Gendered Stereotypes in Gado Cartoons Images and the Attitudes on Gender Roles of Women in Kenya

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to analyze the relationship between these gendered stereotypes in the Gado cartoon images and the attitudes formed about gender roles of women. Cartoon drawings remain an essential means of communication amongst most newspaper dailies. A simple drawing of a cartoon summarizes messages of publications, institutions, societies, regimes governments, organizations, or even persons. This is an analysis of a specific tool used to convey gendered messages often ignored perhaps because cartoons tend to be humorous and satirical concealing the irony, satire, and the serious messages behind the simple strokes. Data for analysis was received from 362 people using questionnaires as well as using content analysis analyzing 20 gendered cartoons. Cartoons were seen to have a huge impact on a larger part of the audience. Indeed, 54% of the respondents indicated that such negative portrayal of women in politics in cartoons makes them hate politics, 56% feel skeptical of women's ability to lead and 72% of the women said they hate joining politics. However, 85.1% indicated that stereotypes are good with 94.2% indicating that stereotypes help them process the bulk of information that they face every day. Many of the respondents, however, indicated that the gendered stereotypes they see in the paper are not true. 70.4%, said that the stereotypes are false. Therefore, cartooning and caricature work is a serious means/tool of communication and should not be ignored. Also, cartoons need to be studied more closely and the messages synthesized further as well as the cartoonists restraining themselves by being objective and fair in their representation of society through their visual images. The images used were published between January 2009 and December 2013. The study recommended ethnographic research be conducted to identify more accurate responses on the effects and attitudes of this gendered cartoon.

Keywords: *Cartoons, Gender, Stereotypes, Newspapers, Women*

1. Introduction

A cartoon is one of the visual means of communication used in the print media, especially the newspapers, which have used caricatures for years. Gender messages are rampant in these images as cartoonists attempt to communicate their messages. Cartoons have truth claims, as do other forms of art that attempt to represent and reflect reality, and also supplement news presentations with statements of meaning. Because they are a printed record of history, they

can be interpreted as reflecting contemporary cultural attitudes and values, and serve to record and perpetuate commonly held beliefs (Berger, 1993).

According to Hawkesworth (2003), following the gender stereotype that men are rational and women are emotional, male politicians are referred to as rational policymakers, who make decisions based on factual evidence while women make decisions based on emotion. These are seemingly the messages that the media and the various tools of communication like cartoons depict even today. This argument is also supported by Wood (1994) who noted that of the many influences on how we view men and women, media are the most pervasive and one of the most powerful. Woven throughout our daily lives, media insinuate their messages into our consciousness at every turn. Further, all forms of media communicate images of the sexes, many of which perpetuate unrealistic, stereotypical, and limiting perceptions. To achieve this goal, the media uses other means such as visuals, drawings, and writings to communicate these messages.

Ignoring cartoons, however, should not be the case as Lent (2000) observed. In some cartoons, the message can be so subtle that readers debate among themselves who is being attacked. The process of unveiling serious ideas through cartoons may involve the use of satire, humor, contrast, surprise, and even nonsense. As such, a cartoon can stand out as a serious tool used to pass on messages to the viewers and readers who access them. Thus, these cartoon drawings not only act as tools of communication amongst many daily publications all over the world, they are also a visual form of self-expression. Many varying messages have been effectively communicated through these cartoons with some even passing more subtle and serious messages than written articles. With such importance then, cartoons have been a subject of controversy, interest, information, debates, arguments, and even irony amongst readers and critics alike globally.

Therefore, this research sought to examine how the image of women remains or has changed over many years using specific tools in these mediums such as cartoons that seem largely ignored. Compared to other tools of communication like write-ups, films, and adverts, cartoons have been largely ignored as serious communication. For example, if a column or film showed that women's position is in the traditionally and hitherto perceived roles and places like the kitchen, childbearing, immediate uproar, angry comments, and criticisms would follow almost immediately as opposed to cartoons that draw women especially those in politics in such positions countless times as was shown by the 20 samples the research analyzed.

Douglas (1975) proposed that a social structure can be organized in the form of a joke or visually as a cartoon. Thus, the examination of the joke can reveal common assumptions, dominant public values, and general public expectations. It is not ironic thus that Gado a cartoonist survived in the politically suffocating environment in Kenya in the 90's yet journalists like him critical to the undemocratic regime were cramped down, tortured, and even exiled if not killed.

