

## MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION AS INSTRUMENTS IN FORMING GENDER-EQUAL PUBLIC CONSCIOUSNESS: A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE



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**Abstract.** In this article, media and communication are discussed as a tool in the creation of gender-equal public consciousness with a psychological aspect to it. It states that gender equality is impossible to establish only with the help of legal and institutional processes and needs to be changed within the social perceptions, attitudes, and cognitive schemas. The research is based on the social learning theory, gender schema theory and media psychology, the study examines the impact of media representations and communication processes on internalization of gender norms and stereotypes. The role of digital media and communication framing in implicit attitudes formation is given particular attention. The article concludes that the psychologically informed media communication can play a role in the creation of the sustainable gender-equivalent public consciousness.

**Keywords:** gender equality; media influence; public consciousness; communication psychology; gender stereotypes.

## МЕДИА И КОММУНИКАЦИЯ КАК ИНСТРУМЕНТЫ ФОРМИРОВАНИЯ ГЕНДЕРНО-РАВНОГО ОБЩЕСТВЕННОГО СОЗНАНИЯ: ПСИХОЛОГИЧЕСКИЙ АСПЕКТ

**Аннотация.** В статье рассматриваются медиа и коммуникация как инструменты формирования гендерно-равного общественного сознания с психологической точки зрения. Обосновывается, что достижение гендерного равенства невозможно исключительно за счёт правовых и институциональных механизмов и требует трансформации социальных представлений, установок и когнитивных схем. На основе теории социального обучения, теории гендерных схем и медиа-психологии анализируется влияние медиарепрезентаций и коммуникационных процессов на усвоение гендерных норм и стереотипов. Особое внимание уделяется роли цифровых медиа и коммуникативного фрейминга в формировании имплицитных установок. В заключение подчёркивается, что психологически обоснованная медиакоммуникация способствует формированию устойчивого гендерно-равного общественного сознания.

**Ключевые слова:** гендерное равенство; медиа; общественное сознание; психология коммуникации; гендерные стереотипы.

## INTRODUCTION

Gender equality of the 21st century has gone beyond the confines of legal provisions and institutional modifications, taking the form of a fundamental facet of

general consciousness and cultural revolution. Although there have been significant improvements in the normative policies on both national and international levels, gender inequality continues to persist in subtle psychological forms where they are expressed through stereotypes, unconscious prejudices, and expectations that are socially supported. In this terrain, media and communication channels are important as they create, sustain or disrupt popular understandings of gender roles. Psychologically, the definition of public consciousness as a non-passive reflection of social reality is an active system of meanings, values, attitudes, which is created in the process of continuous interaction of individuals and symbolic space. The mass media, the digital environment, advertising, and social media are powerful agents of socialization that impact the cognitive structures, emotional responses, and behavior conventions in terms of gender. Thus, the perception of media as a means of psychological manipulation is a key to comprehending gender inequality perpetuation and how media could be used to create more egalitarian attitudes. The significance of the topic is enhanced by the fact that digitalization of communication is increasing faster and the media forms on the basis of visuals and narratives gain increasing dominance. Algorithms, influencer culture and transnational flows of media have brought challenges and opportunities to the way gender is represented. Although media could strengthen traditional stereotypes and status quo, it can also become the driving force of change to foster an inclusive identity, challenge discriminatory standards, and mental preparedness to gender equality. Besides the psychological and cultural aspects of gender equality, there is a direct economic impact of equality. Gender inequality is persistent, thus, resulting in inefficient distribution of human capital, low labor productivity, and economic losses in the long term. Economically, gender representations through the media affects the participation in the labor markets, wage expectation, and the choice of occupation.

*Table 1. Economic Implications of Gender Inequality*

| <b>Indicator</b>              | <b>Gender-Inequality Context</b>                      | <b>Economic Implication</b>              |
|-------------------------------|---|--|
| Labor force participation gap | Lower female participation compared to male workforce | Underutilization of human capital        |
| Gender wage gap               | Women earn on average less than men                   | Reduced household income and consumption |
| Representation in leadership  | Underrepresentation of women in management            | Lower diversity in decision-making       |
| Access to education           | Unequal access in some regions                        | Slower productivity growth               |
| Media representation bias     | Stereotypical gender roles                            | Occupational segregation                 |

**Note.** The table presents selected economic indicators associated with gender inequality and their implications for labor market efficiency and economic development.

This article is aimed at discussing the role of media and communication as a psychological instrument in the creation of a gender-equal popular mentality. The main goals are: (1) to review psychological theories that are applicable to the representation of gender by the media; (2) to examine how the media can create gender meanings; (3) to take note of the dangers and limitations of the media-generated gender messages; and (4) to present prospective solutions regarding how the media can be used to promote sustainable gender equality.

