

Female Mass Communication Undergraduates and Occupational Migration: Perception, Attitude and Implications

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Abstract

Journalism is a profession that has witnessed a surge in the number of female students taking it up as a career. However, the number of female Mass Communication students that graduate every year does not commensurate with the number of female journalists in the media houses. This study, therefore, investigated the perception, and attitudes, of female Mass Communication undergraduates toward journalism, factors that encourage occupational migration and its implications. The study was anchored on the social learning theory. The survey and in-depth interview were used with simple random and accidental sampling techniques to select 114 female students in the department of Mass Communication and six female students were also enlisted for the in-depth interview. Data were subjected to frequency tables and percentages whereas the in-depth interview was analysed thematically. Findings revealed that female undergraduates are aware of the challenges women journalists face in their profession which is having an adverse effect on their willingness to practice after graduation. Findings of the in-depth interview also revealed that public perception determines the acceptability of one's profession and if public perception is negative, female students' attitude will be negative in practising it. Also, more students are ready to migrate from their current course of study after graduation by taking up jobs outside journalism in order to escape the challenges inherent in the profession. Government, individuals, and stakeholders are advised to encourage female journalists by reducing the challenges they face to the barest minimum so that talented female journalists will not channel their useful skills and intellectual resources elsewhere.

Key words: Undergraduates, journalism, mass communication, migration, perception, and attitude

Introduction

Journalism is a profession that is invaluable to the development of any society. It is a field that aims to show case the happenings within and outside its immediate environment (Chioma, Okere, Alao, Atakiti, & Jegede, 2015). It is considered as an essential tool for information dissemination, public education, social mobilization, control, sensitization, and socialization. Journalism could also be described as the gathering, sorting and circulation of news feature and related documentary materials through different forms of media (Chioma, et al, 2015). Journalism imposes on the journalists the tasks of asking and obtaining answers to the 5Ws and H questions from the public as they often ask questions based on Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How? (Harcup, 2004). It serves as the watchdog of the government, institutions, and public; helps to provide different viewpoints over issues; advocates positive change in public interest and searches for and follow the truth for the welfare of the society (Okere, Jegede, & Atakiti 2015). Therefore, journalism is a field that requires training either acquired formally or through apprenticeship. Historically, the pattern of apprenticeship was usually through the local or regional press which journalists at that time embarked on to climb the career ladder (Franks, 2013). As part of its attempts to attain professionalism, different routes by which professionals enter the industry were identified. One of such identified patterns was that of apprenticeship and in the twentieth century, there was what is called “an attitude of school of real life” which was necessary for the training of a journalist aspiring to be successful (Franks, 2013: 7). However, the acquisition of formal training changed the recruitment practice at that time, and this had a positive effect on the notable growth in academic journalism training.

In the twentieth century, an increase in the growth of female Mass Communication students was remarkable. This exponential growth could be attributed to the academic training which followed the American model where academic training first emerged and where universities offer both undergraduate and postgraduate courses (Becker, 2008). The resultant effect of what Franks (2013) called the “academization” of route into journalism has encouraged the interest of women to take up courses in journalism. This gradually increased the number of female journalism undergraduates. Similarly, in Nigeria, many higher

Institutions of learning offer Mass Communication courses and award degrees and certificates in National Diploma, Higher National Diploma, Bachelor and Master's Degrees (Oberiri and Dongari, 2016). Mass Communication can be described as the process of exchanging and imparting information through the mass media to a large audience. There are several branches of mass communication, they include Advertising, Public relations, Journalism (broadcast and Print) etc. Students studying Mass Communication specialise in any of these branches. For the purpose of this study, Journalism will form the basis for which data will be generated. However, a large number of female Mass Communication students are enrolled and produced from different higher Institutions of learning, but these numbers are not represented in the different media of communication in the country as many media stations have only few female journalists working with them as against the large enrolment and turnout experienced every year (Hanusch & Mellado, 2014). It is against this backdrop that this study investigated the perception, and attitudes, of female Mass Communication students toward journalism and examined the factors that encourage occupational migration and its implications.

