Research article

The appeals in women contestants’ campaign slogans during the 2017 general elections in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Women have made notable political gains globally, evidenced by the number of elected women. In Kenya, though the current number of elected women in parliament, senate and governor position is the highest it has ever been, women contestants still face a number of challenges during their political campaigns. To strategically position themselves during campaigns, women have to use slogans that appeal to the Kenyan electorate in the different parts of the country. This qualitative study, anchored on the theory of gender issue ownership, focuses on the campaign slogans that women running for parliament, senate and governor positions used during the 2017 general elections in the country. Data was collected from online sources—contestants’ Facebook pages and groups, websites etc. and thematically analysed. Findings showed that the slogans appealed to motherhood qualities, a sense of community, credible leadership, and to musicality. The study helps to further understand women's political campaigns in Kenya and other related contexts.

1. Introduction

The 2017 general election in Kenya is historic. For the first time in the country’s history, Kenya’s presidential elections results were annulled in a Supreme Court decision, making the country the first in Africa, and the third in the world to do so (Olewe, 2017; Ombuor, 2017). But more interestingly, and perhaps less focused on, the number of elected women in the country was the highest it had ever been: three governors (out of the 47 seats), three senators (out of 47 seats), and a record 23 (out of 290) Members of the National Assembly (Oluoch, 2017; The National Democratic Institute; FIDA-Kenya, 2018). In the election preceding 2017 (held in 2012), no woman was elected for either gubernatorial or senatorial positions, while 16 of them were elected as Members of the National Assembly (Migiro, 2013).

The successful election of women in 2017 is to be celebrated in Kenya, bearing in mind that women have come from a background that is largely against their political progress - culturally, politically, socio-economically, and institutionally (Lawless and Fox, 1999; Kamau, 2010; Maathai, 2006; Nzomo, 1997). This background has also forced women to be more strategic (than men) in their political campaigns, sometimes having to exert extra effort for political seats where both women and men are contestants (Hogan, 2010; Huddy and Terkildsen, 1993; Sossou, 2011).

One avenue that both men and women have exploited during political campaigns is the use of slogans (Koc and Ilgun, 2010). The aim of the current study was to examine the campaign slogans used by women in the 2017 general elections in Kenya. The research question was: What are the appeals in the campaign slogans used by women in Kenyan general elections? The study specifically focussed on the senatorial, gubernatorial, and Member of National Assembly positions. The study restricted itself to regions that had both men and women contestants, and where women won.

1.1. Women and political leadership

Globally, political leadership has largely been the preserve of men. Over time, however, the tide has been turning and more women have ascended into politics, for example Hillary Clinton in the US, Angela Merkel in Germany, Michelle Bachelet in Chile, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in Liberia, and Pratibha Patil in India (Jalalzai and Krook, 2010; Thomas and Adams, 2010). Partly, movements such as feminism have helped advance women's political leadership, even though not all regions have witnessed this progress. Women have risen to both top national...
leadership positions, as well as those in legislative and parliamentary ones, and according to Jalalzai and Krock (2010), more women are now contesting for political positions.

Leadership in African culture has largely been considered a male domain (Kiamba, 2009). In a recent study in Malawi by Hussein (2021), some challenges faced by women as they attempted elective posts include male's perceptions that leadership was a preserve of men while women belonged to the kitchen. According to Kamau (2010), the Kenyan culture has been patriarchal, both traditionally and after the colonial culture, suggesting that leadership has been synonymous with men in Kenya for long. Consequently, most women in Africa and Kenya to be specific, have shied away from both elective and non-elective politics, and those that have tried being part of it have often faced stigma, rejection by family and friends, and general hostility (Hussein, 2021; Kamau, 2010; Maathai, 2006).

