WOMEN IN THE MEDIA

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Structural barriers, negative trends and progress on implementing the Beijing Platform for Action

Access to information and right to communicate are fundamental human rights. Media plays an important role in influencing citizens' perceptions of women, raising awareness about gender inequality, and the empowerment of women. It has the power to build and destroy stereotypes and it is very important regarding the portrayal of women.

However, the global efforts and commitments made so far did not progress far enough in establishing gender equality and improving the position of women in the media since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) in 1995. Sections G (women in power and decision making) and J (women and the media) of the BPfA are crucial and their objectives remain leading in promoting gender equality globally, focusing on the need for governments to actively promote gender-mainstreaming in the media, and to guarantee equal access and full participation of women in decision-making and leadership that are essential to media.

While women are 50% of the world population, the most recent Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) shows that media content is far from gender sensitive and is often presented from the male-dominated perspective. Women remain only 1 in 4 of the people seen, heard or read about in the news since 2010, their viewpoints are not included, and they are often portrayed according to stereotypes. The proportion of stories that clearly challenge gender stereotypes has hovered between only 3% and 4% since 2005.

This tendency is valid both for the traditional media (e.g. TV, radio, newspapers, books, magazines) and for the digital media. EU Femm Committee's (The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality) 2018 Study on Gender Equality in the Media reported widespread gender-based discrimination and inequality of opportunities within media industries including gender pay gap, hiring, allocation of work, and promotion.

Social media, which is one of the most important societal phenomena in our lives, and the main source of access to information and entertainment for the millennial and generation Z youth, was non-existent in 1995, and therefore it has not been covered in the BPfA. +25 Review must focus on and thoroughly examine the gender impact of social media. The imposing of unrealistic beauty standards and gender stereotypes, online harassment and cyber-bullying towards women in social media, the rise of anti-gender equality rhetoric in the internet, and the digital gender gap, are among some of the topics which need to be considered.

With the Fourth Industrial Revolution, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Automated-Decision Making (ADM) in machine learning we face new opportunities but also threats to women's full participation and human rights. Entrenched implicit stereotypes and unconscious bias is being slowly stripped from the analogue world to the new digital media world, aggravated by the lack of women scientists creating ADM systems; from inherent bias in hiring; selection bias and stereotypes in the delivery of ads to women; and explicit misogyny through feminised mechanisms like Alexa - women continue to excluded and left behind. We need gender equality in AI and ADM to ensure the full participation and the rights of women in the present, and in the future, we invent in the digital media world.

In parallel with the digital gender gap, media literacy is one of the most important topics that need to be addressed, especially due to the fast changing and mainly unregulated realm of digital/social media, which is becoming more important for all citizens, to be able to discern discriminatory content, fake news and to protect oneself from data breaches. This is particularly important for women, for whom the digital divide still remains a reality.

Moreover, the access of women to decision-making positions in the media industry remains dismally low. Lack of safe environments and policy frameworks in the media perpetuate gender inequality both in the content the media produce, and in the positions held by women in the media sector. As a result, the under-representation of women as news reporters has not changed in 10 years: only 37% of stories are reported by women. Besides, women in newsrooms do still face poor career perspectives and challenges in accessing decision-making roles. The most recent extensive study covering 170,000 people in the news media by IWMF found that 73% of the top management jobs are occupied by men compared to 27% occupied by women.

The safety of female journalists is a serious concern both in the field and at the workplace. According to the findings of the International News Safety Institute i, two thirds of women journalists are harassed and intimidated at their own office, mostly by their male colleagues and are discriminated on the account of their gender, race, age or professional experience. This often leads to self-censorship and social censorship driven by fear, emotional effects or psychological trauma and even giving up journalism entirely. Next to the challenges women

experience in the newsrooms, (they encounter diverse forms of violence by different types of perpetrators in the digital sphere) they are also attacked on online (social media) platforms. International figures show that online attacks have become more visible and coordinated in the past five years. Although both men and women face harassment online, many female media professionals deal with the kind of hate comments (sexist hate-speech) men do not come across such as messages about their appearance, gender and sexuality. International Women´s Media Foundation's study of 2018 highlighted increase in (online) harassment of female journalists. A wide range of online attacks, the study finds, "... amplify misogyny, sexism, racism, homophobia, religious and other hate speech", and very often spills over to real-life harassment. Research in the Netherlands concluded that to improve the situation, the judicial system and the police need to prioritise the protection of women in the media and this should be combined with specific training for women journalists (e.g. on conflict management).

Furthermore, serious backsliding in freedom of expression, restrictions imposed on journalists and the arbitrary detentions have a chilling effect on the activities of women journalists and lead to intimidation and self-censorship.

Governments need to step up actions in protecting women against any form of gender-based violence, including online and within the media sector, to reverse the trend of the global epidemic of trivialising online gender-based abuse and to provide access to justice for all. A key priority must be to counteract the discriminatory rules and attitudes that contribute to many failures to address gender inequality effectively.

