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**Media Portrayals, Public Perceptions and Women in Administrative Leadership in Jos South Local Government Area, Plateau State, Nigeria**

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**Abstract**

The main objective of this study is to investigate how media portrays the public perceptions of women in administrative leadership in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State, Nigeria. Arising from the Beijing affirmative action on gender and the increasing advocacy for gender inclusion, women in local administrative leadership continue to experience underrepresentation and gender-based stereotypes reinforced by media narratives. This study relied on both quantitative and qualitative research designs. The research design adopted content analysis, descriptive survey, and in-depth interviews. From a population of 650,835, a sample of 384 residents, 12 female administrative leaders, and selected media platforms, including KT FM, NewsGate Magazine, and the "Come to Jos South" Facebook page. The researchers adopted descriptive statistics like Chi-square analysis, independent t-tests and content analysis for the analyses of data. From the analyses of data, the findings revealed that social media significantly influences negative public perceptions of female leaders through gendered and personalised framing. Whereas, respondents had generally acknowledged women's administrative competence (Mean = 4.1), however, the perceptions of their political legitimacy remained comparatively low (Mean = 3.2). Statistical analysis showed a significant relationship between media source and perceptions of leadership legitimacy ( $\chi^2 = 18.7, p < .001$ ). The study concluded that social media framing contributes substantially to the perception disconnect affecting women leaders in Jos South LGA. It was recommended among others that the Plateau State Ministry of Information should organize gendered sensitive media training on regular bases for journalists and social media content creators on gender-sensitive reporting practices. It was also recommended that Strategic Media Engagement should be organized for female administrators thereby supporting in developing professional media communication strategies that highlight policy achievements and governance outcomes.

**Keywords:** *Women leadership; media framing; public perception; gender stereotypes; local government administration; Jos South LGA*

## **Introduction**

Gender equality remains a central concern in contemporary governance and public administration across the world. Despite decades of advocacy, policy reforms, and international commitments aimed at increasing women's participation in leadership, women continue to be underrepresented in decision-making positions. Globally, women constitute approximately 46% of the public administration workforce but occupy only 31% of top leadership positions and 30% of senior management roles (Sabharwal, 2015). This disparity has implications beyond representation, as gender-inclusive leadership is widely recognized as essential for effective governance, accountability, and sustainable development.

The Nigerian experience mirrors these global challenges. Women's representation in elective and appointive positions remains considerably low, accounting for only 6.7% of leadership positions across governmental institutions (Adebayo, 2023). This imbalance is largely attributed to deeply entrenched patriarchal systems reinforced by cultural and religious beliefs that traditionally assign women domestic and supportive roles while reserving leadership positions for men (Okafor & Akokuwebe, 2015). Such social structures limit women's access to education, economic resources, political networks, and leadership opportunities (Bako & Syed, 2018).

At the grassroots level, Local Government Areas (LGAs) constitute the closest tier of government to the people and play a critical role in service delivery, community development, and democratic participation. Consequently, leadership effectiveness within local governments significantly influences citizens' welfare and development outcomes (Sulaiman et al., 2025). The exclusion or marginalization of women from administrative leadership positions within LGAs undermines not only gender equality but also the quality of governance and community development.

Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State presents an important context for examining these issues. Although women in the area have contributed substantially to local governance and development initiatives, they remain underrepresented in administrative leadership positions and frequently encounter discriminatory practices rooted in patriarchal traditions (Adediran, 2024).

Beyond institutional barriers, media representations and public perceptions often shape the extent to which women are accepted and recognized as legitimate leaders.

While considerable scholarly attention has been devoted to women's political participation in Nigeria, limited attention has been paid to female administrators at the local government level. Existing studies have largely concentrated on elected political office holders, leaving the experiences of women in administrative leadership insufficiently explored. Furthermore, the influence of media portrayals on public perceptions of female administrative leaders remains inadequately examined, particularly within local governance contexts such as Jos South LGA.