According to Templin (1999), cartoonists share fundamental biases with the societies they critique, and therefore cartooning has a heritage that has at times been racist and sexist. In this sense, it means that cartoons are also representations that are mediated forms of communication and often recycle ideas of ethnic/racial pictures that are common in society and the social imagination. This explained the observations of women being oftenly drawn as frightened, small, weak, and fearful under attack of the male gender who are in return

drawn as huge, powerful, ruthless, brutal, and majority showing a male-dominated society. Drawing men as masculine, strong, and aggressive, is an assumption that they are as the society seems to think and portray. This should not be taken as a foregone conclusion and thus is the need for this research.

As one of the most satirical forms of communicating in modern times, a cartoon carries messages of images of men and women in certain roles and duties, appearances, positions, and acts that also communicate gendered messages. For example, when a woman dubbed 'wanjiku' is drawn in cartoons looking weak, smaller, and seemingly threatened, she is assumed to be representing the common/average people of Kenya. This leads one to believe that women are the oppressed, weak, and exploited group and represent an average, oppressed, weak, dejected person in Kenya.

Even though cartoon images and the stereotypes they have seem innocent or suggest so, according to Rayner et al. (2001) one effect of stereotypes in the media is that they dehumanize people by denying them the complex psychological make-up that an individual possesses by reducing them to a few generalized personality traits. Stereotypes perpetuated in the media can easily be used to marginalize or even devalue groups in society. When women are depicted as sexual objects especially clad in short skirts to please men, then society gets the perception that sex is all that women have to offer to men.

Berg (2002) observed that stereotypical characteristics in popular media are short messages to audiences, who recognize these quickly. Given the more constrained space of cartoons, this shorthand becomes more potent. Figures who represent those uncommon in the political arena (i.e. gendered and racial minorities) are portrayed as stock characters displaying stereotypical physical markers and characteristics. Thus, as conspicuous visual images, cartoons convey these messages quickly and clearly. They are critical components of the development of cultural and gender messages communication processes today.

The cartoons analyzed in this study were from Gado alias Mr. Godfrey Mwampembwa a Tanzanian by birth, who is arguably Kenya's, east and Central Africa best-known (most serialized) cartoonist. He has been penning his mostly politically charged cartoons in *The Daily Nation* papers since 1992, therefore capturing most of the gendered aspects in the Kenyan, East-African, African, and world societies. He draws controversial images with regard to gender, especially when female political actors defy their gender-stereotyped roles and play politics like men. He often punishes them in cartoons. This was not only seen to be happening in Kenya but also in other parts of the world like the U.S.A, where Hillary Clinton as First Lady and presidential aspirant was constantly targeted by cartoonists. It is noticeable in the way cartoons are gendered today because, unlike the society they portray, they seem to exhibit resistance to changes in the status quo for a while.

According to Wood (1994), cartoons about women in politics speak to more varied themes, depending on the context of time and situation. Three particular themes in media representations of women surface thus. First, women are underrepresented, which suggests that "they are unimportant or invisible" Second, women are presented in terms of sex-role stereotypes, which unfairly categorize women. Third, relational aspects between men and women emphasize traditionally divided roles, psychologically consigning women to limited nurturing and support roles. In this case, cartoon drawings are complicated by the fact that cartooning is overwhelmingly dominated by men.

Therefore, this study addressed a gap in women's representation in politics shown in gendered images and stereotypes in the Kenyan daily newspaper- *The Daily Nation* cartoons. This research explored the ways these stereotypes are used and the effects they have on the audience. It helped gain insight into the effects of these gendered stereotypes in cartoons and provided knowledge that assisted in suggesting improved, effective ways of representing women in cartoons. The world is moving towards gender parity but many sectors like the media still lag in accepting women as equal to men, especially in roles that have traditionally been held by men. Gender stratification remains apparent in the family, in education, in the mass media, in the labor force, in housework, in the distribution of income and wealth, and even in politics, Spain and Bianchi (1996). Yet the media especially should not be buttressing these stereotypical themes but helping in eradicating them in the other sectors of society.

1.1 Problem Statement

If a political cartoonist supports an issue or a political candidate, a reader is not likely to see that issue or person featured in cartoon images, because "to be featured in a political cartoon is traditionally to be criticized or the source of satire" Conners, (2005). To be an issue or candidate supported by a cartoonist is to be ignored in the cartoon content—to be in a cartoon commentary is to be a target. Political cartoons "need not follow the principles of objectivity we expect in news stories; rather, they are expressing opinions in parallel with newspaper editorials and opinion columns" Conners, (2005).

