How Gendered Media Politics Matter? The Role of Media in Supporting Gender-Issue Affinity

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Abstract: This study expands our understanding of factors affecting women's involvement in gendered politics to examine the extent and determinants of Gender-Issue Affinity (GIA) amongst women. The conceptual framework extends Dolan study on gender affinity effect which found evidence for the claim that women tend to vote for female candidates. Similarly, this study suggests that women tend to develop affinity towards gender-related issues. This study constructs a GIA scale to measure the levels of commitment to gender-related issues. It models GIA as dependent variable and explores the effects of selected drivers of gender-affinity media importance, news media use political news interests, voting behaviour, political party affiliation, non-conventional political activity and demographics. For this, a survey of 1,108 women was conducted in Chennai, India. The results suggest that media importance and political news interests contribute significantly to GIA, even when controlled for demographic and socio-economic factors.

Key words: Gender affinity, mediatized, political participation, women and media, women and politics, media and politics

INTRODUCTION

A common understanding people have when studying the relationship between gender media and politics is that greater involvement of women in politics would lead to greater sensitization of gender-related issues in political sphere and consequentially bring greater gender parity. Increased women's involvement in politics is expected to bring increased equality. This assumption parallels studies done in western countries on the phenomenon called 'gender-affinity effect' which claims that women voters will most likely vote for female candidates (Dolan, 2008). Similarly, we could ask are women voters drawn to gender-related issues in political considerations? While gender studies and feminist scholarships have explored several facets of dialectical relationship between women, news media and politics, relatively less attention is paid to support for gender-related issues amongst women. This study seeks to examine the following questions: Is there gender-issue affinity in politics? What is the extent of affinity to gender issues amongst women? What factors determine women's affinity towards gender issues?

There is a significant body of research in the communication discipline that examines relationship between gender, politics and media (Ong and Peletz, 1995; Byerly and Ross, 2006). A closer examination of studies on gender, women and politics indicates that the predominant researches have been on election campaigns, women in public sphere, public debates, participatory democracy. Theoretical perspectives informed by social movements, studies on gender and development indicate the widely prevalent core issues of contestations-women in decision making, representational dialectics, gender roles ideological orientation indicate that there are many core issues that are of concern to women. To reach a critical mass for successful mobilization, we need people to involve in women's issues in political sphere, not just in politics. Without this political commitment, wome's involvement in politics might not make much of a difference, especially, when the institutional structures and rules are still played by patriarchal values. For greater gender equity, gender issues should be considered viable for political action. Making gender a media issue brings a degree of salience to women's cause.

The dominant approach to role of media in gender politics is to emphasis the questions of media representation of women over considering women as distinctive news user groups or an audience community with their distinctive pattern of media use, processes and effects. The representational theory of gender is limited in terms of the insights they can provide on how audience understand and use these 'gendered' messages and with what consequences. Women might be willing to overrule several personal, traditional considerations, work counter hegemonically to support women's issues. Does

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increasing use of news media with its embedded patriarchal values systems enable or constraint women involvement in gender-related issues? This study argues that to understand the relationship between media and gender better, it would be worth exploring how media influences women's concern for gender-related topics and themes.

Literature review: Genderstudies in India have extensively focused on women and development with questions over inequality, empowerment/ disempowerment, social exclusion (Ross and Byerly, 2008). Often, they have underscored how women have been portrayed as sexual objects or mere as upholding patriarchal value systems (Kramarae and Spender, 2000). According to the feminist scholars, the dominant narratives have been historically and contemporarily are represented from 'male gaze' as passive objects (Ong and Peletz, 1995). The article departs from the representational theory to consider continuing relevance of traditional concerns of media influence on audience in relation to the core concerns of how media influences how women's issues are perceived in context of conventional politics. An improvement in representation of women in media alone cannot address the need for changes in gender roles in society. Further, quantitatively increasing the presence of women in political sphere, though desirable, on its own is no guarantee that gender-related issues will be addressed by women decision makers any better than their male counterparts. For gender issue to reach a critical mass of concerned voters, the specific, substantive gender concerns have to be addressed politically. For this, one would expect certain levels of gendered involvement amongst voters. This argument parallels the phenomenon of gender-affinity affect that Dolan (2008) identified in her studies. There may be reason to expect that women would more likely to support gender issues in politics-it directly relates to their interests but empirical support is required to make claims on extent of support and determinants of gender-issue affinity.

