

**“Framing female leaders in Italian newspapers:  
A mixed-method study”**

Student Name: Giulia Bidassi

Student Number: 543931

Supervisor: dr. Joep Hofhuis

Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication  
Erasmus University Rotterdam

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## **Abstract**

The issue of gender nowadays constitutes one of the most critical strands of cultural studies that deal with deconstructing the dominant contemporary discourses disseminated by the media. Through the representation of gender conveyed by the mainstream media such as the newspapers, common sense tends to reproduce the existing social structure that, because hegemonically masculine, contributes to reinforcing social, cultural, and economic imbalances between men and women. Therefore, it is necessary to explore and analyze the currently dominant views that lay the foundations of public discourse that still appears stereotyped to achieve equal opportunities.

In particular, the analyses designed in the present thesis revolve around 6 Italian national newspapers. The final goal is to deeply investigate the perspectives that emerge from the articles when addressing female leaders commonly known by public opinion. Besides, the researcher aims at analyzing the socio-political context by testing the potential relationship between different narratives, linguistic and lexical choices and political leanings, the ratio of women on the editorial board, and the bylines' sex. This choice stems from the necessity to find patterns and propose solutions to improve the quality of public information and ultimately enhance women's representation and visibility.

**Keywords:** Women representation, Italian newspapers, gender inequality, female-leadership, gender framing

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*“In Italy, if you are a woman, you can die of language:  
it is a civil death, but it does not hurt any less.*

***Words make women disappear from public spaces, professions, debates, and the news.***  
*But women die of unfair words in everyday life too,  
where the prejudice that passes through language kills our chance of being fully ourselves.*

*For every difference in rights that women suffer because of male supremacy,  
there is a verbal framework that supports and justifies it.*

*It happens every time they refuse to call us “avvocata” instead of “avvocato,”  
“sindaca” instead of “sindaco” or “architetta” instead of “architetto”.*

*It happens when we do a good job, but they ask us first if we have kids. And whose wives we are.*

*It happens when they call us by our first name as if we were friends.*

*It happens today when they ask us to wear jeans rather than a skirt because it is more appropriate,  
and tomorrow when they want we to be more graceful and sweet.*

*It happens just because we are women. Imagine when we are leaders!”*

*(Michela Murgia, excerpt from “Stai zitta!”)*

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## ***1. Introduction***

There are two strategic objectives indicated in 1995 by the World Conference on Women and still considered valid today: to increase the participation and access of professionals to the expression and coverage of decision-making positions, and to promote a balanced and non-stereotyped representation of women in and through the media. After 25 years, however, the complex question that revolves around the concept of women's empowerment and emancipation is still current in Western countries, where digitization plays a double unsolved role.

According to the study conducted by the OECD (2018), it emerges that the recent digital transformations provide women with greater access to knowledge and the labor market on the one hand, but exacerbate the gender gap, which systematically leads to under and false representation on the other. In this sense, studies on sexual identity have found their own space on the political and media agenda, boasting a considerable attractive power. Thus, issues concerning flexibility policies, female representation, women's rights, and equal opportunities between genders are increasingly becoming the real guiding criteria for national and international policies. To confirm this, a series of studies investigating the nature of political regimes (Just Governance Group, 2017; EIGE, 2020) is inserting these elements within the standards necessary to be defined as democratic countries. As the results of the recent study conducted by EIGE (2020) show, for example, "the dominance of power is the main driver of the progress of gender equality in almost all Member States " (p. 21). This means that the more women in public leadership positions, the more it is possible to predict gender equality within the society of a national country. Since 2010, the European country that showed the least progress on gender equality within organizations is Italy, where women are still a long way from achieving gender equality in the workplace (34,2% of Italian employees are women, compared to 51,4% of men). Therefore, this is explained because of the low participation rate of women in leadership and decision-making positions that, according to the study conducted by Grant Thornton (2020), is just 28%.

Assuming that women's emancipation and presence in leadership is a gender issue (Geissel et al., 2016), a necessary step in the present work will certainly be that concerning the cultural studies: gender becomes an element of the definition of identity processes, as well as of the styles of fruition of the media message (Collins, 2011). In fact, the multidimensional nature of the media coverage oriented towards sexual identity concerning the analysis of the various leadership models is focal within the present work.

