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Media Portrayal of Women in Positions of Influence: An Analysis of Italian Media Outlets

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Abstract

This work examines the portrayal of Italian women in positions of influence by female journalists, filling a critical gap in media studies. Despite extensive research on gender bias and portrayal in the media, there is little research on how Italian women journalists portray other women in positions of influence. Using a qualitative content analysis of 187 articles from five major Italian newspapers - Il Corriere della Sera, Il Manifesto, La Repubblica and Il Fatto Quotidiano - this study examines how these journalists discuss and characterise the actions, achievements, attributes, appearance and private lives of prominent women. The findings show a propensity to minimize professional achievements in favor of traditionally feminine characteristics, physical attractiveness, personal and private lives. This portrayal not only perpetuates gender stereotypes but also draws attention to the ongoing obstacles faced by women in Italian media. Using theories on symbolic violence, gender equity, and post-feminism this study adds to a better understanding of gender dynamics in the Italian media and emphasizes the significance of a more equitable and diversified representation of women in positions of power.

Abstract (German)

Diese Arbeit untersucht die Darstellung italienischer Frauen in einflussreichen Positionen durch weibliche Journalisten und füllt eine kritische Lücke in der Medienforschung. Trotz umfangreicher Forschung zu Geschlechterverzerrungen und Repräsentationen in den Medien gibt es wenig Forschung darüber, wie italienische Journalistinnen andere Frauen in einflussreichen Positionen darstellen. Anhand einer qualitativen Inhaltsanalyse von 187 Artikeln aus fünf großen italienischen Zeitungen - Il Corriere della Sera, Il Manifesto, La Repubblica und Il Fatto Quotidiano - untersucht diese Studie, wie diese Journalisten die Handlungen, Leistungen, Attribute, Aussehen und Privatleben prominenter Frauen. Die Ergebnisse deuten auf eine Neigung hin, berufliche Leistungen zugunsten traditioneller weiblicher Merkmale, körperlicher Schönheit und persönlicher Leben herunterzuspielen. Diese Darstellung verstärkt nicht nur die Geschlechterstereotype, sondern lenkt auch die Aufmerksamkeit auf die anhaltenden Hindernisse, denen sich Frauen in den italienischen Medien gegenübersehen. Diese Studie trägt zu einem besseren Verständnis der Geschlechterdynamik in den italienischen Medien bei und betont die Bedeutung einer gerechteren und diversifizierten Repräsentation von Frauen in Machtpositionen durch die Verwendung von Theorien über symbolische Gewalt, Geschlechtergerechtigkeit und Post-Feminismus.

Introduction

The representation of women in the media has long been the subject of scientific research, particularly as regards how such representations influence social perceptions and reinforce gender norms. The media's portrayal of women in Italy, a nation with a convoluted socio-political terrain and a rich cultural past, is noteworthy and ambiguous, particularly when it comes to influential women. This thesis looks at how influential Italian women are described and discussed by other Italian women journalists in an effort to identify larger trends of gender prejudice and stereotypes in the media.

A significant void in the body of previous research served as the impetus for this study's objectives. Studies that particularly examine the viewpoints and narratives of Italian women journalists in relation to prominent women are scarce, despite the abundance of writing on the depiction of women in the media, gender bias in journalism, and the portrayal of female public figures. This disparity is especially noteworthy in light of Italy's unique socio-political setting and the media's pivotal role in influencing public opinion.

To fill this gap, this thesis asks the following research questions: How do Italian women journalists portray and discuss other Italian women in positions of influence in the articles they write? Specifically, how do these female journalists portray the actions, achievements and attributes of these women? And to what extent do they focus on personal characteristics, relationships or physical appearance?

To answer these questions, a qualitative content analysis was conducted on 187 articles from five major Italian newspapers: Il Corriere della Sera, Il Manifesto, La Repubblica and Il Fatto Quotidiano. The analysis's findings indicated a number of significant patterns. First off, noteworthy coverage of powerful women's professional accomplishments is rarely given, except in exceptional cases like Giorgia Meloni's electoral triumph. Second, while traits like leadership and brilliance have not received as much attention as they should, traditionally feminine qualities like empathy and compassion have. Third, a large amount of the coverage was on the outward appearance, with

reporters frequently making remarks about attire, haircuts, and attractiveness. Last but not least, discussions about personal lives and relationships have frequently perpetuated traditional gender roles by portraying women as partners or mothers rather than as fully qualified workers.

These results imply that, even when female journalists cover powerful women, their stories frequently mirror and reinforce gender preconceptions that restrict the place of women in the public arena. Through the use of symbolic violence, post-feminism, and gender justice, this thesis expands upon our knowledge of the obstacles that women encounter in the Italian media environment.

Literature review

This study examines the complex relationships that exist among Italian journalists, the representation of strong women in media, and the ways in which these factors impact public opinion. In order to do this, the study makes use of a large body of literature that seeks to elucidate the subtleties around gender bias, media representation, and the ensuing impact that a woman's physical appearance has on her legitimacy as a public leader.