There are many reasons for women to support or not support gender issues. Firstly, group cohesion through shared experience might make women identify with gender issues. Voters who are conscious of gender inequality in politics are likely to support gender issues. Secondly, a sense of gendered identity politics of everyday life might seep into a deeper consideration of gender-related issues. Thirdly, women might support gender issues because of accurate perception of gender under-representation in politics. Women's reservation bill in India also had a galvanizing effect on raising awareness of gender disparities in membership to parliament. Finally, greater

support for gender issues might stem not, so, much from identity politics but rather from complex interplay between political socialization and partisan orientation.

News media use, importance given to media and interest in political news might also be a viable explanation for differential levels of affinity towards gender issues as implied by several studies on representation for women in media and attempts to problamatize or correct misrepresentations. Thus, one could postulate that there is a clear evidence for the phenomenon of gender-issue affinity that reflects peopl's levels of involvement in gender-related issues. Most gender studies scholarship and feminist literature have convincingly demonstrated these core gender issues, yet, a few studies have looked at how news media influence these gender awareness.

Studies on media effects on politics suggest that the dominant approach is to see media as a political institution. Schudson (2002) recapitulates the case for considering news media as a political institution, a trial that has a long history, expressing concern over neglect of news media as political institutions. Schusdon (2002) point to an increasing 'mediatization' of politics emphasizing research that examines "news as a form of culture that often unconsciously incorporates general belief systems, assumptions and values into news writing". Gender roles and values are one set of general belief systems that media perpetuates. Allan *et al.* (2002) outlines gendered realities of news but places less emphasis on how news influences gender concerns. We could expect the centrality of news media as a political influence to be reflected at individual level. Thus, we could hypothesise the following relationship:

- H_1: media importance will be positively associated with gender-issue affinity
- H_2: news media use will be positively associated with gender-issue affinity
- H_3: political news interest will be positively associated with gender-issue affinity

Norris (1997) further argues for examining how news media-related activities, especially interest in political news and importance given to media as key influence on individual's orientation on social issues. Research on media influence suggests several candidate variables that can potentially influence women's political involvement (Comstock and Scharrer, 2005). The following hypothesis are generated from these literatures.

- H_4: media importance will be positively associated with voting behaviour

- H_5: media importance will be positively associated with political party affiliation
- H_6: media importance will be positively associated with non-conventional political activity
- H_7: news media use will be positively associated with voting behaviour
- H_8: news media use will be positively associated with political party affiliation
- H_9: news media use will be positively associated with non-conventional political activity
- H_{10}: political news interest will be positively associated with voting behaviour
- H_{11}: political news interest will be positively associated with political party affiliation
- H_{12}: political news interest will be positively associated with non-conventional political activity

Studies on voting behaviour and political participation have traditionally examined politics in terms of conventional forms of political participation such as voting and party membership (Verba *et al.*, 1997). One could expect that measures of conventional forms of political participation are likely to affect individuals concern for gender issues. Thus, the following hypotheses would be expected:

- H_{13}: voting behaviour will be positively associated with gender-issue affinity
- H_{14}: political party affiliation will be positively associated with gender-issue affinity

Political scientists have considered factors that influence individual's political participation, especially socio-economic and demographic characteristics, are seen as an obvious candidates for segmenting citizens and voters. Further, most recent studies have emphasized non-conventional forms of political activity as a powerful factor in political change. Thus, we could complete the model by postulating the following hypothesis:

- H_{15}: non-conventional political activity will be positively associated with gender-issue affinity

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A quantitative approach (a survey design) has been adopted for the study to analyze factors such as demographics the level of importance women attach to media the level of interest they show in political news the extent of news media use by women the voting behaviour of women, political party affiliation of women and the degree of their non-conventional form of political activities. With these exploratory variables, the study tries to analyze the extent of affinity to gender issues amongst women and the factors determining women's affinity towards gender issues.