Against this backdrop, this study investigates how women in administrative leadership are portrayed in local media, how such portrayals influence public perceptions, and how female administrators themselves experience media representations of their leadership roles.

### **Media Framing and Gender in Leadership**

Research on gender and media consistently demonstrates that women leaders are often subjected to stereotypical and unequal forms of media coverage. Unlike their male counterparts, female leaders are frequently evaluated based on their appearance, family responsibilities, emotions, and personal relationships rather than their professional achievements and policy contributions (Aaldering & Van Der Pas, 2020; Elliott & Stead, 2024; Khan, 2020).

Studies have shown that leadership traits considered admirable in men are often negatively interpreted when exhibited by women. For example, assertiveness and decisiveness may earn male leaders praise, while women displaying the same characteristics are frequently labelled as aggressive or domineering (Malloy, 2020). Such portrayals contribute to the persistence of gender stereotypes and shape public attitudes toward women's leadership capabilities.

Within the Nigerian context, the challenges are even more pronounced. Women continue to face significant obstacles in attaining leadership positions due to cultural norms, financial constraints, political resistance, and institutional discrimination (Salaudeen, 2025). Media organizations often reinforce these barriers by emphasizing controversy, personal lifestyles, and domestic

responsibilities rather than leadership achievements and policy outcomes (Guanah & Nwabueze, 2021; Popoola, 2018).

Furthermore, studies by Anam et al. (2023) and Raji (2024) identify patriarchal structures and economic marginalization as major impediments to women's advancement in leadership. While Anam et al. (2023) emphasize cultural resistance, Raji (2024) highlights institutional barriers embedded within recruitment and promotion processes. Together, these studies suggest that both societal and organizational factors contribute to women's underrepresentation in leadership.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on Social Role Theory and Agenda-Setting Theory.

#### **Social Role Theory**

Social Role Theory, developed by Eagly and Wood (2012), argues that societal expectations regarding gender roles influence perceptions and behaviours. Women are generally expected to exhibit communal qualities such as empathy, nurturing, and cooperation, whereas leadership positions are traditionally associated with agentic qualities such as assertiveness, authority, and decisiveness. Consequently, women occupying leadership positions often encounter a "double bind." If they demonstrate assertiveness, they risk being viewed negatively for violating traditional gender expectations. Conversely, if they exhibit communal traits, they may be perceived as lacking the qualities required for effective leadership (Cardador et al., 2022). This theory provides a useful lens for understanding public reactions to female administrative leaders in Jos South LGA.

#### **Agenda-Setting Theory**

Agenda-Setting Theory explains how media influence public understanding of issues by determining what receives attention and how such issues are interpreted (Moy et al., 2016). Beyond informing audiences about events, media organizations shape perceptions through the selection, emphasis, and framing of stories. Applied to this study, Agenda-Setting Theory suggests that repeated portrayals of women leaders through personal and gendered narratives may encourage audiences to evaluate them based on these attributes rather than their professional performance. In the digital age, social media platforms further amplify this influence by enabling

rapid dissemination of user-generated content and opinion-based narratives (Hao, 2022; Safran, 2024).

### **Research Gap**

Although substantial research has examined women's political participation in Nigeria, limited attention has been given to female administrative leadership at the local government level (Adamu, 2023; Ngara & Ayabam, 2013; Okafor & Akokuwebe, 2015). Existing studies largely focus on national politics and elected offices, overlooking the experiences of women occupying administrative positions. Within Plateau State specifically, available studies have concentrated on women politicians and journalists (Dewan, 2018; Dyikuk, 2020; Ette, 2017). Consequently, little empirical evidence exists regarding how media portrayals influence public perceptions of female administrative leaders. This study addresses this gap by examining the relationship between media framing and perceptions of women's leadership legitimacy in Jos South LGA.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study sought to:

1. Examine the dominant portrayals of women in administrative leadership within Jos South LGA as presented in local newspapers and Facebook platforms.
2. Assess public perceptions regarding the administrative capabilities and leadership effectiveness of women in the study area.
3. Document the experiences of female administrative leaders concerning media representation of their leadership capabilities.
4. Determine the relationship between media framing and public perceptions of women's leadership legitimacy.