Keeping in mind the ability of the media to influence the perception of public opinion, it becomes necessary to know how they operate. For this reason, several theories (Buonanno, 2005; Ross & Carter, 2011) suggest that a successful "informative pluralism" is required to improve gender awareness and representation in the news media, through a systematic review of all the phases that make up the production routines, ranging from the introduction in the media agenda of more news featuring women to the involvement of more female journalists in the newsrooms to the encouragement of women presence on boards. In this regard, existing quantitative research such as the recent GGGR (2020) showed an undeniable underrepresentation of female subjects in the media on a global level, resulting from a partisan and androcentric perspective of reality where women are largely absent. In other words, the evolutionary process of the gender issue has slowed down in recent years if one considers that most of the European countries are classified as countries "in transition" or not yet arrived in a truly equal regime, when it comes to the female integration in contexts of power and responsibility within organizations (GGGR, 2020).

Moreover, as the global media monitoring report conducted by Macharia et al. (2015) warns, between 2010 and 2015, the rate of progress towards printed media gender parity has not changed much, and the country that seems to demonstrate the greatest gender inequality in Italy, where an overall decline in the presence of women in Italian news (from 21% in 2015 to 17.8% in 2017) is recorded (GGGR, 2020). Despite the massive information that existent quantitative research provides about gender representation in the Italian media, however, no qualitative study has yet explored how the Italian newspaper frames female leaders.

This leads to the first research question that is:

*RQ1: "How are Italian female leaders framed by the Italian newspapers?"*

Furthermore, several variables might be considered responsible for the (mis)representation of professional women in the news. First, as Lehman-Wilzig and Seletzky (2010) suggest, mass media such as newspapers are characterized by a common and shared frame proposed through a specific narrative. In this sense, the choices adopted when representing a topic or an issue respond to what the audiences expect to consume, and provide perspectives the readers identify with in terms of political values and beliefs. Moreover, besides the political orientation, another element that might be considered essential for producing news media routines concerns the editorial boards' composition.



According to Van der Meer et al. (2019), the gatekeeping function of newspapers leads editorial boards to determine media coverage, what events make it into the news, and how to frame them. Since the literature (Kanter, 1977; Shor et al., 2015) demonstrates that a higher presence of women within the decision-making arena ensures greater sensitivity towards gender issues, then, it is fundamental to investigate what the role of women within the newspaper editorial boards is, and whether and how their presence influences the development of the editorial line related to the representation of female leaders.

Finally, a variable that North's research (2014) identifies concerns the responsibilities of the individual journalists who write the articles and tell stories first-hand. Even though Shor et al. (2015) claim that "journalists' ability to make a substantial change and report equally on women and men remains limited" (pp. 977-978), it emerges that the writing style, linguistic choices, and the approach adopted when portraying women differs between journalists of different sex (North, 2014).

The following quantitative question is deemed necessary to understand the phenomenon as a whole, identify causes, and reflect on solutions:

*RQ2: "How is the framing related to the newspaper's political alignment, ratio of women on the board, and sex of the journalist?"*

## ***2. Theoretical framework***

### ***2.1. The gender system: the theories***

The present chapter will illustrate the concept of 'gender' and how its perception has evolved over time according to cultural hegemony. Furthermore, exploring the theories related to the gender system aims to show the stages that led the female gender to achieve its status quo. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the critical points concerning the problematic relationship between women and leadership and investigate how far the media are from representing female leaders equally nowadays. In this regard, if on the one hand awareness of gender myths in business and leadership can help counter the forces of social conservatism and restriction and promote more appropriate gender concepts in organizations (Geissel et al., 2016), on the other, according to Hanappi-Egger (2011), the question of gender is generally still reduced to the simplistic dualism of "being a man" or "being a woman", found in the theory of social role proposed by Eagly (1987).

First, the term gender system, which appears for the first time in 1975 in a scientific article by Rubin, indicates the behavioral processes through which society transforms sexual bodies and organizes the social division of tasks between women and men. Until the 1970s, within the sociological field, the writings dealing with the differences between men and women did not demonstrate awareness of the distinction between the notion of gender and that of sex, and this is proved by the fact that often these two terms were used interchangeably (Steiner, 2012). The rise of the debate related to the concept of gender questions for the first time widely accepted social paradigms such as the Parsons' sex role theory that associates males and females to instrumental and expressive roles respectively (1956), or the sexual division labor theory (White et al., 1977) by which men represent the "breadwinner" and specialize in market work, while women are perceived as the "housewife," specializing in domestic work.