This study's theoretical framework is derived from a review of previous ideas and academic publications that address gender bias, media portrayals of women in leadership roles, and public opinion of these topics. This theoretical framework is supported by important works such as Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence, which draws attention to the minute but important ways that gender relations are portrayed in media narratives (Ragnedda & Budd, 2015Additionally, by shedding attention on the intricate balancing act between objectification and empowerment, Rosalind Gill's post-feminist viewpoints help us comprehend the modern shifts in how women are portrayed in a more nuanced way (Gill, 2019). (Fraser, 2007).

By integrating these theoretical perspectives, this study aspires to shed light on the complex dynamics that shape media images of powerful women in Italy, with a focus on the role of female journalists, by integrating different theoretical approaches.

Gender Bias in Italian Media

Hallin and Mancini (2004) and Brüggeman (2014) categorize the Italian media landscape within the polarized pluralist framework. This particular model is distinguished by a limited degree of market inclusivity, both with regard to the quantity of newspapers sold and the diversity of their readership. The degree of inclusivity of the media market reflects, to some extent, the level of gender equality achieved in the country's media scene. Research by Hallin and Mancini (2004), supported by Brüggeman (2014), indicates that Italy could do better in this area. Furthermore, this gender disparity is also evident in the representation of subjects in news coverage, underscoring the depth of this gap. Although Italy may not be among the nations with the worst gender equality in the media (GMMP, 2020), the gender disparity that is emphasized in the Italian press and media appears to be in violation of both national legislation and journalistic standards (Macharia, 2020). Furthermore, language and gender discrimination are particularly important issues because of the gendered structure of the Italian language (Leonelli, 2011). It's important to remember that this is a global issue that affects many nations and languages—not just those that have grammatical gender.

Scholars like Belluati (2020) and Kuipers (2017) have brought attention to the persistent issues that Italian media portrays women politicians as having, including their underrepresentation and distortion. These issues skew the portrayal of women in leadership roles by supporting the maintenance of harmful gender stereotypes. Building on these findings, this study aims to provide a thorough grasp of the consequences and expressions of gender bias in Italian media.

Using Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence, Ragnedda & Budd (2015) examine how gender inequality is portrayed in Italian media, especially on television and in news reports. In comparison to other European nations, they accentuate the limited social roles and status of women, worsening already-existing gender inequities. Media representations of symbolic violence uphold prevailing cultural standards of femininity and masculinity, restricting the participation of women and fostering stereotypes. This study exposes the ways in which the Italian media misrepresents women,

limiting their social roles and perpetuating gender inequality, which is especially noticeable in domains such as politics. The persistent dominance of male standards in Italian society is facilitated by these skewed portrayals. (Ragnedda, Budd, 2015).

The 'Velina' phenomena in Italian culture is critically examined by Hipkins (2011), who also examines the phenomenon's significance in conversations about gender, politics, and the media. As a TV showgirl, "Velina" personifies a beauty myth that links attractiveness in women to ideas of stupidity and sexual accessibility. Women are marginalized in public areas as a result of faulty visual representations that are influenced by this objectification.

Belluati (2018) employs Nancy Fraser's approach in her historical research of the relationship between gender, politics, and communication in Italy. According to the report, attaining gender equity necessitates a three-pronged strategy that includes cultural acknowledgment, economic redistribution, and political representation. This viewpoint acts as a roadmap for understanding the intricate dynamics of powerful women's media representations and how they affect public opinion.

The annual report of the World Economic Forum states that the gender disparity in health and education is practically eliminated. Early in 2021, gender parity in education surpassed 95% worldwide, with full equality attained in 37 countries (Gender Gap Report, 2020). Nevertheless, women are still underrepresented in positions of leadership in academia, even in nations like Italy where girls have been surpassing boys in the classroom for 20 years. The gender gap in intellectual professions is still present; just four out of 84 institutions have female rectors, and only 25% of full professors are women. Though gender equality is widely acknowledged in theory, discriminators and victims alike blame the persistence of these inequities on the difficulty of women juggling the demands of a successful profession with their household responsibilities. In order to attain gender equality in intellectual professions, a thorough reevaluation of social roles and the division of labor within the family is necessary, as highlighted by a recent European Union report on the participation of women in academia. (Saccà, 2021).

Today's audiences, from high school students to professionals, can engage in discussions about gender stereotypes in mass media thanks to a plethora of materials, including videos. A film that was shown at the Fa-rete Gender Health conference, for example, invites viewers to critically consider how gender is portrayed in the media, especially on television, which is the preferred medium for Italians, including women (Zanardo, 2011). This film challenges researchers and psychologists to think about the significant impact that popular culture has on how people develop their identities, how society imagines itself, and how people feel about their bodies. It also makes us consider how deeply ingrained cultural and societal standards limit the potential of young men and women by sustaining gender stereotypes. The narrow, binary understanding of gender places restrictions on the wide range of human traits and inclinations, strengthening social norms (Scott, 1998).