### **Research Design and Methods**

#### **Research Design**

This study adopted both quantitative and qualitative research design where content analysis, in-depth interviews and descriptive survey were used to collect data for the study. This method was considered the best because it will enable the integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence,

## *Media Portrayals, Public Perceptions and Women in Administrative Leadership .....*

thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Fadele & Rocha, 2025). The study area is Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State, Nigeria. The area has an estimated population of 650,835 and comprises four major districts: Du, Gyel, Kuru, and Vwang. The target population of this study comprised of :

- a. Female administrative leaders within the local government.
- b. Adult residents aged 18 years and above.
- c. Journalists and social media influencers involved in information dissemination.

For the purpose of media content analysis, purposive sampling was used to select three major media platforms with substantial local influence:

- KT FM Radio
- NewsGate Magazine
- "Come to Jos South" Facebook Page

A total of 120 media items published between August 2024 and August 2025 were analysed. For interviews, 12 female administrative leaders who had occupied senior administrative positions for at least four years were purposively selected. For the survey component, multi-stage sampling techniques were employed. Five electoral wards were randomly selected from the eleven wards in the LGA. Subsequently, systematic sampling was used to select respondents from households within each ward. A total of 417 questionnaires were distributed, and 384 valid responses were retrieved, representing a response rate of 92%. For the purpose of data analysis, quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Chi-square tests, and independent-samples t-tests. Qualitative data from interviews were analysed thematically.

Media content was categorized into:

- Professional framing
- Personalized framing
- Gendered framing
- Neutral framing

Intercoder reliability yielded a Cohen's Kappa coefficient of 0.87, indicating high coding reliability.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Media Consumption Patterns**

The findings revealed that social media serves as the primary source of governance information for most residents.

- Social media users: 72%
- Traditional media users: 28%

This indicates the increasing influence of digital platforms in shaping public perceptions of local governance and leadership.

### **Public Perceptions of Female Leadership**

Respondents generally viewed female administrators as technically competent, with a mean score of 4.1 out of 5.0. However, perceptions regarding their legitimacy and authority in politically sensitive leadership roles were considerably lower, with a mean score of 3.2 out of 5.0. This suggests the existence of a gap between recognition of competence and acceptance of authority.

### **Media Framing Patterns**

The findings indicate significant differences in media framing across platforms. Traditional media largely focused on governance activities, policy implementation, budgets, and development initiatives. In contrast, social media discussions were dominated by personal narratives relating to appearance, family life, emotional expressions, and interpersonal conflicts.

**Table 1: Media Framing Distribution by Platform**

<b>Platform</b>	<b>Professional Framing</b>	<b>Personalized Framing</b>	<b>Gendered Framing</b>	<b>Neutral Framing</b>
Traditional Media (KTFM, NewsGate)	75%	10%	5%	10%
Social Media (Facebook)	18%	68%	9%	10%

These findings support previous studies that identify social media as a major site for the reproduction of gender stereotypes (Farci & Scarcelli, 2024).

### **Competence Legitimacy Gap**

A Chi-square test revealed a statistically significant relationship between respondents' primary information source and perceptions of female leaders' legitimacy ( $\chi^2 = 18.7$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cramer's  $V = 0.22$ ). Respondents who relied primarily on social media were significantly more likely to question the political legitimacy of female leaders than those who relied on traditional media.

This finding suggests that media framing influences public perceptions of leadership authority.

### **Perception Disconnect**

The independent-samples t-test revealed significant differences between female leaders' self-assessments and public evaluations of their effectiveness.

- Female leaders' self-rating: Mean = 4.7
- Public rating: Mean = 3.4

The difference was statistically significant ( $t = 15.1$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 2.40$ ).