If a certain idea of the separation between social and biological characteristics had been maturing since the previous century, the definitive arrangement of the concept of gender took place in the 1970s by feminist authors like Rubin, who presents it within the dichotomous sex-gender system (1975). Their primary purpose was to affirm that biological differences, whose existence remains indisputable as extensively described by Ngun et al. (2011), cannot be automatically assumed as a reason for existence and therefore as a justification for the social roles played by men (dominant) and women (subordinate); rather,

the attempt was to prove that different social positions occupied by men and women were the result of political and cultural operations and not the simple result of biological differences, as the hegemonic rhetoric aimed to normalize (Ngun et al., 2011).

One of the most important feminist currents of the Seventies, prominent both in academia and on the political scene, is defined as liberal feminism and is mainly proposed to abolish gender binarism, provide women with equal opportunities, and create infinite identities through the redefinition of social constructs (Bradley 1996). This creation process can be summarized in the set of values in a group, socially constructed and shared values, which are therefore assimilated and learned, and not innate. According to Butler (2002), the personality of the individual is wholly detached from its biological nature, configuring itself as the product of cultural and social paths, of influences received from socialization channels such as family, school, peer group, as well as from historical-economic elements and, finally, media. As it will be explained later, the awareness about how significantly powerful media is in shaping and constructing social identities prompts the researcher to investigate the kind of image media portray around the female leader figure.

As already mentioned, the proposed interpretation, which defines gender as a social construct, presents three major strands of thought that can be analyzed: biological determinism, the theory of natural difference, the socialization of gender (Hanappi-Egger, 2011). In particular, the biological determinism approach considers gender roles and the differences connected to them as biologically founded, is supported by those political movements linked to a more conservative vision and relies on the theoretical analyses of thinkers such as Goldberg and Livingstone (1974), known for their theory of patriarchy which essentially validates the biological male domination. However, over time, the idea of biological determinism has been re-evaluated from a political point of view, supporting those theories that conceive women better suited to fill roles in welfare domains, but not to decision-making, considered a male prerogative (Sandberg, 2018). As shown below, when depicting women, these paradigms are established and adopted by the media, then the representation is considered traditional.

The second approach, namely the theory of natural difference, is founded on the biological basis of sex. It thus presupposes the existence of innate and unmodifiable differences between men and women, neglecting the inexistence of anthropological or historical evidence, or the role of social interaction in the definition of human behavior (Giddens et al., 2014).

As a response to these first two theories, the theory of gender socialization is developed, a sociological approach that rejects the biological basis of gender differences, defining them as the result of social constructions (Carter, 2014). According to the literature (Cancedda, 2002; Steiner, 2012; North, 2014), the theory of gender socialization encompasses tendencies of radical feminism that aspire to abandon any form of distinction between sex and gender, with the purpose to produce an analysis of a not hetero-normed, fluid sexual identity, related to the individual only. As illustrated below, when media portray women by emphasizing their leadership characteristics rather than focusing on their gender, the communication is seen as progressive.

## ***2.2. Gender stereotypes: pervasiveness and internalization***

According to Serafin & Brollo (2012), different types of frames used to depict female leaders often translate into the public diffusion of gender stereotypes. For this reason, the present chapter will highlight how powerful stereotypes spread by the mass media may be in legitimizing gender differences, especially in terms of power, and in influencing the expectations of individuals based on belonging to a particular social group.

First, the term "stereotype" derives from the Greek "stereos" (hard, solid) and "typos" (impression), meaning "solid impression on one or more idea/theory," as described by Lippmann for the first time in 1922. According to the American writer (1922), indeed, stereotypes are considered as a natural consequence of social categorization processes and cause of automatic identification of a person as a member of a reference social group because of the evident sharing of characteristics considered socially significant such as religion, race, social status, cultural background and, indeed, gender. The activation of a stereotype, therefore, implicates an automatic and rigid generalization of the peculiar characteristics of the reference group to all individuals deemed to belong to that category, independently from the evaluation of the single case, thus becoming the result of a false deductive operation, as pointed out by Serafin and Brollo (2012).