Since television is the most widely used medium, it has a big impact on how society views gender. The portrayal of women in the media has long been neglected; this was evident from the fact that it was not until the World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 that it attracted substantial attention (Scott, 1998). In Italy, television perpetuates outdated ideas about femininity and masculinity by reflecting and reinforcing old gender stereotypes. Television imagery frequently presents idealized representations that deviate from reality, failing to convey the complexity of modern gender identities (Biemmi & Chiappelli, 2013).

The ground-breaking 2009 documentary "Il corpo delle donne" by Lorella Zanardo exposes the objectification and distortions of women's depiction in Italian television and provides a harsh critique of the mainstream media's role in it. Zanardo's art challenges the popular myth of the "beautiful but unintelligent woman," appreciated primarily for her physical attributes, and emphasizes the urgent need to redefine femininity beyond appearances. By bringing attention to the negative consequences of living up to unattainable beauty standards, Zanardo starts a conversation on how media portrayals affect how each person views themselves and makes the case for a more diverse and powerful media landscape (Zanardo, 2011).

Women as public figures in Italy

The way women are portrayed in Italian news media is a multifaceted and constantly evolving phenomenon that incorporates historical, cultural, and contemporary elements. Levonian's (2014) examination of the discursive strategies used by female political leaders illuminates the difficulties associated with establishing a public persona in a setting where the media rules. Through her writings and encounters with these individuals, Levonian illustrates how leaders like as Laura Boldrini and Emma Bonino manage gendered expectations and position themselves as role models for social change.

The impact of social media influencers like Chiara Ferragni and Benedetta Rossi on gendered narratives in the public domain is examined in Carrieri's (2022) study on female subjectivity. Carrieri illustrates how post-feminist ideas have influenced how women are portrayed in the modern day by looking at the models of femininity these influencers present. These superstars are the personifications of freedom, liberation, and self-realization; nevertheless, by commercializing emancipation, they produce a confusing picture of female subjectivity.

Scarparo (2004) and Strocchia (1997) present historical viewpoints that shed light on the protracted battle for women's visibility and influence in Italian society. Scarparo highlights the historical foundations of modern gender dynamics through her investigation of feminist thinkers' attempts to establish a platform for women's voices in public. Similar to this, Strocchia's analysis of women's positions in Italian religious culture emphasizes the intricate historical interactions between gender, power, and spirituality.

Contemporary Italy is characterised by rapid social, economic and cultural transformations, further accelerated by global phenomena such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Roberti, 2022). Marinelli's (2011) analysis of sociability practices in the digital era underlines the blurring of boundaries between online and offline spaces, redefining the way in which individuals interact and

construct their identities. In this context, media representations play a central role in shaping perceptions of gender and power, as pointed out by Buonanno (2014).

Roberti (2022) and Belluati (2020) shed light on the challenges faced by women in positions of influence, particularly in navigating media control and gender expectations. Despite advancements in gender equality, women continue to encounter reductive narratives that focus on personal attributes rather than professional achievements. This perpetuation of stereotypes undermines women's agency and reinforces traditional gender norms, posing significant barriers to their full participation in public life.

Studies exposing the gendered biases ingrained in media coverage and language discourse have highlighted the connection of politics and media representation as a recurrent subject in the literature (Carlin & Winfrey, 2009; Basile, 2010; Pescia, 2010; Sensales, Areni, & Dal Secco, 2016b). Inequitable naming practices and biased media coverage are commonplace for female politicians, which is indicative of larger societal trends toward gender bias and inequality.

Levonian's (2014) study on women political leaders in Italy offers valuable insights into the discursive strategies employed by women to construct their public identities. By analysing media interviews and articles, Levonian identifies themes of firmness, courage, and empathy in their self-presentations. These strategies aim to position women leaders as agents of change, challenging traditional gender norms and expectations in the public sphere.

Women's Depiction by Female Figures in Italian Media

The representation of women by other women in the Italian media is a dynamic and multifaceted phenomenon shaped by power dynamics, social norms and individual experiences. Utley (2016) challenges stereotypes about "other women" in romantic relationships, shedding light on their personal empowerment strategies. Daileader (2007) explores the multiplicity of women's experiences and the pursuit of unification in feminist theory, emphasizing the intricacies of women's interpersonal

connections. Henriksen (2014) investigates the idea of "otherness" in society by looking at women's stories of being extremely sensitive and how different they see recognition from society. In her analysis of how "otherness" is discursively constructed in relation to male infidelity, Burns (1999) makes the case that the act of "othering" women upholds male privilege. All of these studies highlight how important it is to have a complex grasp of how women describe and view one another.

The public's impressions of female individuals, especially celebrities and public officials, are frequently greatly influenced by female journalists and TV hosts. According to Dunn (1985), well-known women are usually portrayed as fearless trailblazers who defy accepted societal conventions and serve as an inspiration to others. But Hegstrom's (2002) study on gendered metaphors for familiar people exposes underlying prejudices: women are frequently characterized as upbeat, reliant, and appealing, while men are portrayed as robust and solid. Similar to this, Evans and Riley (2013) investigate how, in a postfeminist society, female superstars are commodified, upholding unattainable beauty standards and the notion that women need to constantly improve their bodies in order to succeed.