Women's socialization has partly been blamed on their less involvement in politics and leadership-related issues (Frankel, 2014; Sossou, 2011). While women in Kenya played a demonstrable role in the struggle for independence, for example through the provision of food to fighters, fighting alongside men, and collusion in the provision of homes which acted as armouries for smuggled guns, the post-independence governments did not grant equal access to women as it did for men (Nyakwaka and Mokua, 2020; Nzomo, 1997). Socialization of women into domestic roles has further ensured that men are not only kept in leadership, but that excelling women are rarely feted (Kamau, 2010; Maathai, 2006; Ngunjiri, 2006).

Even though inclusion of women has been the intent of past governments in Kenya since independence, the reality on the ground has been different. In examining the story of Julia Ojiambo, the iconic Kenyan woman leader who served four governments, Were (2017, p. 489) observed:

Patrimonial political structures in Kenya perceive women's claims to a separate political sovereignty as a challenge to male dominance. When examined against this background, Julia’s political experiences show how patrimonial politics in Kenya have antagonised women as political aspirants and voters. Androcentrism, patriarchy and ethnicity, therefore, prevent the election of women and stagnate their upward mobility in politics.

Were's argument is that the Kenyan culture largely hinders rather than supports the progress of women in politics in Kenya, and previous leaders like President Moi ‘favoured’ the likes of Julia Ojiambo owing to her adoption of paternalistic filiality approaches, where she was regarded as a 'daughter of the nation'. Arguably, according to Were (2017), such filiality promotes male dominance while suppressing that of females.

On the contrary, Nyakwaka and Mokua (2020) have recently examined women's participation in Kenya politics since independence until 2017. In their paper, Nyakwaka and Mokua argued that women had power, influence, and authority in traditional Kenyan society, but these were undermined and altered by the colonial government, and consequently extended by subsequent Kenyan regimes. Similarly, though governments and even Sessional paper number 10 (on African Socialism) allowed for both genders equally participating in elective posts, women were often not given a chance, but were harassed when they attempted to do so, or maligned by male (and sometimes female) national leaders (Maathai, 2006; Nyakwaka and Mokua, 2020; Nzomo, 1997).

There has been progress in relation to women in politics in Kenya, however. Noteworthy is the observation that President Jomo Kenyatta and President Moi’s regimes stifled women interested in politics, while the regimes of President Kibaki and the current leadership of President Uhuru have been more tolerant and supportive of women politicians (Nyakwaka and Mokua, 2020). Further, constitutional amendments (for example the opening up of democracy in 1992 in Kenya) created democratic opportunities that allowed women to enter into elective politics. While challenges still abide, the two-third gender rule, which stipulates that elective or appointed leaders shall not constitute more than two-thirds of the members of one gender, has buoyed women participation and representation in politics (The National Democratic Institute; FIDA-Kenya, 2018).

1.2. Slogans and political campaigns

Successful political campaigns by men and women contestants make use of effective slogans. The word ‘slogan’, which is thought to originate from the (Gaelic) Scottish word ‘slaughtghairm’ or ‘slogan’ for ‘battle-cry’ or ‘war cry’ (Al-Sowaidi et al., 2017, p. 622; Kohli et al., 2007, p.415), has been extensively employed in politics. According to Hartig (2018, p.120), ‘a political slogan is a phrase that is easy to remember and is used by a political group, organisation or individual politician to attract attention and to communicate certain information and/or an agenda.’ Slogans play a central position in political marketing since they often summarize the aims or goals of a political party (Koc and Ilgun, 2010).

Naturally, slogans stick in the minds of the audience (Newsome, 2002). Even then, Blythe (2003) argued that for slogans to be memorable to the audience, they should have rhythm, foregrounding, alliteration, assonance, rhyme, intonation, and pun. In agreement, Kohli et al. (2007) observed that slogans should have an aspect of musicality, and should clearly position the brand, if they have to be effective. Effective slogans should persuade based on emotion, reason and credibility, and should be easy to remember (Hartig, 2018; Newsome, 2002).