Undergraduates' Motivation and Perception of Journalism

Investigations have been conducted on the probable reasons undergraduates generally opt to study Mass Communication as a course (Endres and Wearden 1990; Adams, Brunner and Fitch-Hausser, 2008;). Students may feel that many opportunities abound in journalism such as promotion, enviable financial reward and advancement in career. Students who specialised in print journalism indicated that they chose a career in journalism because the profession is credible and useful to the society despite the stressful nature of the job, low salary and little or no room for advancement in the job (Endres and Wearden, 1990;). In a study conducted by Swanson (2016), it was observed that the motivating factor for students studying advertising and public relations was good job opportunities and good pay, though the profession lacks credibility in the eyes of the public since moral and professional ethics will need to be sacrificed to be successful in the profession. The finding also revealed that female students perceive journalism in two ways - the positive and negative aspects. The positive aspect of journalism according to

the female students is the connection of the profession with social justice and the writing opportunities it affords them. Also, the profession allows female journalists to be able to connect more deeply with sources of information and are often trusted with more confidential information than their male counterpart. Whereas, the negative aspect of the career include discrimination, low pay, lack of job security and negative impacts on family life. However, he pointed out that women face the challenges of balancing the unpredictable hours of the newsroom with raising children (Swanson, 2016). In their opinion, Coleman, et al (2016) citing Grile and Mrowickki (2005) claim that students are motivated to offer journalism because the broadcast media offers potential fame. This is because both local and national reporters achieve celebrity status. As part of these motivation, students crave for self-glorification, recognition and the ability to transfer knowledge and experience from generation to generation.

Reasons students choose journalism as a field of study

Mass Communication students have been found by numerous studies to study the course for different reasons (Adams et al, 2008; Coleman, Lee, Yaschur, Meader and McElroy, 2016). In a survey involving Nigerian female Mass Communication students, it was observed that the interest in the profession developed in order to advance the representation of women in the media as against what the media portrays them to be currently (Weaver et al, 2006; Adams et al, 2008; Coleman et al, 2016; Coleman, Lee, Yaschur, Meader and McElroy, 2016). Also, most of the female students feel the profession befits women than their male counterparts because of the glamour that accompanies the profession, some were found to love appearing on television and be heard on radio as presenters. As part of their motivation are the ability to write (Weaver et al, 2006; Adams et al, 2008; Coleman, Lee, Yaschur, Meader and McElroy, 2016; Coleman et al, 2016), the love for news gathering, meeting new people, talking, and researching, the desire to impact lives, serve humanity and witness important historical events. Some have been drawn to the profession basically because of the various connections they are likely to get through influential people, this is possible because of the calibre of people they meet on daily basis. However, students also report that they love the profession

because it helps to improve the condition of those who are suffering, provide justice for those suffering from injustice and it is a job that others respect and admire (Coleman, et al, 2016).

Reasons for female students' negative attitudes towards journalism

The field of journalism goes beyond the gathering, sorting, and circulating information but also include, analysing, informing, commenting, and amplifying issues that bother on public interest (Oberiri and Dogari, 2016). The number of female students enrolling to study Mass Communication as against the number who find themselves in the field has become an issue of great concern (Hanusch & Mellado, 2014). Various reasons that might have contributed to the low turnout of female Mass Communication students practising journalism have been suggested. One of the reasons is that females have negative attitude towards journalism itself (Chioma, Okere, Alao, Atakiti, & Jegede, 2015). This negative attitude was found to be as a result of the hazards involved in the profession. Some of these hazards are noticeable difference in the pay gap as men earn higher salaries and are placed in higher status positions (Franks, 2013; Adefolaju, 2016). The negative attitude could also be as a result of fear, stereotyping, attitude of people towards women journalists generally and even husband and family disapproval (Oberiri and Dongari, 2016; Ogundoyin, 2020). These could be viewed from the tradition or cultural point of view where women are expected to be responsible housewives by being able to multitask with their heavy domestic roles and responsibilities as well as being mothers, school teachers, secretaries, maids, social workers, hair dressers and tailors rather than becoming a journalist which does not give women enough time to focus on their cultural and traditional duties (Stitt, 1995; Amao, 1999). Their marital status is also a contributing factor because married students are of the view that they will quit work if it interferes with their family responsibilities. Similarly, discrimination in workplace combined with lack of respect for women's rights in many cultures are some other salient factors contributing to the negative perception and attitudes female Mass Communication students have (Morna, 2003). And when women are seeking to enter the industry, they are likely to face sexist attitudes, sexual harassments (men making advances, or asking females out), pay inequalities,