The media is seen as a tool capable of shaping perceptions of the world Boulding (1956); Eagly (1987); Eagly and Wood (1999). The media is a powerful tool used to reflect the values of society and create new ones. Media power has the potential to influence and to some extent control the minds of readers or viewers Klapper, (1960). The media through books, newspapers, television, and the internet have become the avenue for reflecting our societies. They create a representation of reality through the content they offer. The messages that the media carries thus have a huge impact on the audience and if stereotypes on gender find space in the newspapers, then such messages take society years back or support aspects that should be discarded.

Some of the messages are in cartoons intertwined with cartoon humor which can be a conservative force in society, and examination of the "joke" can reveal common assumptions, dominant public values, and general public expectations. The humor can also mock or point out absurdity and thereby challenge the status quo. Cartoons, therefore, can also serve as a force of social and political change. According to Wood (2000), media depicts relationships between men and women emphasizing traditional roles and normalizing violence against women. Cartoons are part of the powerful media and as a tool; it is used by the media to pass gender discriminatory messages. The cartoonist involved argued that images drawn about women are a reflection of the social ideologies and beliefs of society. However, these cartoons seem out of place where women have considerably gained gender parity, and where it is slow, steps to fast-track it are in place.

As such, this research was anchored on the constant attacks women in politics receive and bearing in mind the immense power that the media possesses, the gendered cues that cartoons communicate affects gender roles and its perception. The researcher sought to analyze how women are portrayed by the cartoons as gender emancipation for women continues to feather.

1.2 Objective of the Study

The objective of this study was to analyze the relationship between these gendered stereotypes in the Gado cartoon images and the attitudes formed about gender roles of women.

2. Literature Review

The creation of gender stereotypes in cartoons is further compounded by their role in communication through which gender ideals are continuously constructed, nurtured, and negotiated in American society at large Gamble (2003). Editorial cartoons, which circulate widely among the public, participate in such constructions by affirming presidential politics as a male domain. They offer varied strategies in their presentations of female political actors that both ratify and challenge enduring social stereotypes depending on the context of depiction. These deeply gendered roots of American politics and the important role of gender in today's political realities underscore the importance of gender as a construction in editorial cartoons.

Carroll and Fox (2006), argue, "underlying gender dynamics are critical to shaping the contours and the outcomes of elections in the United States." Historically, we have defined our ideals of political leadership and effectiveness around norms associated with masculinity. Jorgensen (2000) also observes that men have been the dominant actors in the political sphere, particularly at the national level. The more recent incursion of women into the male domain of political participation and leadership has commanded scholarly attention to women's roles in the political sphere as Wood (2000) also notes. Moreover, gender studies have come full circle to consider how masculinity, as well as femininity, is socially constructed in the realm of politics as Ducat (2004); and Jeffords (1994) also write.

Because cartoonists must use gender in a manner relevant to readers' social experiences, cartoons provide a window into pervasive cultural attitudes about gender. Gender ideals are continuously constructed, nurtured, and negotiated in American society at large as Gamble and Gamble (2003) observed. Editorial cartoons, which circulate widely among the public, participate in such constructions by affirming presidential politics as a male domain, while they offer varied strategies in their presentations of female political actors that both ratify and challenge enduring social stereotypes, depending on the context of depiction.

Females are portrayed as passive and waiting for men's attention, while males are shown ignoring, exploiting, or directing women according to Brown et al. (1986). Even elsewhere in entertainment circles like rap music videos, African-American men and women stars, men dominate women according to Texier, (1990).

In today's world, the inclusion of women in the fight for various freedoms and rights can be seen in these courses although in the cartoons, not much has changed in women's representation in Kenya. Stereotypes are still included whenever women are portrayed against men, as the strong are against the perceived weak, exploited disadvantaged females. These observations made the researcher seek to analyze the observations; of the various visual forms and illustration genres in modern times, the cartoon is perhaps one of the most used, appearing daily in most publications around the globe, as a visual metaphor or metaphorical codification through which an artist informs, educates or entertains his viewers, cartoons are therefore more effective tools of communication and that it has been classified as a form of cool media although a cartoon is a screaming medium that cannot be denied attention. In delivering these massages, cartoons use stereotypes about gender.