One of the ways slogans work in political campaigns is through the appeals they make. Slogans can be used to appeal to the values and emotions that a particular society is keen on. For example, religion is a stronger value for some electorate (Greenberg, 2001), suggesting that appeals in this direction will be useful. Similarly, Brader (2006) argued that political campaigns utilize emotional appeals, for examples through ads that appeal to anger, fear, sympathy etc., to win over the electorate. To be persuasive as a speaker, a politician should appeal to emotions that are likely to woo that audience (Lucas, 2007; Young, 2017). Following the Aristotelian persuasion, slogans should appeal to the audience's reason (logos), credibility of the speaker (ethos) or their emotions (pathos), if they have to be effective (Lucas, 2007; Newsome, 2002; Petek, 2014).

Over the years, slogans have been used globally for political campaigns by many candidates. According to Hartig (2018):

The usage of slogans in political communication is as old as politics. Examples include Julius Caesar’s Veni, vidi, vici, Lenin’s promise Peace, Land and Bread, the Evil Empire, Yes, We can or, most recently, Make America great again and Stronger Together.

Focussing on the recent Arab Spring Al-Sowaidi et al. (2017) discovered that slogans disseminated through platforms such as graffiti, speeches, songs, banner among others contributed to the revolutionary political actions in the affected countries. In china, slogans are extensively used by the government for political purposes and in government communication (Hartig, 2018; Nianxi, 2009). In Kenya, slogans have been used for long in the political arena, even though there is scant literature on this (Malande, 2018). Much of the focus in literature has been on advertising slogans and those on health behaviour change (Murimi, 2007; Omari, 2011).

1.3. Appeals and gender in political campaigns

Studies have shown that men and women adopt different appeals in the political campaigns, with men likely to focus on economic issues, and women on social ones (Kahn, 1993). According to Herrnson et al. (2003, p.251), ‘When women choose to capitalize on gender stereotypes by focusing on issues that are favourably associated with women candidates and targeting women or other social groups, they improve their prospects of electoral success.’ The foregoing statement suggests that women have
advantage if the appeals they adopt in their political campaigns are those stereotypically associated with the female gender. Lawless (2004) further observed that the women and men are perceived differently by the electorate, and that gender stereotypes influence individuals voting patterns.

On the contrary, Huddy and Terkildsen (1993) suggested that for women to be successful in politics (and especially at the national level) they have to possess ‘masculine’ traits, hence have appeals along this line. While focusing on the election of Michelle Bachelet in Chile and Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf in Liberia (who were elected as first female presidents in their countries), Thomas and Adams (2010) realized in their study that one of the strategies the two used was to present themselves as leaders who possessed masculine traits. Indeed some of the slogans in their rallies had titles such as ‘Ellen-she’s our man!’ (p.118).

Appeals adopted by men and women for their political campaigns, whether in all the ads or in their campaign slogans, have to be culturally sensitive. For example, Han and Shavitt (1994, p.334) discovered in their study that US ads were more individualistic than Korean ones as they emphasized self-reliance, self-improvement and personal rewards, and were less likely to emphasize family well-being, in-group goals, or interdependence. One dimension that has been used to categorize cultures is individualism versus collectivism, or the tendency towards self or communal focus in life issues respectively (Kolman et al., 2003). This suggests that slogans that are crafted for political campaigns have to be cognizant of the electorate's culture.

The Kenyan context thus presents an interesting area of study regarding women's political campaigns and especially the appeals adopted. As already argued, women's entry into politics in Kenya is almost at a disadvantage as men already have an upper hand. Besides, female contestants in Kenyan politics not only have to contest in a male-dominated environment; they also have to deal the very ‘alive’ issues of tribalism and ethnicity (Kagwanja and Southall, 2009).