The sampling design was based on snowball sampling techniques and the field site being Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India. Given the resource and time constraints, the research restricted out the sample size to 1,200 respondents. However, the researcher managed to get only 1,108 valid samples. As the study is to analyze the gender-issue affinity of women, all the 1,108 respondents were only women.

The details of the operationalization of exploratory variables media importance news media use political news interestm volting behaviour political party affiliation non-conventional political activity and gender-issue Affinity are given as.

Media importance: Measures the level of importance the women attach to media in their everyday life. Though, women might be interested in political news they might not consider media to be important. Therefore, a separate measure becomes necessary and the question 'how important is media to your everyday life?' captures this dimension.

News media: Use measures the degree of women's news media use for trying to acquire information on political issues. It is considered the dynamic process of acquiring knowledge from various sources of media, i.e., from newspapers, TV, radio, internet and so on. In short, it is a simple measure of what sources women use to know what is happening in political arena. The question, 'Which of the following sources of information on politics you use?' was meant to capture this dimension. The choices were) daily newspaper) news broadcasts of radio/TV) magazines). In-depth Reports on Radio/TV, online news websites, smartphones/mobile phones/tablets/emails, chatting with friends/colleagues. The last indicator 'chatting with friends/colleagues' captures the concept of sharing political news which they gathered with their friends/colleagues. It has been included in the assumption that sharing about 'political news' is an element that drives one to use media to know more.

Political news interest: It's the degree of interest shown by women towards political news issues. Here, 'political news' is considered a special and distinctive interest evinced by women apart from interests in teleshopping, animal and plant life, science, history, entertainment. Hence, the question 'How interested are you in political news' captures this dimension.

Voting behaviour: It's also an indicator of traditional form of political involvement of women. It was operationalised through the question 'Did you vote in the recent elections' with the choices 'Yes' or 'No'.

Political party affiliation: It's an indicator of traditional form of political involvement. Since, most of the political activities are mainly based on party politics, it is considered a vital part in this study. The nature and level of affiliation towards political party organizations is used as a tool to measure the patterns of political involvement of women. The question 'Are you a member of any political party?' With response category as) active member) inactive member) not a member, captures this dimension.

Non-conventional political activity: Measures the women's drive to involve in various forms of non-conventional political activities. The collective actions included signing petitions, joining boycotts or protest movements, involving in demonstrations (peaceful and non-violent). The question 'have you participated or will you participate in any of the following activities' was included to capture this dimension. It should be noted that though people involve in various forms of non-conventional political activities, only a few popular forms were taken into account.

There has been several measures to study gender-related issues-gender equity, gender sensitivity scales and their variants are popular tools to assess the extent of gender individual perception of gender issues typically framed within an organizational (e.g., company) or application context. Within the context of political communication, there are relatively few measures that use indicators of political involvement political.

Gender-Issue Affinity (GIA): It's a measure of affective and behavioral commitment to gender-related issues in political sphere. Affective dimension could be emotional or symbolic. Gender issue affinity differs from previous measures in that the scale does not focus on gender perceptions but instead emphasize behavioral aspects of political orientation, more closely resembling scales on political participation (Robinson *et al.*, 1998). The scale seeks to measure women's active participation in gender-related political actions explicit value commitment articulated through social and political actions. GIA is not an attitudinal measure but rather seeks to measure levels of political participation related to gender issues.

Operationally, gender-issue: Affinity measures the actions of women that are intended towards influencing women political outcomes. It was opertionalised using seven-item scale with 'yes/no' response. The questions were framed as, 'Have you done any of the following in the last 5 years?' Did you give/spent personal money for a particular Women's Association/Women self-help-groups? Did you do any voluntary or paid work for a particular woman candidate? Did you try to persuade/try to show someone why they should vote for a particular woman candidate? Did you watch or read news on Radio/TV/Newspapers to pay attention to women's issues? Did you try to persuade your family members to support a particular women's cause? Did you attend any political meeting in support of a particular party/woman candidate? Did you display preferences, like flags, posters, dress in support of a woman candidate? Reliability tests showed Cronbach alpha of 0.864. A summated scale score was developed based on the positive responses and were finally categorized into three levels of involvement 'low gender-issue affinity', 'moderate gender-issue affinity' and 'high gender-issue affinity'.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The statistical model developed here considers demographic and exploratory variables such as media importance news media use political news interest voting behaviour (conventional form) political party affiliation (conventional form) non-conventional political activity and gender-issue affinity. A series of bi-variate analysis has been carried out cross-tabulation, Chi-square significance testing and correlation analysis. At the second stage of analysis, part and partial correlation between the main exploratory variables were carried out, controlling for demographics and socio-economic factors. In this study, the researcher examines the relationship between gender-issue affinity and the above exploratory variables.