Media coverage and reviews are another area where gender biases are evident; female journalists have been known to show a preference for male musicians (Armstrong, 2004). According to Jansen et al. (2008), this prejudice may affect the length and calibre of evaluations as well as how female artists are portrayed in the media. Furthermore, feminist literary criticism plays a crucial role in upending conventional narratives and elevating the status of women's voices in literature, as discussed by Jacobus (1979).

The way other women portray themselves in the Italian media is a reflection of larger cultural views and power structures. It is an opportunity for female journalists to dispel preconceptions and advance diverse portrayals of powerful women. It is possible for women in the media to contribute to a more authoritative and equal representation of women in Italian society by critically analysing the language, pictures, and narratives used to describe female figures.

Gap

After an extensive review, it's evident that a significant research gap exists in the central focus of this thesis, which is the representation of Italian women in influential roles by female journalists. While previous studies have delved into related topics such as women's representation in media (Scott, 1998; Ross, 2014), gender biases in journalism (Armstrong, 2004; Jansen et al., 2008), and the depiction of female public figures (Strocchia, 1997; Scarparo, 2004; Belluati, 2020; Carrieri, 2022; Roberti 2022), there's a noticeable lack of research that specifically addresses the perspectives and narratives of Italian female journalists and regarding influential women. The literature reviewed provides valuable information on broader issues concerning women's representation and gender dynamics in media discourse. However, the absence of studies that explicitly focus on women journalists' views about influential Italian women leaves a significant gap in our understanding of how these women are represented and discussed within the ecosystem media.

Current research has explored various aspects of media representation, including the representation of women in politics (Levonian, 2014), the entertainment industry and social media (Carrieri, 2022). While these studies illuminate broader patterns and trends in media coverage, they do not specifically address the role of women journalists and shaping narratives about women in influential positions.

Furthermore, the studies reviewed often focus on Western contexts or provide a general overview of gender dynamics in the media (Brüggeman, 2014), rather than delving into the nuances of Italian media culture and its specific challenges and opportunities for women. Given Italy's distinct socio-political setting and the importance of television as a medium, it is essential to comprehend the perspectives of prominent Italian women and female journalists in order to thoroughly examine how women in positions of power are portrayed in the media.

In conclusion, women's portrayal in the media in Italy is a complicated and multidimensional topic that is impacted by historical legacies, current challenges, constantly and rapidly evolving discourses concerning power and gender. Despite the progress made in promoting gender equality, prejudices and disparities that limit women's visibility and influence in the public sphere remain. In order to overcome these obstacles, people must come together to fight stereotypes, support and advocate for more inclusive portrayals, and elevate the status of women so they may establish their presence and their ability to participate in all spheres of society.

Research questions

The representation of women in the media has been a long-standing subject of academic exploration, gaining particular relevance in examining individuals in influential roles. This study focuses on Italy, a nation with a rich cultural history and an intricate socio-political landscape. Given the significant impact of media representation on social perceptions, a global understanding of how women in influential positions are portrayed by other influential women becomes imperative to unravel broader patterns of gender bias and stereotypes. The following research questions are prompted by this necessity:

Research Question 1: In what ways do Italian women journalists portray and discuss other Italian women in positions of influence in written articles?

Sub-Research Question 1.1: How do Italian women journalists depict and discuss the actions, achievements, and attributes of other Italian women in positions of influence in their written articles?

Sub-Research Question 1.2: To what extent do Italian women journalists and focus on personal characteristics, relationships, or physical appearances of other Italian women in positions of influence in their written articles?

The goal of this study is to shed light on the many ways that well-known women are discussed and portrayed in Italian media by female journalists. The objective is to enhance our comprehension of gender dynamics in the Italian media landscape by identifying noteworthy patterns and emerging trends in media conversations about women using a textual representation analysis.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative content analysis approach to investigate how women journalists describe influential women in Italy. The data for this study are collected from written articles by women journalists discussing other women in influential positions. A purposive sampling strategy is employed to select a diverse range of articles, ensuring representation across different news outlets and topics.

Thematic coding techniques are employed to analyze the gathered data. Initially, the data are examined and coded to identify recurring themes, topics and patterns related to the representation of influential women. This process involves systematically identifying and categorizing segments of text based on predefined codes derived from the research questions. This method involves several steps, including open coding, axial coding and selective coding. In open coding, information is divided into distinct units and initial codes are assigned to represent the main ideas of each unit. Axial coding, on the other hand, involves identifying relationships between codes and their organization into more comprehensive themes or categories. Selective coding includes refinement and synthesis of the most significant themes to develop general analytical insights.