Recommendations beyond Beijing+25

Many issues have been discussed by the group (for example the need for discrimination-free AI, need of investments in open internet research, digital literacy, online harassment faced by women and LBTQI and Gender Non-Conforming (GNC) community, need for keeping gender-disaggregated data by organisations, fair and equal gender representation in and by the media (traditional and online), creation of gender-responsive policies, use of media as education tool, etc.)

To fully realise the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action we call for political leadership and recommend:

- To achieve equality including digital equality, develop and implement inclusive policies to promote gender balance in media decision-making at all levels, which is grounded in human rights and takes an intersectional approach to combat and correct for gender bias and stereotyping in the media, including in Artificial Intelligence and Automated Decision-Making (you cannot be what you cannot see).

- States to undertake proactive action including developing mechanisms to ensure transparency and accountability in addressing online harassment, violence, threats and attacks in the media through strong legal frameworks to promote accountability, including but not limited to codes of conduct and self-regulations in the media.
- Grounded in universal human rights, promote international cooperation which includes creating multi-stakeholder alliances (private sector businesses such as global media and advertisement corporations, governments as regulators and civil society - which includes women as creators and consumers of media products) to address the issues that women in media face online and offline.

Key recommendations of the discussion group to realizing the objectives under critical area:

- Advancing gender equality and women's empowerment through media and information and communication technologies (ICTs) requires the formulation of gender-responsive ICT and media strategies and related policies which seek to improve the relevance or representation of content and services;
- Ensuring diversity within the portrayal of women in media, focusing on the representation of the intersectional experiences which women coming from disadvantaged backgrounds go through. Representation, providing a platform to speak, giving full agency to women, giving wide coverage for feminist storytelling are extremely important in this aspect.
- Increasing investments and financial incentives from governments for investment in gender equality measures in the media and the ICT sectors and the establishment of a monitoring mechanisms that integrate gender perspectives for increased accountability around implementation of commitments.
- A majority of the online harassment measures focus on prevention measures and advice/ feedback/ criticisms to those who have been attacked by giving perpetrators an opportunity to escape prosecution. The 3Ps paradigm: prevention-protections-prosecution must be fully enforced as a fundamental framework to combat against misogyny within the media to reverse the trend of the global epidemic of trivialising online gender-based abuse and provide access to justice for all.
- Social media corporations (Instagram, Twitter, Facebook …) must urgently reconstruct their -currently inadequate and non-transparent- online harassment and cyber-bullying policies with a gender perspective. The judicial system and the police need to prioritise the protection of women in the media and this should be combined with specific training for women journalists (e.g. on conflict management) .
- Gender-biased algorithms and automated decision-making (ADM) that are used (amongst other things) in the context of news feeds, trending, and the display of ads and content online must be detected, reviewed, and reconstructed. Encouraging media corporations to self-regulate and advocating for media corporations to take responsibility for misogynistic media as well.
- Rigorous testing is needed across the lifecycle of AI systems: testing should account for the origins and use of training data, test data, models, application program interfaces and other components over a product life cycle.

- At the EU level, several countries have adopted quotas to increase women's participation on boards, and women have reached parity within several countries at the UNECE's region as presidents and board members in public broadcasting, but they are still underrepresented as executives. Further implementation of relevant gender-responsive policies is required to advance the position and decision-making power of women in the media.
- Action is needed to ensure that the existing rules on equal treatment in employment are enforceable (in particular gender pay gap, hiring, allocation of work, and promotion).
- Making the most of the influential power of social media: Feminist collective movements can collaborate with social media influencers (Youtubers, Instagram influencers, etc…) in order to engage the youth more.
- Action to promote new initiatives providing digital training, mentoring and networking opportunities, with special focus on career progression, improvements to pay, and working conditions are required and such efforts form an integral part of fighting gender inequality in the media.
- Social and educational campaigns and programs, and targeted training initiatives, including industry decision-makers, to promote egalitarian values and practices.

Useful sources

- https://aplusalliance.org/en/articles/1 (see end of document for recommendations)
- The position paper highlights the mounting evidence that gender bias and sexism is pervasive in automated decision-making. From inherent bias in hiring; selection bias and stereotypes in the delivery of ads to women; and entrenched implicit stereotypes and unconscious bias that gets translated into explicit misogyny through feminised machines like Alexa – women continue to be excluded and left behind. Affirmative Action for Algorithms <A+> in order to correct real life bias and barriers that prevent women from achieving full participation and rights in the present, and in the future, we invent in the media.
- https://www.un.org/en/pdfs/HLP%20on%20Digital%20Cooperation%20Report%20Executive%20Summary%20-%20ENG.pdf
- https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session41/Documents/A_HRC_41_42_EN.docx (various references to online violence against women)
- https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G18/184/58/PDF/G1818458.pdf?OpenElement (Special Rapporteur VAW 2018 report on online violence)