The demographic variables were categorized as follows: the age group was categorized into three sets ranging from younger to older. Those in the age group of 18-29 as younger, those between 30-49 years are middle-aged and those above 50 years considered old. Of the total 1,108 respondents, 250 (22.6%) are younger, 537 (48.5%) belong to middle-age group and 321 (29%) are older.

Under educational background category of the total women respondents, non-literates were 225 (20.5%), those who had upto primary education were 231 (21%), those who had upto higher secondary education were 146 (13.3%) and graduates were 498 (45.3%).

Under occupational status category, business/ executive/professionals were 243 (21.9%), supervisors were 172 (15.5%), house-wives were 470 (42.4%), labourers were 51 (4.6%) and students were 172 (15.5%).

Women respondents from various walks of life have been taken into account. Therefore, the monthly family income was scaled as upto Rs. 10,000 as low income group, Rs. 10,001-50,000 as middle income group and above Rs. 50,000 as high income group. Of the total respondents 330 (29.8%) belong to low income group, 419 (37.9%) middle income group and 358 (32.3%) high income group.

The respondents were asked to mention the class status (individual's perception) to which they perceive that they belong to. Under the perception of class category, of the total respondents, upper middle class were 249 (22.9%), middle class were 389 (35.9%), working class were 199 (18.3%) and lower class were 248 (22.9%).

Gender-issue affinity and media importance: Chi-square results between gender-issue affinity and media importance showed that there was statistically significant difference at (p = 0.000, χ^2 = 886.077, df = 6). Spearman's Rho showed a significant relation (r = 0.816, p = 0.000). The part and partial correlation carried out between the two variables, controlled for all demographics (age, educational background, occupational status, income and perception of class) are significant at (r = 0.828, p = 0.000). Thus, hypothesis H_1 is supported.

The study found a positive association between media importance and gender-issue affinity. That is, the higher the importance the women attach to media the higher their gender-issue affinity. Media importance accounts for 81.6% of variance in gender-issue affinity.

Gender-issue affinity and news media use: Chi-square results between gender-issue affinity and news media use showed that there was statistically significant difference at (p = 0.000, χ^2 = 72.144, df = 4). Spearman's Rho showed a significant relation (r = 0.239, p = 0.000). Controlling for demographics, it was found that the part and partial correlation were also significant (r = 0.240, p = 0.000), thus, hypothesis H_2 is supported.

The study found a positive association between news media use and gender-issue affinity. That is, the higher the women use the news media the higher their gender-issue affinity. News media use accounts for 23.9% of variance in gender-issue affinity.

Gender-issue affinity and political news interest: Chi-square results between gender-issue affinity and political news interest, showed that there was statistically significant difference at (p = 0.000, χ^2 = 809.522, df = 6). Spearman's Rho showed a significant relation (r = 0.775, p = 0.000). Controlling for demographics, it was found that

the part and partial correlation were also significant at (r = 0.801, p = 0.000) thus, hypothesis H_3 is supported.

The study found a positive association between political news interest and gender-issue affinity. That is, the higher the women are interested in political news, the higher their gender-issue affinity. Political news interest accounts for 77.5% of variance in gender-issue affinity.

Media importance and voting behaviour: Chi-square results between Media Importance and Voting Behaviour showed that there was no statistically significant difference at (p = 0.317, χ^2 = 3.531, df = 3). Spearman's Rho showed that there was a significant relation between the two variables (r = 0.048, p = 0.122). The part and partial correlation carried out between the two variables are not significant, when controlled for demographics. Thus, hypothesis H_4 is rejected.