The large effect size indicates a substantial perception gap between how female leaders evaluate their own performance and how they are perceived by the public.

### **Qualitative Findings**

Three dominant themes emerged from interviews with female administrative leaders.

#### **Double Burden of Performance**

Participants reported feeling pressured to outperform male colleagues in order to receive equivalent recognition and respect. This finding reflects the "double bind" predicted by Social Role Theory.

#### **Weaponization of Personal Life**

Many respondents reported that media attention frequently focused on their marital status, family life, and personal relationships rather than their professional accomplishments.

One participant noted: "A budget presentation that took three months to prepare received no coverage, but a rumour about my marriage went viral within hours."

### **Systemic Gatekeeping**

Interviewees reported that women were often assigned to social welfare and health departments, while men dominated strategic sectors such as finance, works, and revenue generation.

This institutional pattern limits opportunities for women to demonstrate leadership in areas traditionally associated with political power and resource control.

### **Discussion**

The findings reveal a persistent disconnect between competence and legitimacy among female administrative leaders in Jos South LGA. While women are widely recognized as capable administrators, they continue to face challenges in gaining full public acceptance as political authorities. The study demonstrates that media framing plays a significant role in shaping these perceptions. Traditional media generally portray women as professionals engaged in governance activities, whereas social media frequently emphasizes personal characteristics and gender-related narratives. These findings support Social Role Theory (Eagly & Wood, 2012), which explains how women leaders are evaluated against competing expectations. They are expected to demonstrate leadership qualities while simultaneously conforming to traditional gender norms.

Similarly, Agenda-Setting Theory explains how repeated exposure to personalized and gendered portrayals influences public evaluations of leadership. By emphasizing personal attributes rather than governance achievements, social media platforms contribute to the perception that female leaders are less legitimate political actors. The findings also align with previous Nigerian studies that document gendered media portrayals of women leaders and the persistence of patriarchal norms within governance structures (Guanah & Nwabueze, 2021; Popoola, 2018).

### **Conclusion**

This study examined media portrayals and public perceptions of women in administrative leadership within Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State, Nigeria. The findings demonstrate that women are generally perceived as competent administrators; however, they continue to face challenges regarding public recognition, authority, and leadership legitimacy. The study identified a significant competence–legitimacy gap whereby female leaders' professional

abilities are acknowledged, yet their authority is questioned. Evidence suggests that this gap is influenced by media framing, particularly on social media platforms where discussions frequently focus on personal and gender-related issues rather than administrative performance.

The findings further reveal that women leaders encounter systemic barriers, including gender stereotypes, unequal scrutiny, and institutional gatekeeping. These factors collectively undermine their visibility, influence, and opportunities for advancement within local governance structures. Achieving gender equity in local administration therefore requires not only increasing women's representation in leadership positions but also transforming the social and media narratives that shape public perceptions of female leadership.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following:

1. **Gender-Sensitive Media Training:** The Plateau State Ministry of Information should organize regular training programmes for journalists and social media content creators on gender-sensitive reporting practices.
2. **Strategic Media Engagement:** Female administrators should be supported in developing professional media communication strategies that highlight policy achievements and governance outcomes.
3. **Community Engagement Programmes:** Local government authorities should institutionalize regular town hall meetings and public engagement forums that enable direct interaction between citizens and female leaders.
4. **Leadership Diversification:** Women should be deliberately appointed to strategic sectors such as finance, works, planning, and revenue administration to challenge existing stereotypes about leadership capabilities.
5. **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Government agencies, civil society organizations, and development partners should implement campaigns aimed at promoting positive perceptions of women's leadership.

6. Policy Reforms: Local government councils should establish gender-inclusive policies that ensure equal access to leadership opportunities, promotions, and decision-making positions.
7. Further Research: Future studies should adopt longitudinal and comparative approaches across multiple local government areas to better understand how media framing influences perceptions of female leadership over time.

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