Mainly, gender stereotypes are categorization mechanisms that individuals use to decode the representation of the feminine and masculine, mechanisms present in cultural and geographical realities that are also very different from each other (Hanappi-Egger, 2011). As Mahalingam and Jackson (2007) suggest, the descriptive procedures of "idealized models" of women and men are highly polarized, almost specular (2007, p.1012): what is man is not woman, and vice versa. Besides, the psycho-social literature of the last decades provides

evidence of a functioning dynamic of stereotypes that are more subtle than individuals are led to think. In this sense, in their research, Serafin and Brollo (2012) demonstrate that the implicitness of gender stereotypes consolidated through the everyday processes of socialization can unconsciously sabotage the rational egalitarian attitude of the individuals (women included) and led them to acquire prejudices. Therefore, exogenous variables and automatic mechanisms of endogenous nature, such as gendered expectations, can impact the way women are perceived and, consequently, represented (Ayman & Korabik, 2010).

Accordingly, as Serafin and Brollo (2012) argue, the process of social perception driven by a stereotype inevitably exaggerates the similarities within groups and exacerbates the differences between groups. In this regard, Eagly (1987) proposes the so-called *social role theory*, which claims that the allocation influences the role that each individual plays in their daily life to a specific gender and, therefore, the different social roles played by men and women are structured concerning the different beliefs and expectations that society has regarding the personality characteristics linked merely to their gender group. From these assumptions, as argued by many (Adcock, 2010; Hanappi-Egger, 2011), it follows that crucial preconception of the unique binary gender system has been constructed and conventionalized, defining women as more feminine and inclined towards roles of social care, and men as masculine and therefore predisposed to roles that allow self-affirmation and domination over others. Specifically, Eagly (1987) coins two terms known as "agency" and "communality", meaning the opposite dimensions addressed to men and women, respectively. Thus, if on the one hand, the agentic attributes refer to those qualities necessary to cover the multiple roles of extra-domestic, rewarded work, such as being assertive, controlling, ambitious, forceful, independent, self-sufficient, self-confident, and prone to act as a leader, on the other hand, the communal features include a kind, sympathetic, interpersonally sensitive, nurturant, and gentle approach (Eagly, 1987). Besides, Hanappi-Egger (2011) stresses that the latter traits ascribed to women are considered indispensable for coping with family responsibilities and housekeeping activities.

According to Brescoll (2016), gender inequalities as an expression of value structures, systems of meanings, economic and power relations represent a theme of primary importance in contemporary society in the scientific, institutional and political spheres. However, as Hanappi-Egger (2011) points out, the simplistic dualism merely referred to the gender classification, which was recognized as myth at first and has transformed into societal norms, meaning the "taken for granted knowledge" (p.8) to date, is particularly critical when it comes to deal with power relations and, therefore, organizations and leadership roles.

### ***2.3. The representation of female leaders in the media***

As explained in the previous chapter, women are traditionally considered not adapted to hold a leadership position. It follows that any context that (consciously or not) normalizes a distorted representation, becomes a means of propagating stereotypes, and Adcock (2010) blames the news media in the first place. According to the proponents of the *cultivation theory* conceptualized by Gerbner and Gross (1976), media representations persist to contribute to shaping reality and, therefore, reinforcing stereotypes instead of changing them. In this regard, several studies (Lämsä & Tiensuu, 2002; Collins, 2011) analyze how the media depict women, and the findings suggest that they are often portrayed as nonprofessionals, homemakers, mothers, and sexual gatekeepers, thus employing those traditional gender stereotypes which the *role congruity theory* (Eagly & Karau, 2002) refers to. Likewise, Azzalini (2020) stresses that mass media have a great responsibility in preserving the conceptions of the female gender based on the traditional theories that conceive them as subordinate to the men as well as dismantling them by building a new collective imagination that is more democratic, inclusive, and progressive.

As evidence, Macharia et al. (2015) point out that 76% of the spokespersons in the mass media of the 114 countries investigated by the GMMP are male, and only 24% are female. The report (2015) shows that women are framed as experts or spokesperson only 20% of the time in Italy. According to Azzalini's study (2020), Italian media reflect an androcentric, old-traditional reality where women are under and misrepresented.