In the qualitative content analysis of articles, ethical concerns are given priority as they support the credibility and reliability of research. It is essential to respect copyright and intellectual property laws, following the appropriate citation protocols meticulously to avoid plagiarism. It is essential to safeguard the privacy of authors, by treating personal information with care and identifying data. Transparency on possible conflicts of interest is crucial during the analysis. Maintaining integrity ensures accurate presentation of results and avoids providing false information

or selective citations. It is also important to take account of cultural variations and different points of view.

It is critical to recognise the potential limitations of the methodology, such as the subjective nature of qualitative analysis and the possibility of bias by researchers. Moreover, it's possible that the findings are only applicable within the particular parameters of the research. Through careful data collection and analysis, this study aims to provide valuable information on the representation of influential women in the Italian media landscape, contributing to a deeper understanding of gender dynamics and representation.

Sample Selection

Online Newspapers

For the analysis, a series of articles from important online newspapers in Italy will be examined, ensuring a complete representation through various publications and time contexts (Saccà, 2021). The official roster of the national Italian online newspapers, as published by the Ads website, will serve as the basis for the first selection (Ads, 2023). In particular, the statistical information provided by Audipress will guide the identification of the most read newspapers, including:

1. Il Corriere della Sera;

2. Il Fatto Quotidiano;

3. Il Giornale;

4. Il Manifesto;

5. La Repubblica;

Time Period

The period from 2013 to 2023 was chosen for its importance in capturing Italy's journey towards gender equality, as well as for benchmarking with other countries in southern Europe, namely

Portugal, Slovenia, Cyprus, Malta, Spain, Croatia, and Greece; Table 1. (IDEM Lab elaboration, EIGE 2023).

Table 1. Progression of the EIGE (Gender Equality Index) Over the Last 10 Years (2013-2023)

| DIMENSIONE	ITALIA 2023 vs. 2013	SUD EUROPA 2023 vs. 2013
Totale	14,9	12,3
Lavoro	3,7	4,0
Denaro	1,4	1,1
Conoscenza	7,0	6,6
Tempo	12,3	13,5
Potere	37,5	29,8
Salute	2,9	2,3

This period includes crucial political events, including seven successive governments and the historic election of the first woman Prime Minister of Italy, Giorgia Meloni, on October 13, 2022, contributing to a dynamic socio-political landscape. When the Italian gender equality index (EIGE) is examined over this time frame, significant advancements have been made, particularly in the power industry, where scores have risen substantially; Table 2. (EIGE European Institute for Gender Equality, 2024).

Table 2. EIGE. Gender Equality Index / Italy / 2013 – 2023

FIGE, Gender Equality Index / Italy / 2013

	Index		Work		Money		Knowledge
✓		✓		✓		✓	
	Time		Power		Health		
✓		✓		✓			
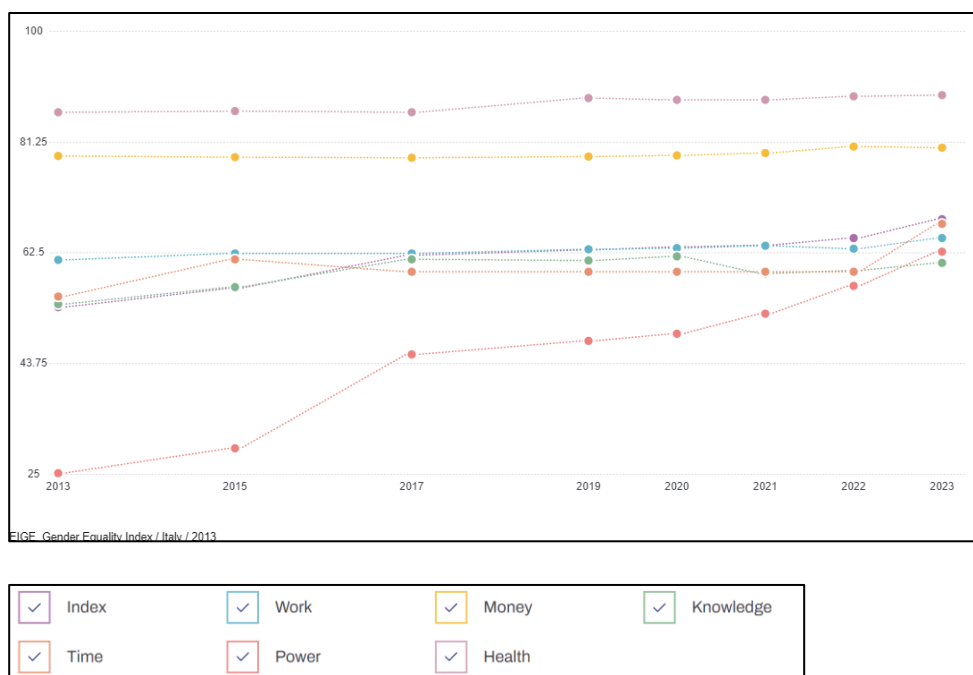
This progress aligns with Italy's efforts to close the gender gap, evident in the significant decrease in the rate of gender unemployment observed from 2013 to 2023. A phenomena known as "feminism" emerged in 2020, partially as a result of the COVID-19 epidemic and partly because a huge number of women had either ceased looking for work or quit the labor. Compared to 2021, in 2022 the inactivity rate, which has registered a strong increase for both sexes, returning to the post-crisis levels of 2012, increased by almost 2 percentage points for women; Table 3. (ISTAT, 2023).

