminist struggle is not getting much attention. Those young girls who especially need proper education may not be viewing the right medium to get the awareness they need about their universal condition. Using women FM 91.7 as a springboard, we attempted to assess the level of awareness of the target female students on the activities of the feminist radio station. We also attempted to find out if the girls who listened to the radio station understood the essence of the station.

The findings gathered in the study have showed that many girls in higher institutions are aware of feminist mediums like the Women 91.7 FM and they fully understand the ideology of the station through its various programmes. In view of the findings, it is necessary to make the following recommendations.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are pertinent:

1. While it is good news that many female students in the university agreed that they listen to Women FM 91.7, it is important to know if female students at the secondary school level also know about the station. This will necessitate similar research at the secondary school level to know if the younger ones also listen to this mass medium which will enlighten them about gender issues.

2. Though the research population, the female undergraduates, mostly understood the ideology of the station and know what the station stands for, the research did not cover details of their understanding and the effect the station's programmes has on them. This research is only a preparatory work for a detailed research which should find out the extent to which young female students are impacted by the Women FM programmes. This research is urgently needed.

3. Considering the fact that the respondents enjoyed the station's programmes, there is a need to analyse the kind of programmes the station is currently airing and which ones in particular are more appealing to the female students. The findings will be of help to other new gender-based mass media houses designing programmes.

4. It is a huge relief to know that many of the female undergraduates do not like the excessive anti-male programmes the station airs. There is still need for concerted effort to enlighten young girls on the difference of sexism and feminism. Like African notable writers rightly stated in their style of feminism, there is a distinct difference between African feminism and western-style feminism. There is need for more gender-based stations like Women 91.7 FM to help young girls understand the difference inthe ideologiesthey are feeding them with. This calls for a conscious attempt to encourage gender related stations to create informative programmes onsexism and feminism.

5. Further research is required to ascertain the level of support a gender-based station like Women 91.7FM is receiving from our government. Our government which will ultimately benefit from societal development should be at the forefront of encouraging mass media houses like Women FM and other similar media outfits. It is not certain if they are receiving the required support from government at various tiers. Mass media costs a fortune to establish and maintain; thus, such specialized media needs support from both government and international bodies.

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