Over the last decades, feminist media research's scholars such as Verge and Pastor (2017), following the paradigm of the cultivation theory, have been animated by the desire to investigate the extent to which cultural images and constructions impact patterns of inequality, domination, and oppression in a contemporary world that is increasingly influenced by the media. Particular attention has been paid to the language used by traditional media like newspapers that, according to Gaucher et al. (2011), represents a possible predictor of gender discrimination about social role theory (Eagly, 1987). While some scholars belonging to the feminist current like Sczesny et al. (2015) consider this form of analysis to be limited because it is based only on the representation of images rather than examining the deeper structures of the meaning of the transmitted representations, other sex roles studies (Collin, 2011; Verge & Pastor, 2017) that cover a broad amount of media content and look at a variety of gender role-related issues concludes that the manner how media depict women is crucial because woman identity is "dependent on an ongoing process

of linguistic practices by which people make sense of the world" (Lämsä & Tiensuu, 2002, p.366).

Advocating the belief that language and its discursive use are functional and action-oriented (Potter & Wetherell, 1998), Lämsä and Tiensuu (2002) conducted a discourse analysis investigating how Finnish major news media describe women. The research's outcomes suggest that the printed newspapers in Finland describe the status of women and men differently, depicting woman leaders as the representative of the feminine gender and men as neutral human beings (Lämsä & Tiensuu, 2002). Overall, female leaders were represented through three different discourses, categorized as follows: 'patriarchal discourse' which underscores the traditional subordination of women to masculinity, 'victim discourse' that, although publicly demands a change in the existing power relations between the genders, it justifies it and reinforces masculinity as a neutral norm, and 'professional discourse' that assesses women's competences and success regardless of their gender (Lämsä & Tiensuu, 2002).

### ***2.3.1. Traditional and progressive representations***

Speaking about the relationship between leadership and media, McNair (2004) elaborates a conception that follows the principles of the *agenda-setting theory* developed by Lippmann (1922), according to which the tools of mass communication forcefully enter individuals' everyday life, dictating new rules in the management of messages and the creation of these themselves. Nowadays, besides overseeing the exclusion or the coverage of specific news in their agenda, the media follow a more structured market logic that leads them to make news more attractive in the eyes of the public opinion, by employing carefully designed formulas and adopting impactful linguistic and lexical choices (Watson, 2021).

Regarding the social context in which this research is embedded, when media tell stories about female leadership, they tend to rebrand leaders' figures often by resorting to shared stereotyped narratives to produce new myths and draw the media attention. An example of how media have successfully rebranded female leadership concerns the case of Margaret Thatcher, first Britain's woman premier elected in 1979 (Elliott & Stead, 2017). According to Jones (2016), her figure was periodically portrayed through a stereotypical framing which tended to underscore her gender, emphasize her wife-, and mother-status, and invade her domestic sphere, therefore focusing on her gender role rather than on her profession (Jones, 2016). Consistently, as the study conducted by Vandenberghe (2019) on

European new media shows, female leaders' feminine aspects and communal features are emphasized quantitatively more often compared to their leadership capacities and skills, and they are prominently linked with their family status, look, and age.

About the repetitive and traditional use of gender stereotypes in the news, the study conducted by White (2009) reveals that, on a global scale, "female leaders are more likely to be portrayed in soft stories, meaning articles dealing with topics such as celebrity and the arts, where they make up 28% of news subjects, and they are least likely to be found in hard news stories about politics, government, and the economy" (p.14). According to North's research's findings (2014), the gendered nature of the soft-hard news binary is because soft news entertains and evoke feelings that make "readers laugh or cry, love or hate, envy or pity" (p.357) and therefore relates to emotions, typically seen as feminine attributes (Powell et al., 2002).

As argued by White (2009), the use of a limited set of pre-defined gender characteristics, or a language that encourages societal expectations of women that might shift focus from their being leaders, belittle and trivialize their success; and by detracting from their merits, bias and gender inequalities are reinforced. In addition to the association of effective leadership with male stereotypes, the persistent representation of female leaders as traditional ordinary women, according to Hanappi-Egger (2011), leads women to face a generalized dilemma recognized by the literature as "double-bind". This phenomenon concerns the urgency on the part of women to conform their leadership style to masculine standards, reinforcing their images, showing more authority and aggressivity. The double effect that this condition produces has been proved by the outcomes of the report published by Catalyst (2007), demonstrating that "more than half of all responses describe women leader as "either too soft or too tough" (p.14).