Media importance and political party affiliation: Chi-square results between media importance and political party a ffiliation showed that there was statistically significant difference at (p = 0.000, χ^2 = 74.493, df = 6). Spearman's Rho showed a significant relation (r = 0.251, p = 0.000). Controlling for demographics, it was found that the part and partial correlation were also significant at (r = 0.234, p = 0.000), thus, hypothesis H_5 is supported.

The study found a positive association between political party affiliation and media importance. That is, the more the women are active in a party the higher the importance they attach to media. Political party affiliation accounts for 25.1% of variance in media importance.

Media importance and non-conventional political activity: Chi-square results between media importance and non-conventional political activity showed that there was statistically significant difference at (p = 0.000, χ^2 = 58.265, df = 6). Spearman's Rho showed a significant relation (r = 0.292, p = 0.000). Controlling for demographics, it was found that the part and partial correlation were also significant at (r = 0.312, p = 0.000) thus, hypothesis H_6 is supported.

The study found a positive association between non-conventional political activity and media importance. That is the higher the non-conventional political activity, the higher the level of media importance. Non-conventional political activity accounts for 29.2% of variance in media importance.

News media use and voting behaviour: Chi-square results between news media use and voting behaviour showed

that there was no statistically significant difference at $(p = 0.092, \chi^2 = 4.769, df = 2)$. Spearman's Rho showed no significant relation $(r = 0.066, p = 0.029)$. The part and partial correlation carried out between the two variables are not significant, when controlled for demographics thus, hypothesis H_7 is rejected.

News media use and political party affiliation: Chi-square results between news media use and political party Affiliation showed that there was statistically significant difference at $(p = 0.000, \chi^2 = 40.736, df = 4)$. Spearman's Rho showed a significant relation $(r = 0.145, p = 0.000)$. Controlling for demographics, it was found that the part and partial correlation were also significant at $(r = 0.112, p = 0.023)$ thus, hypothesis H_8 is supported.

The study found a positive association between political party affiliation and news media use. That is, the more the women are active in a party the more their news media use. Political party affiliation accounts for 14.5% of variance in media importance.

News media use and non-conventional political activity: Chi-square results between news media use and non-conventional political activity showed that there was statistically significant difference at $(p = 0.000, \chi^2 = 49.440, df = 4)$. Spearman's Rho showed a significant relation $(r = 0.274, p = 0.000)$. Controlling for demographics, it was found that the part and partial correlation were also significant $(r = 0.213, p = 0.000)$ thus, hypothesis H_9 is supported.

The study found a positive association between non-conventional political activity and news media use. That is, the higher the non-conventional political activity, the higher the news media use. Non-conventional political activity accounts for 27.4% of variance in news media use.

Political news interest and voting behaviour: Chi-square results between political news interest and voting behaviour showed that there was no statistically significant difference at $(p = 0.052, \chi^2 = 7.744, df = 3)$. Spearman's Rho showed a significant relation $(r = 0.082, p = 0.009)$. The part and partial correlation carried out between the two variables are not significant, when controlled for demographics thus, hypothesis H_{10} is rejected.

Political news interest and political party affiliation: Chi-square results between political news interest and political party affiliation showed that there was statistically significant difference at $(p = 0.000, \chi^2 = 92.959, df = 6)$. Spearman's Rho showed a significant relation

$(r = 0.245, p = 0.000)$. Controlling for demographics, it was found that the part and partial correlation were also significant at $(r = 0.266, p = 0.000)$, thus, hypothesis H_{11} is supported.

The study found a positive association between political party affiliation and political news interest. That is the more the women are active in a party the more they are interested in political news. Political party affiliation accounts for 24.5% of variance in political news interest.

Political news interest and **non-conventional political activity:** Chi-square results between political news interest and non-conventional political activity showed that there was statistically significant difference at $(p = 0.000, \chi^2 = 101.247, df = 6)$. Spearman's Rho showed a significant relation $(r = 0.440, p = 0.000)$. Controlling for demographics, it was found that the part and partial correlation were also significant at $(r = 0.430, p = 0.000)$, thus, hypothesis H_{12} is supported.