1.4. Motherhood political leadership in Kenya

Globally, the word, role and position of a mother is not only symbolic, but also one that connotes nurture and fecundity. It is the reason refer- ences such as ‘Mother nature’ are used, or planets and countries are often referred with feminine pronouns (i.e. ‘her’). In Africa, the traditional understanding of ‘mother’ and ‘motherhood’ are held dearly. Some scholars have argued that traditional leadership in Kenya was incomplete without the presence and contribution of women (Chebet-Choge, 2010; Nyakwaka and Mokua, 2020). Hence, while not many women have elected into political offices in the nation, their invaluable contribution is acknowledged.

Motherhood political leadership suggest that women in running for office or while executing for roles of the office they have been elected to, espouse the qualities and roles associated with motherhood such as nurturing, development, incorruptibility, among others (Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Even though the aspect of women as nur- turers and possessors of other feminine qualities has been taken advan- tage of and used to oppress and subjugate women as far as political leadership in Kenya is concerned (Were, 2017), women contestants in Kenya still use strategies that espouse their motherhood qualities to po- sition themselves for leadership. Further, the many cases of corruption, slower rate of development among others, which have characterised the nation, can for the most part be attributed to male-dominated leadership.

1.5. Theory of gender issue ownership

According to Herrmann et al. (2003), the theory of gender issue ownership argues that women are better placed politically if they run on platforms that associate them with traditional feminine roles. In other words, voters are likely to support women if they perceive the women candidate as being the image of the ‘ideal’ woman as per their cultural expectations. Relatedly, the theory suggests that women voters are likely to follow gender-related issues in their choice of candidates, and hence likely to vote for women. The theory is traced to Petrock’s 1996 party ownership theory, ‘which suggests that particular political parties are perceived to be better able to ‘handle’ certain matters’ (Meeks and Domke, 2016, p.899).

Generally, gender stereotyping is common in the political arena (Hayes, 2011), with some roles associated with one gender, more than the other. For example, women have largely been thought instrumental when it comes to social issues such as health and education, while men have been associated with economic and military-related issues (Kahn, 1993). The arguments in the current study are anchored on gender issue theory.

2. Method

This study was a census of all female elected senators, governors and Members of National Assembly (also known as Members of Parliament-or MPs) in the 2017 national elections in Kenya. The winning women polit-icians consisted of three Governors, three Senators and 23 MPs, making a total of 29 women. While there was a repeat for the presidential elec- tions in Kenya in 2017, the elections for all the other posts (including the ones under study) took place only once in August 2017.

Data was collected from online platforms of the women under study. These included the women politicians’ websites, Facebook pages and groups, as well as from online media platforms that contained the campaign posters with slogans. Ethically, therefore, the material used for study was publicly available as the female contestants had used the same to woo voters. Notably, social media has become a useful platform for political advertising and marketing in Africa (Gyampo, 2017). Even then, for seven of the MPs, no material related to them was found online; hence, they could not be included in the study. It must be understood that while Kenya has one of the fastest rates in internet growth and adoption in Africa (Communication Authority of Kenya (CAK), 2019), there are still regions where online communication is still a challenge owing to cost and other access factors (Okoye et al., 2019). The eventual number of women under study was thus 22.

Data collection involved examining the campaign posters used by the women politicians during their campaigns. We looked at a number of them (for example by going through the images they had uploaded on their Facebook pages and groups) to establish the consistency of the slogan. The data collection soon revealed that a number of slogans had been written in the local Kenyan dialects, and would thus require translation. After noting down such slogans, both authors translated those from their own dialects (Kalenjin and Luo) as well as those from Swahili. We also got in touch with individuals we knew, who spoke the other specific dialects the slogans had been written in, to help with translation. Where doubt existed, we checked with another or other local dialect speakers. Once we had all the dialects and their English equiva- lence, we began analysing data thematically.

