



2. Gender Equality, Policy and Media Structures

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INTRODUCTION

The convergence of traditional print, broadcast and cable with digital (computer) formats requires that we understand 'ICTs' (information and communications technology) to include the wide array of media used for personal, interpersonal, and mass communication in today's world. Women must have full access to these media, at ownership, employment and personal levels. This paper responds specifically to Goal Number 5 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2015-2030. That goal is to Achieve Gender Equality and Empower all Women and Girls, and proposed target '5.b' specifically concerns the use of ICTs to promote women's empowerment.

However, having a greater ability to own and control media companies will also affect women's ability to benefit from other SDGs as well. Greater communication will enable them to: articulate their aspirations for greater peace and justice (SDG-16); to participate more actively in the expansion of industry and infrastructures (SDG-9), especially related to the communications sector in their respective nations; advocate more actively for clean water and sanitation (SDG-6), affordable and clean energy (SDG-7), ways to end hunger (SDG-2) and poverty (SDG-1); and to more actively purvey information about all of the many other issues related to sustainable development in which women's interests are firmly embedded.

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If the monitoring of media content over the last 40 years has shown anything, it is that women's right to be seen and heard has not progressed at the same rate as their real-life roles or their needs to fully participate in society. Since the 1970s, women have benefited from women's liberation movements and taken ever greater leads in business, education, politics, and public life. Yet, they are still unable to speak in their own self-interest in the news media of most countries – either as expert sources, or to articulate pro-feminist opinions (World Association of Christian Communication, 2015). Women are similarly under-represented in Hollywood films, which are viewed all over the world (Hunt, Tran, Sargent and Díaz, 2017). Regional studies show that women's voices and images are similarly marginalised in traditional, as well as new digital, media formats of both developed and developing nations (Byerly, forthcoming).

Much of the focus in both research and human rights groups has been on women's access to ICTs, with a particular concern with the digital divide between men and women. A moderate share of the concern has also been with *gaps in infrastructure* (i.e., availability) and with user issues, such as the dominance of English in web-based information (Annan, 2005). Therefore, this paper seeks to broaden attention on women's relationship to the *structures* of the industries that still thwart them from exercising their right to communicate. Structural relations are present and perpetuated in the macro-level of the media landscape and include finance, policy, and governance.

EVIDENCE

The right to expression was recognized as a human right by Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Adopted by the United Nations' General Assembly, Article 19 states:

'Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers' (Article 19).

Yet current research shows women’s difficulty in exercising that right to communicate within the industries. In media professions, they remain prevented from entering decision-making roles both within news and entertainment sectors (Byerly, 2011; Hunt et al., 2017, Lauzen, 2017; Ross and Padovani, 2017; Vega Montiel, 2012). As the Table 1 below illustrates, few women are allowed to accede to the prestigious role of policy-making exercised by boards of directors in large digital media conglomerates (Byerly, forthcoming). These companies provide both the infrastructure and content of the vast majority of all communication, the world over. They also control an enormous amount of wealth, wealth that their mostly male governors use to help elect pro-corporate legislators and to shape media policy in their favour.

TABLE 1: OWNERSHIP, WORTH AND GENDER REPRESENTATION ON BOARDS OF SELECTED MEDIA CONGLOMERATES IN LARGE MARKETS (CURRENT 2017)

Digital Media Company	What is owned (example of brands)	Also owns stake in	Market value (in billions, USD)	Number of women on board
Alphabet Google (USA)	YouTube, Android, Chrome, Nexus, Pixel, Blogger, Zagat, Google Search (and Gmail, Hangouts and other apps), Chrome, Nest, Verily, Waze		\$553	1 (of 13), 8%

Digital Media Company	What is owned (example of brands)	Also owns stake in	Market value (billions, USD)	Number of women on board
Amazon.com, Inc. (USA)	Amazon Prime (and Cloud Drive, Web Services, Marketplace, Echo, Fire TV), Kindle, Audible, Twitch.tv, Washington Post		\$388	3 (of 10), 30%
Facebook, Inc. (USA)	Face book, WhatsApp, Instagram, Oculus, Facebook Messenger, Internet.org		\$371	2 (of 8), 25%
AT&T, Inc. (USA)	AT&T, DirecTV, Cricket Wireless, U-verse, YP.com (aka Yellowpages.com), Sky Brasil		\$227	4 (of 13). 31%
Verizon Communications, Inc. (USA)	Verizon Wireless, Fios, AOL, Huffington Post, Engadget, TechCrunch, Terremark	Complex Media, Awesome-nessTV, Seriously TV, RatedRed.com	\$198	4 (of 12), 33%

Digital Media Company	What is owned (example of brands)	Also owns stake in	Market value (billions, USD)	Number of women on board
Walt Disney Co. (USA)	ABC News, ESPN, Disney Channel, Walt Disney Studios, Pixar, Marvel, Lucasfilm, Disneyland and other parks and resorts	Vice Media, A&E, Lifetime, Hulu	\$151	4 (of 12), 33%
Comcast Corp/ NBC Universal (USA)	Xfinity, NBC Network, MSNBC, CNBC, Telemundo, Bravo, USA Network, Universal Pictures, Universal Studios and other parks and resorts	BuzzFeed, Hulu, Eater, Recode, Flipboard, Slack	\$146	2 (Of 12), 17%
Time Warner, Inc. (USA)	CNN, HBO, Warner Brothers Entertainment (also Records, Motion Pictures), TBS, TNT, NCAA.com, TMX.com, DC Comics	The CW, Hulu	\$68	2 (of 9), 22%