discrimination on assignments and promotions, inflexible work environments and lack of support mechanism (Morna, 2003).

Theoretical Framework

Social Learning Theory

The study is anchored on Albert Bandura's (1977) social learning theory. The theory proposes that new behaviour can be acquired by observing, imitating, modelling the behaviour, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others. In other words, by observing and interacting with other journalists, students can form ideas that may serve as a guide for action. In addition, learning also occurs through the observation of rewards and punishments. Through good remuneration, recognition, respect for the female gender and job satisfaction or otherwise, students can decide whether to follow their career path or not. The relevance of this theory to this study is that it reflects the way female Mass Communication students are exposed to and perceive journalism through their periodical industrial training. This later informs their perception and attitudes towards the profession since these variables depend largely on their decision to either take it up as a career or migrate to other prospective occupation.

Methodology

The study employed the use of survey and in-depth interview. The sample size constituted 120 female Mass Communication undergraduate students. Of the 120 copies of the questionnaire distributed to the respondents, 114 copies of the questionnaire were retrieved, and six female Mass Communication students were enlisted for the in-depth interview. The sample population was drawn from Bowen University, Iwo which is a Private Institution. The choice of Bowen University is borne out of convenience to get respondents to fill out the questionnaire. The simple random and accidental sampling techniques were used to draw respondents across four levels (100-400) out of 150 female students. For the distribution of the copies of the questionnaire, attention was paid more to the 300 level and 400 level students because they have been engaged in the practical aspect of the profession twice during their industrial

training at the end of their 200 level and 300 level respectively and would thus be able to evaluate their desire on whether they would love to practice their profession later in future or not. Thus, their perception of the profession will influence their attitude towards the profession. Data were presented in frequency tables and percentages while the interview was analysed thematically.

Results

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents according to Age (years)

Age range	Frequency	Percentage
Below 17 years	20	17.5
17 – 20 years	57	50.0
21 – 25 years	27	23.7
Above 25 years	10	8.8
Total	114	100.0

Of the 114 respondents studied, 57 (50%) were between the ages of 17 – 20 years, 27 (23.7%) were between 21 – 25 years and 10 (8.8%) respondents were older than 25 years (Table 1). The fact that over half of the respondents were below the age of 20 years suggests that they might not be matured enough to appreciate journalism as a profession that poses great hazards to women. They tend to see journalism as being limited to broadcasting where people see and appreciate you only on television and radio. This may influence their choice of journalism as a profession at the initial stage.

Table 2: Hazards of journalism scare female students away from the profession

Degree of Agreement	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	12	10.5
Agree	18	15.8
Uncertain	24	21.1
Disagree	11	9.6
Strongly Disagree	49	43.0
Total	114	100.0

A total of 30 (26.3%) respondents agreed that female students are scared from taking up journalism as a career

because of the hazard involved, whereas 60 (52.6%) disagreed and 24(21.1%) were uncertain suggesting that female students' choice of journalism as a career is not driven by the hazards of the profession but their level of interest in the profession (Table 2).

Table 3: Female Journalists find it difficult to get married because of the profession

Degree of Agreement	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	46	40.4
Agree	29	25.4
Uncertain	8	7.0
Disagree	19	16.7
Strongly Disagree	12	10.5
Total	114	100.0

Seventy-five (65.8%) respondents agreed that female journalists find it difficult to get married because of the profession, 31 (27.2%) disagreed and 8(7.0%) respondents were uncertain. The fact that the practice of journalism is time consuming which may be worse for female journalists in comparison to their male counterparts may be responsible for these findings (Table 3).