Table 3. Gender unemployment rate in Italy

Fonte: ISTAT
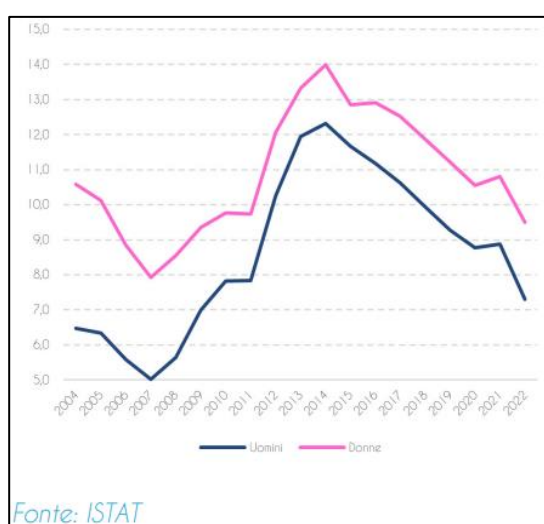
Though Italy is currently the second-largest EU member state, there are still certain difficulties, particularly in the job sector. Despite these challenges, Italy's trajectory suggests a promising trend towards narrowing the gender gap and catching up with other Member States in terms of gender equality. The selected timeframe provides a solid set of data to evaluate the Italian gender equality landscape and its evolution over the past ten years (EIGE, 2023; Osservatorio Job Pricing, 2023).

Methods

Coding and Analysis

To systematically analyse the representation of Italian women in positions of influence, a qualitative content analysis was carried out. To guide the coding process, a code book was developed which ensured a consistent and rigorous examination of textual data. Four primary codes have been identified to capture the various dimensions of media representation: Achievements and Actions, Attributes and Qualities, Focus on Physical Appearance, Focus on Personal Life and Relationships.

The Achievements and Actions code has been used to classify all mentions of significant professional achievements or actions undertaken by women, reflecting their contributions and influence in their fields. The Attributes and Qualities code has been used to capture discussions of personal traits or characteristics, such as leadership style or resilience, often related to their professional roles. The Focus on Physical Appearance code was applied to cases where women's physical appearance was discussed, highlighting how visual elements were framed by the media. The Focus on Personal Life and Relationships code identifies references to women's personal lives, including family dynamics and relationships, providing insight into how personal aspects have been intertwined with their professional identities.

The complete data set was subjected to these codes in a methodical manner, enabling a detailed examination of the recurrent themes and patterns in the portrayal of powerful women in Italian media.

Codebook structure

Code Name	Definition	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria	Example
Achievements and Actions	This code captures any mention or discussion of the actions, achievements or professional accomplishments of Italian women in positions of influence.	- Any reference to professional achievements, such as awards, milestones, leadership in significant projects, or notable contributions to their field. - Discussions of decisions or actions taken by these women in their professional roles. - Mentions of their strategies, innovations, or successes in overcoming challenges.	- General discussions about the women's personal lives or relationships. - Non-specific mentions of their influence without details of their achievements or actions.	"Per la prima volta una donna è eletta alla guida dell'università di Messina." Manuela Modica, Il Fatto Quotidiano 28.11.2023 "Eva ha una laurea in architettura messa da parte per diventare giornalista." Francesca Basso, Il Corriere della Sera 10.12.2022
Attributes and Qualities	This code concerns the discussion of personal qualities, traits or attributes of Italian women in positions of influence.	- Any mention of personal qualities such as leadership style, intelligence, creativity, resilience, or other character traits. - Positive or negative assessments of their capabilities.	Comments solely focused on physical appearance or relationships unless directly linked to their professional role.	'Una grana che si chiama Martà Dassù, potente signora direttore […] oltre ad essere una donna competente.' Sara Nicoli, Il Fatto Quotidiano 23.04.2014 'Era una donna testarda e curiosa, sempre in