These cartoons are accessible to a large diverse audience because the views, actions, and even physical appearance of figures are already widely known. The prior knowledge is part of a broader social scenario selected by the cartoonist and rearranged to form the script for the humorous text Raskin, (1985). Cartoons rely on current personalities and or events and some common understanding of issues for their content Berger, (1993). Douglas (1975) proposed that a social structure can be organized in the form of a joke or visually as a cartoon. Thus, the examination of the joke can reveal common assumptions, dominant public values, and general public expectations. Humour is perhaps the most brilliant achievement of the human spirit, and that humour is a way of saying something serious respectively'.

Media is "deeply implicated in the process of defining and framing gender," as noted by Aalberg and Jenssen, (2007), and is often the main culprit behind the perpetration of gender stereotypes. Media consumers process the messages therein and create attitudes regarding what is appropriate. Berg, (2002) further observes that the educational function of the cartoon has proven a valuable instrument and avenue to educate the readers in any publication where it appears because cartoons are most times satirical and humorous in the subject and inevitably elicit readers' participation. With many changes coming to the modern world Kenya included questions of just how this change in female portrayal should be viewed by society and by cartoonists, continue to linger.

One might however argue that cartoons are designed in accord with their audiences, thus indicating that the world is still gender insensitive as cartoonists show. Earlier on, it could be assumed that the readership of the editorial page and such cartoons was male. However, increased education of women argues against that assumption today. Much has changed today. So, when women are portrayed as a weak gender, this research is inevitable.

2.1 Social Identity Theory

This theory was developed by Tajfel and Turner in 1979. It was originally developed to understand the psychological basis of intergroup discrimination. Tajfel et al (1971) attempted to identify the *minimal* conditions that would lead members of one group to discriminate in favor of the in-group to which they belonged and against another out-group. Tajfel (1971) proposed that the groups (e.g. social class, family, football team, etc.) which people belonged to were an important source of pride and self-esteem. Groups give us a sense of social identity: a sense of belonging to the social world.

This theory assumes that people belonging to an 'in-group' will look for faults and negative things about another group hence enhancing their self-image. Social identity theory states that the in-group will discriminate against the out-group to enhance their self-image. The theory asserts that group membership creates in-group/ self-categorization and enhancement in ways that favor the in-group at the expense of the out-group. After being categorized in group membership, individuals seek to achieve positive self-esteem by positively differentiating their in-group from a comparison out-group on some valued dimension.

Fig 1. Conceptual Framework

Independent Variables   **Dependent Variable**
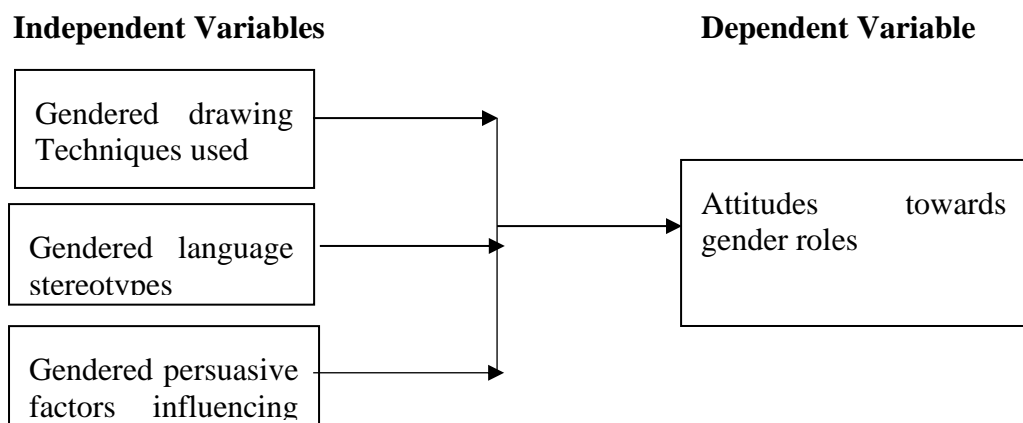
From the conceptual framework, the cartoonist draws images and inserts short texts to explain to their audience, and in this way, they use their opinions, and knowledge as well as certain attitudes. Through these images and texts, they present and impose their attitudes and opinions to their readers. The use of prejudices the cartoonists have about certain gender directly translates into the content they create. Therefore, the cartoonist has a direct influence and relationships to the content they create.

3. Methodology

For this study, an approach of survey research design to obtain data was used. According to (Bernard & Morrison, 1992), survey research design is a systematic method of gathering information from a population using questionnaires.