Table 4: Factors that attract female students towards journalism

Statement	Frequency	Percentage
To be a voice for women and children	32	28.1
It is interesting and for exposure	16	14.0
Freedom of expression	15	13.2
Passion	17	14.9
Recognition	80	70.2
Meeting new people	34	29.8
Total	114	100.0

A total of 80 (70.2%) respondents took interest in journalism because they want recognition, 34(29.8%) are attracted because they love meeting new people, 32 (28.1%) are studying the course because they want to be a voice for women

and children and 15 (13.2%) respondents love the course because it will afford them the freedom of expression (Table 4). The implication of these findings is that female Mass Communication Students tend to be attracted to the profession at the initial stage because they want to be recognised as celebrities where they will be able to meet with people and also add their own voice to burning issues in the society especially gender issues. However, this feeling may change as their training continues and with further exposure to the profession.

Table 5: Factors that discourage female students from practising journalism after graduation

Statement	Frequency	Percentage
Requires time	8	7.0
Requires different careful measures	5	4.4
Stress	9	7.9
Low pay	6	5.3
Very tough	6	5.3
Family disapproval	34	29.8
Sexual harassment	46	40.4
Total	114	100.0

It was observed that Sexual harassment 46 (40.4%) and Family disapproval 34 (29.8%) were the major discouraging factors that hinder female students from taking up journalism as a profession. These are strong social factors usually considered in typical African societies when a woman is about to get married, therefore, female Mass Communication Students will want to consider these factors in relation to their marital life before they take up the profession (Table 5).

Table 6: Public perception of women Journalists

Statement	Frequency	Percentage
Tough women	21	18.4
Carefree	8	7.0
Irresponsible women	25	21.9
Socialites	21	18.4
All of the above	39	34.2
Total	114	100.0

A total of 39 (34.2%) respondents believed that the public perceive women journalists as socialites, tough, carefree and

irresponsible; 25 (21.9%) respondents felt they are perceived as irresponsible and 8 (7.0%) felt that they are carefree. The implication of this is that public perception may discourage the students from pursuing a career in journalism since they feel that women journalists do not have public acceptance (Table 6).

Discussion

Perception of Female undergraduates

The perception of female Mass Communication undergraduates can be categorised into two – positive and negative aspects. During their industrial training, the students were acquainted with the intricacies of what the job entails within the industry through observation. Though most of the challenges identified by students as part of what constitute a bane in the industry also exist in other professions, they feel that female journalists ought to be respected more as their male counterparts. On the positive side, findings revealed that their reasons for getting attracted vary from one person to another. Some were attracted to the profession because of recognition. The responses of those interviewed revealed that most female students want to become celebrities through the programmes they anchor, and they want attention from people within and outside the industry. Other reasons include wanting to be a voice for women and children who are repressed and underrepresented. Some of them felt that the profession provides a good platform for freedom of expression where their opinions and views can be heard and expressed without fear or favour. As part of the responses of the respondents interviewed, they are motivated to study journalism because of the exposure it affords journalists (Weaver and Wilhoit, 2006). Passion was part of the identified attraction. Some of the respondents have passion for writing, talking, news gathering, researching and the glamorous life in the industry (Adams, et al, 2008). Meeting new people attracted some of them who claimed that this will enable them to have more friends and give them more connections that they desire (Weaver and Wilhoit, 2006).

Conversely, as part of the challenges attached to the profession is the claim that female journalists find it difficult to get married and those who do may have difficulty balancing work

with their career which can be quite difficult without an understanding husband or relatives. However, the study investigated factors that discourage female students from practising journalism. Majority of them claimed that sexual harassment poses a threat to women journalists within and outside the media houses (Williams, 2015). Some of them believed that the stressful nature of the job and low financial reward which includes the inequality in salary payment between the two genders that thrives in the industry (Franks, 2013; Zorlu, 2016) are discouraging them from practising journalism after graduation. They also felt that the profession is a very tough one which requires different and careful measures in order to approach issues appropriately. Responses from the interview confirmed that journalists are expected to be careful in the way they handle some issues like legal matters especially when still in court, as journalists are trained on how to handle sensitive issues that may cause chaos if not handled with care.