		- Discussion of how these attributes impact their professional roles or public perception.		movimento, colta senza essere erudita.' Ritanna Armeni, Il Manifesto 02.01.2021
Focus on Physical Appearance	This code identifies cases where the physical appearance of women in positions of influence is discussed.	- Descriptions or evaluations of the woman's physical appearance, including clothing, beauty, age, or body shape. - Comments on appearance that are not linked to any broader discussion of her professional role or public image.	Any mention of appearance that could be interpreted as contributing to the public perception of her professional role or influence.	'La Schlein di lotta si presenta in piazza con il parka e talvolta con il pugno chiuso. La Schlein televisiva arriva in blazer e camicia spesso fantasia. […] Punto fisso del suo abbigliamento, le sneakers bianche e i jeans, che lei porta senza cintura. […] dai jeans un po' larghini. […] blazer glicine, jeans e sneaker.' Maria Teresa Meli, Il Corriere della Sera 23.03.2023 'Berretto di jeans con visiera e veletta di Dior, firmati dal direttore creativo della maison Maria Grazia Chiuri (dalla giovane fiorettista ribattezzata zia Scialla)' Maria Luisa Agnese, Il Corriere della Sera 12.03.2018

| Focus on Personal Life and Relationships | This code captures any discussion related to the personal life, family or relationships of women in positions of influence. | - Mentions of marital status, children, or other family-related details.
- References to how their personal relationships influence or intersect with their professional lives.
- Discussions about balancing personal and professional roles. | References to professional relationships or networking unless intertwined with their personal life. | 'Maria Pia Pizzolante è salita agli onori delle cronache perché era l'unica delle aspiranti componenti della Direzione che invece di inseguire un posto inseguiva un bambino […] Era suo figlio Mattia, che ha fatto avanti e indietro tra il palco e la sala stampa senza fermarsi mai. Ah no, forse bisogna precisare, che, come ha raccontato lei agli amici per un po' è stato «composto». E fermo. Per ammissione della stessa madre «30 secondi». […] Lui giocava, lei lo gestiva tra il divertito, l'avvertito e l'adorante.'
Maria Teresa Meli, Il Corriere della Sera 13.03.2023

'[…] figlia di Gabriele Ferzetti e moglie di Pierfrancesco Favino.'
Anna Bandettini, La Repubblica 10.12.2023 |

Ethical considerations

In conducting this research on media portrayals of women in Italy, several ethical considerations have been carefully addressed. The project includes qualitative content analysis, which is based indirectly on information from human subjects through multimedia content. However, the research does not involve direct contact with vulnerable subjects such as children, people with disabilities or those who are unable to give full consent. The preservation of people's privacy and dignity when they are portrayed in the media is emphasized by ethical concerns in the project's design and implementation.

The goal of the analysis is to explore patterns without causing harm or perpetuating negative stereotypes, and responsible presentation of results will be a priority in order to avoid sensationalism. After doing research, ethical considerations extend to responsible dissemination of results, and ensuring accurate representation. Maintaining respondents' anonymity is essential to preventing unexpected outcomes and advancing the conversation around gender representation in the media.

Findings

The content analysis of 187 articles published by five important Italian newspapers (Ads, 2023) —Il Corriere della Sera, Il Giornale, Il Manifesto, La Repubblica, and Il Fatto Quotidiano— revealed some significant trends in the way Italian women journalists portray other women in influential positions. The articles were analysed and coded according to the default code, leading to the following observations:

1. Achievements and Actions

Contrary to expectations, the professional achievements and significant actions of powerful women have rarely been highlighted in articles. Only a few cases have been reported, especially on the occasion of exceptional events such as the victory of Giorgia Meloni in the Italian elections. This implies that, with the exception of prominent or noteworthy events, Italian women journalists do not

typically prioritize their subjects' career outcomes. This lack of emphasis on professional achievements could lead to an incomplete and inadequate representation of the role and impact of these women in their fields.

2. Attributes and Qualities

The analysis revealed a tendency for women journalists to focus on qualities traditionally associated with women, such as compassion and empathy, rather than on traits typically associated with men, such as strength, intelligence, leadership, or decision-making. This representation seems to balance the portrayal of professional success with personal virtues, it also runs the risk of perpetuating stereotypes that restrict women's perceptions of their skills to traits that are typically associated with femininity. The awareness of the entire spectrum of qualities that support Italian women's professional success may be diminished by this strict and selective emphasis.

3. Focus on Physical Appearance

An important area of attention for the articles under analysis was the physical appearance of women in positions of influence. Descriptions of the clothing worn, hairstyles and physical attractions were frequent, especially when these women were under the public's eyes. Journalists often focused on fashion choices during public appearances, framing them as an integral part of the professional image of women. In addition, journalists tended to scrutinized the physical attributes of their subjects, such as body shape, wrinkles and hair. This was particularly clear in pieces where attention was focused on the physical appearance of women, even when they play important roles, such as scientists or politicians. This persistent emphasis on the physical aspect draws attention to the gender lens that continues to dominate media representations of women, obscuring their identities and professional achievements.

4. Focus on Personal Life and Relationships

An additional recurring theme in the pieces was the intimate lives and interpersonal connections of powerful women. Female journalists often discussed their subjects in relation to their role as wives, mothers or partners, often emphasising their domestic responsibilities. This emphasis suggests that media representations of these women go beyond their professional achievements to include their private lives, which can reinforce traditional gender roles. For example, in some articles, political women have been described mainly as mothers, with detailed accounts of how they managed family responsibilities, such as raising children during meetings, rather than focusing on their professional actions or statements. The idea that women in influential positions are more characterized by their personal roles than by their professional contributions may arise from their focus on personal life above professional accomplishments.