Digital Media Company	What is owned (example of brands)	Also owns stake in	Market value (billions, USD)	Number of women on board
BCE (Canada)	Cable TV stations, specialty channels (Bravo, Canal D, Book TV, etc.), Bell Broadcast Radio group, wireless technologies.		\$64	4 of 13, (31%)
Grupo Televisa (Mexico)	Broadcast TV stations, radio stations, Videocine film, Editorial Televisa publishing, Televisa Digital (Internet), Televisa Musica, football teams, Aztec stadium		\$15	0 of 19 (0%)
Grupo Globo (Brazil)	Broadcast TV stations, Globostat channels, Radio Globo, newspapers, internet services, books and magazines, record labels, film production.		\$4	0 of 7 (0%)

Digital Media Company	What is owned (example of brands)	Also owns stake in	Market value (billions, USD)	Number of women on board
Zee Entertainment (owned by Essel) (India)	34 TV channels, Zee Mundo (Spanish), production studios (Zee telefilms), music companies (Zee music), digital platforms, theaters, Reliance Broadcast Network, Big Magic, Big Gangsta, Big FM	Star Den, Den Networks, Zee Turner Ltd., 9X Media, INX Music	\$110 million	1 of 8 (13%)

Source: Data in table adapted from Byerly, C. M. (forthcoming), Gender, Media, Oligopoly: Connecting Research and Action. In N. Benequista and S. Abbott (eds.), *International Media Development: Historical Perspectives and New Frontiers*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing. (Note: Data gathered from selected company websites in 2017, with focus on the largest markets and companies to illustrate the problem of conglomeration. It is not meant to be representative of the situation in all nations.)

Media conglomeration characterises the great majority of the world's communication systems today where women are marginalized at decision-making levels, as has been shown. We may thus conclude that women are presently peripheral to both the control of, and related benefits from, the world's communication technology companies and what they provide. The salient question to pose with this realization is how will women become full participants in their societies if they cannot affect the telling of their own stories, if society does not see the wide array of images and roles they occupy, and people cannot obtain the information they need for societies advancement by addressing gender inequality?

Women have paid less attention to the national, regional and international policy governing communication systems than they have to more practical realities, such as information available (or not, within those systems) and access to jobs. There is little research to date on whether, and to what extent, gender equality figures in national level communication policies. Male scholars have avoided the subject for the most part, and both feminist scholars and activists have given it only minor attention (Gallagher, 2014). Yet, as Gallagher (2011) insists, any discussion of freedom of expression must ask, 'whose freedom, defined by whom?' (p. 457). It should not be defined, as it typically has, as men's right to utilize the profits of communication companies to secure their own economic and political power, or continue to omit and stereotype women in the content of their news and programming.

Despite the passage of international documents like the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, with its Section J calling for gender equality in the media, or the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), there has been little success in securing a place for gender and media concerns on the international agenda (Gallagher, 2011, p. 459; Ross and Padovani, 2013; Media Compact, 2015). The next frontier for media research and activism, therefore, is at national and international policy levels, something that gatherings of women, such as the annual U.N. Commission on the Status of Women meetings in New York City affords the opportunity to develop.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to respond to the points of GAMAG's position on women's relationship to media structures, it is essential to develop policy frameworks that incorporate requirements for gender equality, for mechanisms that enable those policies to function as intended, and for monitoring activities that assess progress and efficacy of those policies. The development of such policy frameworks will require the involvement and support of international governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations concerned with communication rights. Toward these ends, GAMAG supports the following recommendations:

GOVERNMENTS SHOULD:

- Adopt public policies that enable greater numbers of women to own media companies that serve both local and national populations.
- Fund academic and NGO projects to monitor media companies as regards gender equality in national level media policy and industry compliance.
- Require appropriate national-level agencies to monitor women's status in all levels of employment within both traditional and new digital media companies.

UN AGENCIES SHOULD:

- Assist in moving gender equality in media ownership onto both national and international agendas of the forums where communication rights and relevant issues such as SDGs are addressed.
- Adopt requirements and methods that allow full participation by women in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) process.
- Convene panels of experts on media policy, ICTs and women's communication to update gender sensitive indicators and guidelines for national level and corporate level media policies.
- Underwrite research projects aimed at identifying policies already in place that can serve as models, as well as identify efforts where media activism is advocating for gender equality in communication policy.

MEDIA INDUSTRY ORGANIZATIONS AND PROFESSIONALS SHOULD:

- Adopt, implement and monitor workplace policies that assure gender equality in hiring, training, promotion, and placement of media professionals.

- Develop employee performance standards that are free of gender bias.
- Develop guidelines for programming and news production that assure gender balance and sensitivity in content.
- Monitor, evaluate and correct (as needed) policies and practices aimed at assuring gender sensitivity in companies and their programming and news.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS SHOULD:

- Identify problems in access to new media (ICTs) for women, and develop strategies for policy changes at national and company levels.
- Advocate for gender equality in training and employment within media companies.
- Advocate for national level policy aimed at increasing women's media ownership and service on boards of directors.
- Form coalitions with communication trade unions, women's organizations, and activist scholars/researchers to develop multi-stakeholder advocacy for gender equality in and throughout the media industries.
- Move gender equality in media ownership onto both national and international agendas of the forums where communication rights and other issues are addressed.

RESEARCHERS SHOULD:

- Generate empirical data that reveal the level of gender equality in communication policies at national levels and within industries of individual nations, with respect to media ownership, technology access, and employment in media.

- Conduct empirical studies that evaluate men’s and women’s experiences in media industries with respect to training on ICTs.
- Establish longitudinal studies that track gender equality in media employment, ownership, and governance (boards).
- Promote theory-building to explain conditions within media industries that both hinder and enable gender equality to exist within companies.

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