### **Theoretical Background: Media and Gender: Psychological Perspectives.**

The psychological research offers a variety of theoretical approaches to the analysis of media influences on the perception of gender. One of the theories that form its basis is the social learning theory developed by Albert Bandura which emphasizes the significance of observation and imitation in the learning process. According to this theory, individuals receive gender norms through observing media characters, plotlines and the symbolical effects of rewards or penalties associated with gender-conforming actions. Once more, when stereotypical representation is made often, they strengthen the mental associations between gender and specific roles, profession, or character traits. The other perspective that has had a great influence is the theory of gender schema by Sandra Bem. This model describes the fact that people organize mental patterns called gender schemas which assist them to process the gender-related information and determine their perceptions, memories and behaviors. Media is very important in how they create and strengthen these schemas through disproportionate emphasis on some of these gendered features at the expense of others. As an example, the constant presentation of the leadership as male characteristic and care-giving as a female one can shape implicit assumptions that will be reflected in subsequent schooling and career choices. Socially psychologically on the cultivation theory, it can be understood that the long-term exposure to media can be used to explain how viewing the world is affected by individuals. Gender inequality is easily legitimized when individuals are consistently exposed to media, which features gender inequality, as it becomes normal or unalterable. Conversely, the variety of their equal representations can develop more inclusive and egalitarian attitudes to the role of gender in the society in the long term. The concept of implicit attitudes automatic and unconscious assessments that influence behavior is also examined further by cognitive psychology. The media representations and stories tend to work at a subconscious level, and strengthen gender biases in people even while they consciously believe in equality. This demonstrates the lack of consistency between stated ideologies and mental schemas. Combined, these theories of psychology underline that media does not remain a passive conduit of information, but rather an active space that shapes how individuals think, feel and behave towards gender. Understanding of these psychological mechanisms is the key to the development of the media strategies which will assist in the evolution of a more gender-equitable state of mind.

## **Media Representation and the Construction of Gender Meanings**

Media representation is symbolic in nature in which society constructs, negotiates and challenges gender. Older mass media like television, cinema and print journalism have been based long on simplified and polarized images of gender. The men are generally depicted as superior, rational, and aggressive, but the women are more frequently represented as being passive, emotional, or dependent. These images are significant in the internal psychological acceptance of subordinate gender roles. This has been complicated by the advent of digital media. On the bright side, social media sites allow more voices and alternative narratives to be given room where the traditional gender rules are challenged. Nevertheless, the algorithmicness of content presentation is associated with the tendency to give more priority to emotionally appealing and stereotypical content, which may even reinforce the existing biases. Psychologically, messages with powerful emotions will be more memorable and assimilated, and gendered media content of this kind will have a greater effect on perception and behavior. One of the most effective types of persuasive media is advertisement. Psychological research indicates that gender stereotypes are commonly used in ads to create a fast emotional connection with the viewers. Although this is a useful strategy in commerce, it strengthens gender restrictions. However, the increased movement towards inclusive and gender-neutral advertising shows how the media can change the perceptions of people and help them adapt to different genders. According to Narrative psychology, storytelling is important in helping to define the self. Media discourses serve as prototypes, which people can use to understand their life directions and opportunities. When media shows a broad range of gender roles and life situations then it increases the psychological range of self-identification. Conversely, monotonous and stereotypical storytelling limits the number of identity choices and promotes inequality. Markedly, media representation is not merely a passive reflection of the reality but it is actively involved in creating the psychological frames within which gender is cognized and lived in the society.

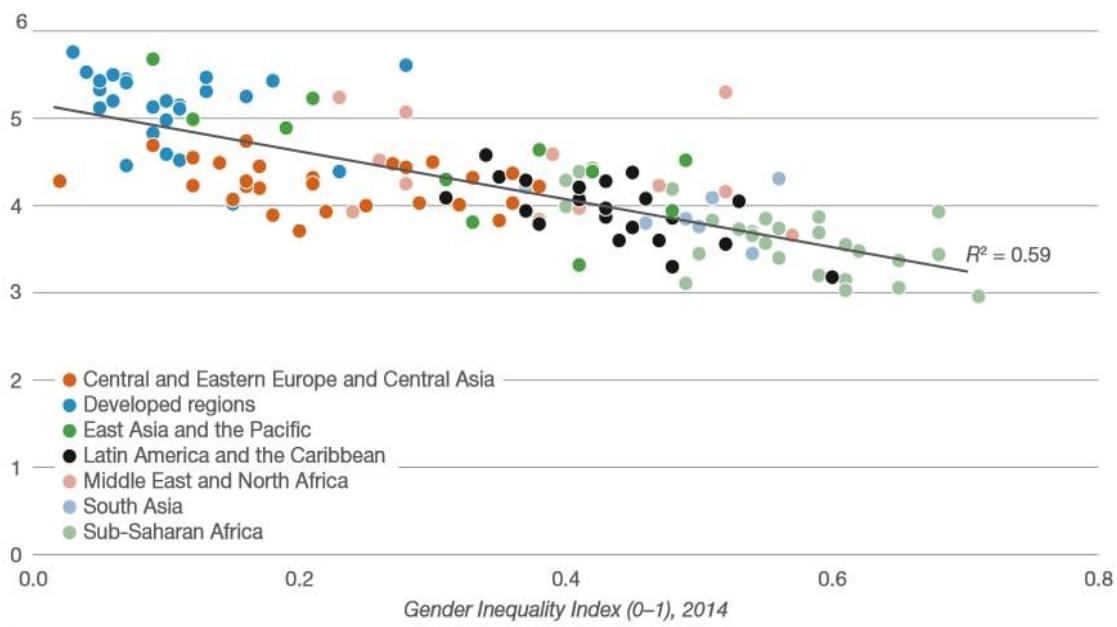
## **Communication Processes and Public Consciousness Formation**