Following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) guidance for thematic analysis, we first familiarized ourselves with emerging data then manually developed initial codes from the data. Thereafter, we collated and merged related codes, which we used in searching for themes. We then reviewed emerging themes, and then finally defined the themes which are reported in this study. This process, which we believe enhances the trustworthiness of our study (Nowell et al., 2017) was carried out by the two authors; first at the individual level, then later, together.

3. Study limitations

One limitation in this study revolves around the translation of the slogans from local Kenyan dialects to English. While we had English equivalence from all the slogans, it is possible that some of these may not have fully conveyed the meaning as used in that community. Many Af- rican languages and Kenyan ones are no exception, are richly nuanced, highly connotative, and may have deeper meanings than what is literally
suggested. This consequently affects the interpretation given. The sole focus on websites and Facebook pages as data sources is a potential limitation in this study. Even though this was opted for owing to its applicability to most candidates, other sources, perhaps interview with some candidates might have enriched this study. Finally, the findings of this study should be interpreted with caution. Success in political campaigns is as a result of many factors [such as media bias, the candidate in question, electoral systems in a country, among others - (Cheeseman et al., 2019; Van Spanje and Azrout, 2019)]; slogans play a part of this. The study does not therefore attribute the success of the women political candidates to slogans only; it merely examines the slogans they used in their campaigns.

4. Findings and discussion

Tables 1, 2, and 3 display the names of the female contestants at the parliamentary, senatorial and gubernatorial positions, their slogans as well as English equivalence (for those written in local Kenyan dialects).

4.1. Emerging themes

A number of themes emerged from the current study, and these will be discussed next.

4.2. Appeal to motherhood qualities

Many of the slogans had the word ‘mama’ in them suggesting an appeal to the motherhood qualities the aspirants had. These qualities were portrayed differently, however. For example, Uasin Gishu Senator had the twin slogan ‘Mama wa vitendo (An action-oriented Mama), and ‘Mama Kityo!’ (‘Mama Only!’). The two slogans seemed to portray the aspirant as one who was focused on action (rather than mere words), and the only sober choice the electorates had. Relatedly, Njoro’s MP had the slogan ‘Nani kama mama!’ (‘Who compares to Mama!’) which seemed to appeal to the uniqueness of the woman as a candidate.

Other slogans appealed to motherhood and the fact that it was their time for leadership. For example, Kiut Governor had the slogan ‘Mama sasa!’ (‘It’s mama’s time!’) which portrayed the urgency of electing a woman as the governor. Gatundu North MP had a similar slogan ‘Roundi hii ni mama na maendeleo’ (‘This time round, it’s mama and development for MP’) which suggested that it was time a woman spearheaded development (seemingly implying that the previous ‘non-development’ times were not led by a woman).

Findings from this study suggest that a number of slogans appealed to traditional feminine African qualities, and supportive of gender issue ownership theory. The notion of a mother (or ‘Mama’ as used in the slogans) in Africa largely suggests productivity and nurture (Walker, 1995), hence something many of the aspirants were happy to associate themselves with. As a result, such aspirants desired to be assessed from the prism of motherhood qualities and roles. In this study, the ‘Mama’

| No | Name            | County          | Party | Slogan                        | English Equivalence                      |
|----|-----------------|-----------------|-------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| 1  | Joyce Laboso    | Bomet           | Jubilee | Joyce my Choice              |                                          |
| 2  | Anne Waiguru    | Kirinyaga       | Jubilee | Minji minji                  | Peanut/the beautiful one                 |
| 3  | Charity Ngilu   | Kinui           | Narc   | Mama sasa!                    | It’s Mama’s time!                        |

Table 2. Elected female senators and their campaign slogans.

| No | Name            | County          | Party | Slogan                        | English Equivalence                      |
|----|-----------------|-----------------|-------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| 1  | Margaret Kamar  | Uasin Gishu     | Jubilee | Mama Kityo!/Mama wa Vitendo  | Mama Only!/An action-oriented Mama       |
| 2  | Fatuma Dullo    | Isiolo          | Jubilee | Pamoja tujenge Isiolo yetu   | Let’s all build our Isiolo (County)      |
| 3  | Susan Kihika    | Nakuru          | Jubilee | Tested. Proven. Ready        |                                          |

Table 3. Elected female governors and their campaign slogans.
quality was associated with action, development and sense of community. While leadership in Africa has traditionally been associated with males (Kamau, 2010; Kiamba, 2009), real societal development has been thought possible when women are on the forefront (Kevane, 2004). For example, the role played by women has been considered one key factor in the reconstruction of post-genocide Rwanda (Hamilton, 2000).