3.1 Content Analysis

Content analysis in this study was used to analyze 20 gendered images and messages in the cartoons drawn by Gado. Thus, content analysis helped the researcher to describe how gendered cartoon images show gender stereotypes that are used to represent women in politics in the Daily Nation's editorial cartoons by Gado.

3.2 Sampling Procedure

A total of 362 questionnaires were issued using a purposive sampling procedure and were later analyzed. They were issued to audiences within the larger Nairobi County to a section of the target population within the 20-60 years age bracket. This group was sampled from the larger Nairobi population which according to the (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2009) was 3,138,369 people in Nairobi.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data obtained was analyzed in two ways. The data from the questionnaires was analyzed using the social sciences data analyzing tool called SPSS (package 21). Data from the 20 selected cartoon images with gendered stereotypes from the media under study was analyzed using content analysis.

4. Results

To describe how cartoons portray gendered stereotypes by Gado while representing women in politics, data was analyzed and the findings were interpreted for presentation. This was done using a table of frequency of occurrences, pie charts, and graphs. The images used for the study were also described with reference to the gendered stereotypes used. The study aimed to analyze the relationship between gendered stereotypes in Gado's cartoon images and the attitudes formed about gender roles of women, particularly in the political context. The findings of the research revealed significant insights into how such depictions influence societal perceptions and attitudes toward women.

The research highlighted that Gado's cartoons, which are often featured in *The Daily Nation*, depicted women in ways that reinforced traditional gender stereotypes. Women were frequently shown as emotional, passive, and dependent, perpetuating a narrative that aligned with outdated societal norms. These portrayals were particularly pronounced in the context of women in politics, where they were represented as incapable of leadership and relegated to supporting roles. Such depictions were seen to significantly impact the attitudes of the audience towards gender roles in society.

From the survey conducted, 54% of respondents indicated that the negative portrayal of women in politics through these cartoons made them dislike politics altogether. This aversion was particularly pronounced among female respondents, with 72% expressing disinterest in joining politics due to these representations. Furthermore, 56% of the audience reported feeling skeptical about women's ability to lead effectively. These findings underline the pervasive influence of visual media in shaping public opinion and perpetuating stereotypes.

The study also delved into the audience's perception of the stereotypes depicted in cartoons. A paradox emerged, where a significant portion of respondents (85.1%) acknowledged that stereotypes were beneficial in helping them process complex information quickly. An even larger percentage (94.2%) felt that stereotypes simplified the bulk of information they encountered daily. However, there was also a critical acknowledgment that the stereotypes presented in the media were largely inaccurate, with 70.4% of respondents agreeing that these stereotypes were false. This indicates a level of cognitive dissonance among the audience, where they recognize the falsehood of these stereotypes but still rely on them for interpreting information.

The qualitative content analysis of the cartoons further reinforced the argument that women were portrayed in roles that diminished their authority and influence. Women in political roles were often shown as less competent compared to their male counterparts, and their contributions were trivialized. These representations were not just limited to the Kenyan context but mirrored a broader global trend of gendered media portrayals. For instance, parallels were drawn with how international figures like Hillary Clinton were targeted by cartoonists during her political campaigns, showcasing a global pattern of using gender stereotypes to undermine women in power.

The study's findings emphasize the role of media in reinforcing patriarchal norms and shaping public attitudes toward gender roles. Cartoons, often dismissed as mere humor, were found to have a profound impact on the audience's perceptions. The humor and satire embedded in these visual narratives subtly influenced societal attitudes, often reinforcing negative stereotypes without the audience consciously realizing their effect.

Based on these findings, the research made several recommendations to address the issue. First, it called for a more nuanced approach to cartooning and caricature work, emphasizing the need for fairness and objectivity in representing societal issues. Cartoonists were urged to adopt a more balanced perspective, avoiding depictions that perpetuate harmful stereotypes. The study also recommended that media houses take proactive steps to review and regulate the content they publish, ensuring that it aligns with principles of equality and fairness.

Additionally, the study highlighted the need for further research into the effects of visual media on societal attitudes. It emphasized the importance of engaging stakeholders, including media professionals, policymakers, and the public, in discussions about the implications of gendered stereotypes in media. Encouraging critical media literacy among audiences was also identified as a key step in empowering them to recognize and challenge biased portrayals.

5. Conclusion

The study underscored the significant impact of Gado's cartoons in shaping public attitudes toward gender roles. While these cartoons serve as powerful tools of communication, their potential to perpetuate harmful stereotypes cannot be overlooked. Addressing this issue requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders to promote fair and balanced representations of all genders in media.

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