The media content is a part of what is inculcated in the minds of the people through communication. Psychologically speaking, communication is not confined to mere exchange of information which is also accompanied by the process of interpretation, emotional response and social approval. The communicative practices between the people become shared and this creates a societal norm of what is acceptable, desirable or expected. These communication processes have a wider economic implication that affects the participation and productivity in the labor market.

**Figure 1.4**

## Gender equality is associated with stronger national competitiveness

Global Competitiveness Index (1–7), 2015



Source: The Global Competitiveness Report 2015–2016 (World Economic Forum) and United Nations Development Programme 2015 Human Development Report.

### Figure 1. Relationship Between Gender Equality and Economic Performance

**Note.** The figure illustrates a general positive association between gender equality and economic performance.

One of the key ideas in this regard is framing, which explains how media messages present the problems, blame, and propose possible solutions. Gender-related issues are usually disguised when they are defined as individual failures (e.g. the absence of ambition). Contrastingly, systemic cause frames contribute to the creation of a more egalitarian view. Empirical studies on psychology have established that framing influences individuals in attributing blame and making moral judgments, which may influence the general population in their gender policies. Another major psychological process that is affected by the media is social comparison.

By comparing oneself to what is discussed in the media, people compare themselves to the standards presented, which affects their self-worth, aspirations, and gender role interpretation. Gender stereotypes can create biased communication that causes internalized inferiority or superiority that adversely impacts mental health and reduces social cohesion. In contrast to one-way communication, dialogical one is a transformative agent of reinventing the consciousness of the population. Interactive media spaces provide for discussion, thought and challenge the conventional gender expectations. Nevertheless, such interactions have psychological advantages that are associated with respectful interactions and

existence of critical media literacy. In the absence of these components, the communication spaces may turn into the echo-chamber that only strengthens the existent predispositions and polarization. Summing up, the processes of communication are mediators between the psychological influence of media on the consciousness of society. They dictate whether media is a control mechanism or an empowering and changeable media.

### **Perils and Disadvantages of Media-Based Gender Equality.**

Even though the media has a great potential in promoting gender equality, it has few psychological limitations and constraints to its influence. Among the biggest issues is the phenomenon of symbolic equality whereby media projects an image of progress without changes in the structures. On the psychological level, it may lead to the illusion of achievement, which reduces the motivation of people to work together. Reactance is another psychological defence that is caused when people are made to feel that the message is coercive or overly moralizing. Culturally sensitive and ideologically rigid messages on gender equality can create resistance thus strengthening the patriarchal gender norms. This highlights the fact that there must be subtle, culturally sensitive and context-specific communication strategies. Gender narratives are also commercialized and this poses an ethical concern. The psychological impact of gender equality can be shallow and short-lived when gender equality is employed as a marketing strategy. Authentic social change needs to be long-term and consistent between media images and life realities of various societies. Besides, media access inequality and different levels of digital literacy could worsen already existing inequalities. The psychological advantage of media-based empowerment hinges on the capacity of people to be critical consumer of the media content and actively contribute to the media setting. These psychological risks are critical issues that should be addressed and cognized to get the necessary media strategies that are effective yet ethically sound and socially influential.

## **CONCLUSION**

Media and communication are the key drivers to create a consciousness of gender equality which is acted through a complex psychological mechanism. Media channels as symbolic space define gender tropes, latent prejudices, and accepted socialities either by reaffirming existing inequities or by leading to positive transformation. The psychological perspective of this matter is that gender equality cannot be long-term unless there is a change in the tendency of thinking in certain ways, feeling in certain ways, and shaping identities. As noted in this analysis, media representation, communicative dynamics and narrative structures are potent instruments in bringing about this change. Nevertheless, media campaigns are faced with serious challenges, including the threat of cosmetic change, backlash due to psychological reactance, and commercialization of gender equality. Addressing such barriers requires research-based, culturally sensitive, and long-term

intervention strategies. To conclude, media cannot merely be considered a source of information delivery, but psychological space where gender meanings are being created and disputed. Media when used responsibly and cautiously can be critical in shaping a national mindset that is based on critical thinking, empathy, and even social justice.

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