The study found a positive association between non-conventional political activity and political news interest. That is, the higher the non-conventional political activity, the higher the interest in political news. Non-conventional political activity accounts for 44% of variance in political news interest.

Gender-issue affinity and voting behaviour: Chi-square results between gender-issue affinity and voting behaviour showed that there was no statistically significant difference at $(p = 0.279, \chi^2 = 2.554, df = 2)$. Spearman's Rho showed that there was no significant relation $(r = 0.050, p = 0.119)$. The zero-order correlation and controlled correlation for these two variables are not significant, when controlled for demographics thus, hypothesis H_{13} is rejected.

Gender-issue affinity and political party affiliation: Chi-square results between gender-issue affinity and political party affiliation showed that there was statistically significant difference at $(p = 0.000, \chi^2 = 87.923, df = 4)$. Spearman's Rho showed a significant relation $(r = 0.281, p = 0.000)$. Controlling for demographics, it was found that the part and partial correlation were also significant at $(r = 0.265, p = 0.000)$ thus, hypothesis H_{14} is supported.

The study found a positive association between gender-issue affinity and political party affiliation. That is, the higher their gender-issue affinity the higher their activities as members of political parties. More involvement in politics makes them more active (as a member) in the party. In short, the higher the gender-issue

affinity, the higher the political party affiliation. Gender-issue affinity accounts for 28.1% of variance in political party affiliation.

Gender-issue affinity and non-conventional political activity: Chi-square results between gender-issue affinity and non-conventional political activity showed that there was statistically significant difference at (p = 0.000, χ^2 = 73.282, df = 4). Spearman's Rho showed a significant relation (r = 0.401, p = 0.000). Controlling for demographics, it was found that the part and partial correlation were also significant at (r = 0.396, p = 0.000) thus, hypothesis H_{15} is supported.

The study found a positive association between gender-issue affinity and non-conventional political activity. That is, the higher the gender-issue affinity the higher their non-conventional political activity. Gender-issue affinity accounts for 40.1% of variance in non-conventional political activity.

Overall, we found that of fifteen hypotheses, 11 were significant. The extent to which women give importance to media, have a positive influence on GIA. Similarly, increased news media use and level of interest in political news seem to increase GIA. Voting behaviour did not show significant relationship with GIA but party affiliation seems to have a positive association. Non-conventional form of political activity as expected, seems to positively influence GIA. The results suggest that gender-issue affinity is a significant phenomenon amongst women and that media plays a critical role in gender sensitization, even though the portrayal of women in media continues to promote a distorted communication about gender roles as suggested by studies on media and gender.

This study finds that to increase gender-issue affinity, we need to focus on improving the political news interests and importance women give to media. While clearly acknowledging that institutional and structural factors play a critical role and the complexities of gendered considerations in politics, this study underscores the continuing need to engage with media to make gender issues salient. This study has found evidence that news media influences the gender-issue involvement in politics. For instance, those women who attach more importance to media in their everyday life, involve highly in gender-related issues. The study found that the higher the media importance, higher the issue-affinity by women. Moreover, those women who are very interested in political news and who are eager to know what happens in the political arena, also involve themselves very highly in politics. With regard to the usage of news media in getting to know political

information, there is more probability that women who have high news media use have high gender-issue affinity.

CONCLUSION

Women have become more visible in the public sphere and have built up significant political resources in India. Moreover, the barriers to involve in politics have by and large reduced compared to the generation immediate to post independence. Apart from usual voting rights and party affiliation with the advent of technology, women have equipped themselves with knowledge regarding national policies, political affairs across the globe and have also started fighting for their rights in all spheres. Given this scenario, this study sought to empirically investigate the scope, nature and level offender-issue affinity amongst women in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India.

The presence of gender-issue affinity might be one positive outcome of news media use, despite media converge being far from gender neutral and often promotedistorted imageries and stereotypes of gender. Gender-issue affinity seems to work beyond socio-economic and demographic differences. Women who hold interest in political issues and consider media to be an important part of their everyday life show greater gender-issue affinity. While it might be intuitive to suggest that women with greater interest in political news are likely to show higher gender-issue affinity, these considerations are not necessarily conditions for support for gender causes.

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