In this study, thus, women wanted to appeal to these ‘motherly’ attributes in their campaign slogans with the hope that the electorate would associate them with such. As Herrnson et al. (2003) observed, by focusing on feminine roles and qualities, the women aspirants who used these appeals were increasing their chances of electoral success. Even then, the society in which the women aspirants found themselves in, also played a role. The women who appealed to traditional feminine qualities did so while aware that their societies not only appreciated the roles women played, but would also be willing to support them in such endeavours. In the same vein, Sanbonmatsu (2002) observed that female contestants are more likely to win if they run along feminine stereotypes that voters associate them with.

Another conspicuous appeal in this category is the use of word ‘Mama’ in the campaign slogans. As Bradner (2006) argued, this word is emotional in appeal and evokes feeling of ‘nurture’, ‘care’ and ‘life’ to the hearers. Emotional appeals (or ‘pathos’ according to Aristotle) are powerful and bound to be highly persuasive (Lucas, 2007). ‘Mama’ has been used in many songs and poems (for example by the poet Langston Hughes and Boyz II Men singers) (Samer, 2004) as an endearing word, one which many people are likely to identify with (Botha, 2015). The word ‘Mama’ also has a common reference of mothers and motherhood across many African dialects. The contestants’ use of this word was therefore a strategic appeal, a desire to connect emotionally with the electorate.

### 4.3. Appeal to a sense of community

Some slogans had the appeal to the sense of community, and while a number associated motherhood with this, others did not. Some slogans suggested that being a woman was synonymous with the concept of community, or that a mother had the ability to bring everyone on board. An example was from Laikipia North MP ‘Sauti ya mama, sauti ya wote’ (‘A mother’s voice is the voice of all’) which suggested that a mother understood and accommodated everyone she led, hence was able to represent them well. Naivasha MP had the slogan ‘Mama ni taifa’ (‘A mother is a nation’) meaning that a mother was the face of the nation, or that a mother had the concerns of her nation at heart.

Other slogans directly appealed to the sense of community, and development. For example, the Isiolo Senator had the slogan ‘Pamoja tujenge Isiolo yetu’ (‘Let’s all build our Isiolo (County)’), which appealed to a communal approach to development. Ijara Kigumo’s MP similarly had the slogan ‘Twende mbele’ (‘Let’s all build our Isiolo (County)’), which appealed to the electorate to support a developmental program.

In Kenya, like many other African states, the aspect of ‘community’ is very much cherished. This is even more pronounced owing to the many election-related inter-tribal clashes that have often caused hatred and disunity among Kenyans (Kagwaja and Southall, 2009; Roberts, 2009). During elections, therefore, appealing to a sense of community becomes an important component of elections, more so for regions that have diverse communities (Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), 2005). Besides, as Kenya is a collectivist nation (Kolman et al., 2003), political slogans that engender a sense of community (like those in this category) are bound to connect much more easily with the electorate.

The role of a mother in fostering a sense of ‘community’ as shown in the findings is important. Leadership studies portray women as nurturers and caregivers and able to accommodate those who are at the periphery. For example, Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001, p.783) observed that ‘Communal characteristics, which are ascribed more strongly to women than men, describe primarily a concern with the welfare of other people—for example, affectionate, helpful, kind, sympathetic, interpersonally sensitive, nurturant, and gentle’. This implies that since women are more predisposed to being communal and nurturers, they are more likely to appeal to this aspect in their political campaigns, and quite in agreement with the theory of gender issue ownership.