The public perception of women journalists also goes a long way in shaping their opinion about the profession. Most of the respondents were of the opinion that people believe that women journalists are irresponsible, tough, carefree and are seen as socialites or trend setters. Responses from the interview gave a deeper insight into how public perception has encouraged female students to have a negative attitude towards journalism. They pointed out that the public perceive them as people who engage in extra-marital affairs since they meet new people and influential personalities on regular basis. Their irresponsible nature as claimed by some respondents is also attached to their inability to be dutiful at the home front since the main belief is that the profession suits males more than females. In other words, the roles of both male and female have been defined by the society and an attempt to contravene these rules is considered a sign of irresponsibility. This perception of people has a great negative influence on female students' interest to pursue journalism.

Attitudes of Female Undergraduates

Some of the respondents believed that the challenges that come with the job cannot stop them from practising their chosen career, whereas some claimed that it is enough to scare them from practising. The respondents who completed the questionnaire believed that these hazards were enough to prevent

female students from practising journalism after graduation (Oberiri and Dongari, 2016). The responses from the interview revealed that the challenges women are exposed to are too dangerous for them to be encouraged to take up a career in that field. They emphasized the fact that many of them were unaware of what made up the industry other than the flashy outlook of women journalists which encouraged them to choose Mass Communication as a course of study. However, with the exposure they had during their industrial training, they feel it will be better to take up a career outside journalism. The responses of the interview revealed the attitudes of female students which suggests that they are not willing to take up a career in journalism. Their reasons were because of the challenges women journalists face on the one hand and the non-availability of jobs on the other. Other career routes they prefer to opt for are public relations, advertising and marketing (for those who are still willing to practice later in life), trading, modelling/photography, make-up artistry, catering, baking, event management, tailoring (for those who have a negative opinion of the profession). They are of the opinion that most female students are forced to study Mass Communication as a course rather than a choice. They claimed that the main problem of women journalists is discrimination, religious as well as cultural beliefs.

Implications

The way female Mass Communication students perceive journalism informs their attitude towards the profession. Those whose perception is positive would follow a career path in journalism in spite of the challenges in the profession. On the contrary, female students who have a negative perception about the profession would be disinterested in practicing after graduation because they feel that the challenges are too many for them to be encouraged to pursue the profession as a career. As a result, they are ready to pursue a different course at the postgraduate level or take up a different career path as a means of livelihood.

As previously reported above, journalism provides a platform for women to make their voice heard on different issues including issues that affect the female gender. Therefore, few women that can rise up to face the challenges will be saddled

with the responsibility of being in the forefront of efforts in making gender issues and other issues that concern women to be heard. This task may prove enormous for them with little or no results.

Some of them that follow another career path such as baking, trading, tailoring, make-up artistry, catering, hair dressing, event management, modelling/photography, etc, may experience less or no job satisfaction because they were forced to follow another pathway due to the challenges.

Conclusion

Female students' perception of the challenges that are entrenched in journalism influences their attitudes towards the profession. The public perception too is of great and equal importance because everyone craves for acceptability as an individual and with the career of their choice. However, their attitude towards the profession has implication for their professional practice in the future as many of them plan to take up trainings in different fields other than their current area of study. This is with the assumption that they will likely earn more respect and face less challenges.

This occupational migration can have a negative implication on the profession as more males are likely to dominate the industry. Therefore, for gender balance to be well defined and appreciated, it is suggested that the following measures should be put in place like adequate mentoring, organising seminars and workshops that would enhance the image of women in the profession, provision of in-service trainings, equality and equity in financial reward, giving them the right to make key decisions, review of working hours that would favour married women and prompt promotion are ways by which journalism could be made attractive to female students.

This is necessary so that more female students will be encouraged to take up a career in journalism and practice the profession after graduation, instead of channelling their acquired skills into a career that is absolutely different from the formal instruction received in school.

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