ABSTRACT

A common understanding people have when studying the relationship between media and politics is that greater involvement of women in politics would lead to greater sensitisation 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 research 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? What is the role played by media in driving women towards gender-issues? Whether the gender-issue affinity plays a vital role in involving women in politics?
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. Theoretical perspectives and ideological orientation indicate that there are many core issues that are of concern to women. The representational theory of gender is limited in terms of how audience understands and uses the ‘gendered’ messages with what consequences. While clearly acknowledging that institutional and structural factors play a critical role, this study underscores the need to engage women with media to make gender-issues salient.

A quantitative approach (a survey design), using snowball sampling technique, was adopted for the research. A questionnaire was distributed to 1,108 women respondents who were exposed to various kinds of media, in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India. The survey was done from October 15- November 17, 2013.

This study finds that to increase gender-issue affinity, we need to focus on improving the news media use, political news interests and the level of importance women give to media. This study has found evidence that news media influences the non-conventional political activity of women from the perspective of gender-issue affinity. In order to involve women in politics, they must be oriented towards gender-issues or issues that affect them.