The findings indicate that Italian female journalists' portrayals of influence women are nuanced and often problematic. Although there is occasional recognition of professional achievements, the dominant focus on traditionally feminine qualities, physical appearance and personal life reveals a persistent gender bias. Prejudice like this not only limits the range of representation of these women, but also reinforces stereotypes that can undermine their professional authority and public perception. This analysis highlights the need for a more balanced and complete representation of women in positions of influence in the Italian media.

Discussion

This purpose of this study was to fill the research gap regarding the representation of powerful women in the Italian landscape by Italian women journalists. The results indicate that, contrary to expectations that women journalists may challenge traditional gender narratives, representation of women often reinforces established gender norms. In particular, the analysis revealed that notable career accomplishments are rarely highlighted and that the focus is mainly on exceptional circumstances such as the election victory of Giorgia Meloni. This limited focus on professional

achievements suggests that even when women hit big milestones, their results may not receive the media attention they deserve, thus perpetuating a distorted representation of women in power.

Gender stereotypes are still prevalent because traditionally feminine traits like empathy and compassion are valued more highly than traits like leadership or intelligence. By prioritising these qualities, media narratives may inadvertently reinforce and perpetuate the idea that women's professional success is closely linked to their adherence to traditional female roles. In order to combat current gender biases, it is imperative that women are seen as strong, effective leaders, and this selective representation runs the danger of damaging that view.

The research questions that guided this study sought to explore how Italian women journalists portray influential women and to what extent these portraits focus on personal characteristics, relationships, or physical appearance. The findings clearly demonstrate that gendered narratives have a substantial impact on how powerful women are portrayed, with a particular emphasis on physical attributes and personal lives. The fact that physical appearance is a dominant and recurring theme, with detailed descriptions of clothing, hairstyles, and body features, suggests that female journalists are not free from social pressures that emphasize the physicality of women over their professional attributions. This focus on the aspect is in line with existing theories of gender representation, which contend that women are frequently evaluated more on their beauty than their accomplishments.

Similarly, the frequent discussion of personal life, particularly in relation to the role of mother or partner, highlights the continuing challenge of overcoming traditional gender roles. These pictures, which show powerful women through the prism of their personal relationships, support the notion that a woman's value is intimately connected to her home life, even in positions of authority. This outcome is critical because it reflects how deeply rooted gender norms and stereotypes may influence media narratives, even in cases where female journalists are involved.

The results of this study contribute to the larger discourse on gender representation in the media, providing specific insights into the role of women journalists in shaping narratives about

influential women. Previous research has shown that women's accomplishments are underrepresented and that their beauty and personal lives are overemphasized; nevertheless, this study shows that same trends also apply to Italian women. This reinforces the idea that social norms and gender bias are deeply rooted and impact media representations in different contexts and even among those who might challenge them.

Furthermore, the focus on the Italian context is a valuable addition to the literature, which is frequently dominated by research on western media or general overviews of gender dynamics. This study, which examines the unique socio-political environment of Italy, highlights the need for more localized research that takes into account the specific cultural and media dynamics at work. The conclusions suggest that women journalists in Italy can continue to operate in a media environment that support traditional gender roles, which may restrict the potential for more diverse and credible representations of women in the media.

Gender equality in Italy is significantly impacted by the media's continued gendered depictions of powerful women. The emphasis on looks and personal life along with the lack of focus on professional accomplishments may contribute to a public impression that minimizes women's contributions to society and perpetuates stereotypes that restrict them to traditional positions. This can therefore have a more significant effect on society, affecting how women are viewed and handled in a variety of contexts, such as politics, business, and the media itself.

It will take a lot of work to change this kind of narrative, and that work should begin in the media industry. In this process, women journalists in particular, have a key role to play. They can help dismantle the stereotypes that continue to shape public perceptions and create a more equitable media landscape by consciously shifting attention to more balanced and comprehensive portraits of influential women.

Conclusion

This study has limitations even if it offers valuable insights. The scope of the analysis was restricted to a certain set of newspapers and articles, which might have resulted in an incomplete portrayal of the diversity of media representations across Italian platforms and regions. Furthermore, the study focused just on written pieces, leaving out other media that would have provided alternative portrayals of powerful women.

In order to find out if comparable trends persist, future study might build on these findings by examining a wider range of media, including digital platforms, social media, and television. A deeper comprehension of the worldwide disparities in gender representation in the media and the factors underlying these variances may also be obtained through comparative studies conducted in various cultural contexts.

As a result, this study sheds light on the complex and frequently problematic ways in which Italian women journalists portray other women in positions of influence. The findings imply that, in spite of advances in gender equality, traditional gender norms continue to shape media narratives, with a persistent focus on physical appearance and personal life compared to professional achievement. In order to advance these trends is crucial to promote a more accurate and strong representation of women in the media, which is also essential to achieving gender equality in all sectors of society.

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