### 4.4. Appeal to credible leadership

Some of the slogans focussed on the women aspirants’ leadership qualities, which were put forth as credible or reliable. Nakuru Senator had the slogan ‘Tested. Proven. Ready’ which suggested that she had the reliable experience and was fit for the office she was running for. Turbo’s MP had the slogan ‘Kerichotab Turbo’ (‘Turbo’s (Constituency’s name) medicine’) suggesting that she was the solution (literary, ‘the medicine’) her constituency needed in relation to their leadership and governance. Kajiado East MP, who was defending her seat, had the slogan ‘Niliahidi… Ninetenda… Nitazidi’ (I promised…I delivered…I will do more…) which hinged on the progress she had done so far, with the promise to do even more.

Three of the MPs had the words ‘good’ to qualify their leadership in their slogans. For example, Kabondo Kasipul’s MP had ‘Teló Makare’ (‘Good leadership’); Samburu West MP had ‘Rikore Supat, Nkishon supat’ (‘Good leadership, good life’); while Gilgil’s MP had ‘A mother with good leadership’ slogans. The use of ‘good’ seemed to suggest that the leadership they were offering was going to be exemplary. Generally, slogans in this category tended to portray the women as potential leaders who could be banked on. Most of the women with slogans in this category came from regions and cultures that seemed largely patriarchal, suggesting that the female contestants aimed at challenging such deep-rooted beliefs about women and leadership.

The appeal to credible leadership seemed to challenge men’s leadership, and portray women as similarly abled political contestants, a contrast to expectations of gender issue ownership theory. Thomas and Adams (2010) observed that one of the successful strategies in the election of Michelle Bachelet and Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was the portrayal of the two candidates as having masculine traits, an observation that mirrors the slogans in this category. In our study, women here seemed to shift focus from themselves as women, to their ability and leadership as their masculine competitors. Kahn (1993) similarly found out that women in their study emphasised their leadership and competencies rather than on stereotypic feminine perspectives.

### 4.5. Appeal to musicality

The last theme from this study hinged on punning, repetition and other sound aspects that would be attractive to the electorate. For example, Bomet Governor had had the slogan ‘Joyce my Choice’ which showed a punning on the/t/and/dz/sounds. The Kirinyaga Governor had the slogan ‘minji minji’ (meaning ‘peas’ in Kikuyu, but which connotatively meant ‘the beautiful one’). This slogan flaunted the Governor’s physical beauty as well as her suitability for the gubernatorial position.

The Maragwa MP Mary Waithira had ‘Wa Maua’ which meant she traded in flowers, but connotatively, that she was ‘flowery’ (beautiful). Suba East MP had the slogan ‘geza geza’ (a reference to the MP’s Luo and Suba background). The musical slogan however, more connotatively appealed to her origin and suitability to the constituency and tribes where she was contesting. Baringo North MP had the slogan ‘Simama na mama’ (‘Support mama’) which appealed to the electorate to support a woman in their midst. The slogans in this category generally hinged on sound aspects in appealing to the electorate.

The appeal to musicality seems primarily targeted at the youth, who make up the majority of the Kenyan population. According to Wamuyu (2013), 75% of the country’s population is youthful (aged between 1-30 years) and that 60% of the country’s labour force is made of the youth. Targeting the youth during elections campaigns therefore has the twin-fold effect of a contestant getting more votes from the youth, as well
as benefiting from increased popularity through the same youth who are heavy users of social media. For example, the *minji minji* slogan was translated into a song which further endeared the Nyeri gubernatorial contestant to her electorate as she was portrayed as beautiful and highly suitable for the post (Tamada, 2017; Wainaina and Munene, 2017).

In examining the 2006 presidential campaigns in Ecuador where Rafael Correa eventually won, De la Torre and Conaghan (2009, p.345) opined that the hybrid model that Correa used in his campaigns included the use of the appealing musical and punning slogan ‘*Dale Correa*’ which meant ‘whip ’em Correa’. Slogans that are musical and entertaining, and that make use of sound patterns (repetition, assonance, punning, etc.) are bound to be much more effective as the electorate are likely to associate them with contestants (Blythe, 2003; Kohli et al., 2007). For example, Suba MP Millie Odhiambo has for long been referred to as ‘geza geza’, a musical slogan that has become her second political name and identity. This branding is useful for her political ambitions.

5. Conclusion

Although Lawless and Fox (1999) argued that the election of women in Kenya may not necessarily translate to more representation of women issues and interests in the country, regional and global studies suggest that progress and development in the society is evident when women have been elevated to positions of influence in the society (Yoon, 2011). The report by Bouka et al. (2017) further noted that having many women in legislative positions is associated with development at local levels, even though this is dependent on the elected women’s experience, and the contexts they operate in. To this end, how women position themselves during political campaigns is of importance in understanding not just women political campaigns, but also their contribution to national leadership.

Findings from this study both support and contradict the theory of gender issue ownership as earlier discussed. The theory generally argues that women are better placed as political contestants if they campaign based on platforms that stereotypically associate them with female roles (Herrnson et al., 2003). In this study, while some women appealed to their African femininity in their slogans, others focussed on other aspects (some unrelated to gender) which would better position them as the preferred political candidates. While we do not suggest that the use of slogans solely contributed to these women’s election success, our argument is that use of slogans does have a bearing on the electorate (depending on the appeals in them), and contestants need to be cognizant of this. Further, using slogans in political campaigns, like all other political ads, is more about positioning oneself as a candidate, which may be more about one’s image than a true reflection of the real self (Sullivan, 1998).

Based on our findings, and in line with the theory of gender issue ownership, one implication from this study is for female contestants to study their contexts when it comes to political campaign slogans. Some cultures might have particular stereotypes that might to a large extent dictate the kind of slogans that will be successful (in this case the ones that appealed to African feminine qualities). However, as slogans that focused on leadership qualities demonstrate, it might be possible for female candidates to go against the grain by using campaign slogans that question deeply-held beliefs (such as patriarchal tendencies).

A point to note is that of the 22 women leaders under study, three of them (all MPs) were seeking re-election. Bomet East and Kajiado East MPs had slogans ‘*Rudisha Mama Bungeni*’ (or ‘Take Mama back to Parliament’) and ‘*Niliahidi...Nimetenda...Nitazidi*’ (or ‘I promised...I delivered...I will do more’) respectively. The Suba East MP had ‘*geza geza*’ (reference to her ‘half Luo, half Suba’ origin) and which had become her political identity. Other contestants like the Kitui Governor had once contested for presidency and lost (in 1997). Generally, the argument is that the use of slogans was a strategic move, and if indicating their political experience (more than their motherly qualities, for example) would help them win, then this would be adopted. The contrary would also be true, as was the case for Kitui Governor whose slogan was ‘Mama Sasa!’ (‘It’s Mama’s time!’). This is also the reason that contestants would use a slogan with a mix of qualities (such as on motherhood and leadership) or even expressing the slogan in local dialects. The aim was not just to reach the masses, but to win them over.

As this study has focused on slogans and online platforms used by women contestants, future studies could examine related areas, such as slogans by those women who contested and lost. Other studies could also take the study further and include both qualitative and quantitative data.

Declarations

**Author contribution statement**

Harry Kipkemoi Bett: Conceived and designed the experiments; Performed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Wrote the paper.

Magdalene Adhiambo Ngala-Dimba: Performed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data.

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**Data availability statement**

Data included in article/appendix.

**Declaration of interests statement**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

**Additional information**

No additional information is available for this paper.

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