It follows that, as the literature (Catalyst, 2007; Hanappi-Egger, 2011; Elliott & Stead, 2017) stresses, when woman leaders are represented as "too feminine", the public opinion perceives them as weak and therefore inappropriate; on the other hand, when they are represented as not consistent with the feminine stereotype, their role of power is conventionally not approved. As mentioned, the latter case occurs when media represent woman leaders as masculine, thus emphasizing their agentic attributes, such as strength, rationality, resoluteness (Eagly, 1987). Moreover, according to the hegemonic gender roles model (Hanappi-Egger, 2011), portraying woman leaders with masculine traits activates a common perception that questions their legitimacy and assesses them as unnatural. In practice, as Lämsä and Tiensuu (2002) show, media revolve around this way of



representation by constructing the exceptional identity of the "iron lady", through a traditional patriarchal approach. As Cancedda (2002) points out, this is the status embodied by female leaders when they are portrayed as tokens, and their performances are legitimized because they depart from the standards dictated by the hegemonic masculinity values and norms.

Finally, to conclude the excursus concerning the ways media represent female leaders, despite the systematic (both quantitative and qualitative) marginality of women in the media (Adcock, 2010), several recent longitudinal analyses like the GMMP (Macharia et al., 2015) have identified a slow improvement in the representation of women, mostly linked to a more and more solid and aware cultural evolution and progress coming from the bottom (Valdivia, 2003). This is the case of the "progressive approach" (Koerning & Granitz, 2006; Elliott & Stead, 2017), which provides a neutral and detached vision and a more progressive framework and normalizes the figure of the woman leaders by proposing positive narratives (Valvisia, 2003). As Lämsä and Tiensuu (2002) suggest, this kind of approach on the part of the media emphasizes the leadership qualities and competencies of the subject according to the gender-blindness idea. The representation of women is neutral and focuses exclusively on their professionalism and power (Koerning & Granitz, 2006).

#### ***2.4. Overview of Italian national newspapers***

Although the GMMP report conducted since 1995 shows that some progress regarding the visibility of women as sources and subjects in the Italian newspaper context had been made (in 25 years, an increase from 7% to 21% has been recorded, according to Macharia et al. (2015)), Italy still scores lower than the European and global average (respectively 25% and 24%), and shows shortcomings as far as equal opportunity for women in news media in terms of representativeness and representation (Azzalini, 2020). In this regard, Macharia et al. (2015) prove that Italian media, considered as "both powerful institutions and power-defining mechanism" (p. 2), have had enormous responsibilities in challenging female leaders status quo, often by misreporting facts, overlooking merit and competence, and leaving them little room in the news' coverage. For this reason, it is essential to understand how traditional media contribute to describing a male-biased reality, to what extent they strive to improve matters, and how far they still have to go.

Therefore, given the specific national context that the researcher explores in the current study, it is important to illustrate an overview of the Italian newspapers where, as the

findings of a study carried out by Macharia et al. (2015) confirm, the presence of gender stereotypes and the transmission of an unbalanced gender setting appear more pervasive than other sources of information like the Italian television. According to the study conducted by Azzalini (2020), women are underrepresented in the most prestigious and prominent news topics, such as politics (15%) and the economy (10%). Keeping these figures in mind, the researcher aims to extend the outcomes and explore the different perspectives adopted by the newspapers when telling stories about female leaders, and whether and what characteristics impact their narratives.

Going into detail, as reported by Mancini and Gerli (2017), the Italian newspaper market is divided among 84 publishing companies. In terms of economic power, the most relevant ones are Gedi Gruppo Editoriale with 20,5% market share, RCS MediaGroup with 18,9%, Caltagirone Editore with 7,2%, Monrif Group 7% (Watson, 2021). Furthermore, even though since the '80s, Italian newspapers have ceased to be subsidized by political parties, politics continues to hold a privileged position in the media, producing a state of "political sensationalism", through a combination of commercialization and partisanship (Mancini, 2000, p.322). Today, all the major national newspapers are indeed owned by industrial groups such as FIAT, ENI, and Fininvest that have had interests in different economic fields and political affiliations for decades (Brogi & Carlini, 2020).

Further considerations that might be insightful for the present analysis should be made about the internal personnel's Italian printed newspapers' demographics. In this regard, although the set of active journalists in Italy is made up of 42% of women, a disparity is shown in the coverage of hard news: only 35% of female bylines deal with political articles, and 20% cover business and finance topics (Agcom, 2017). Finally, regarding the Italian newspapers' editorial board composition, an alarming fact concerns the low percentage of women who hold leading positions as managing directors, deputy directors, co-directors, editorial and digital directors, editors in chief, editors (Agcom, 2017). For example, when looking at the editorial boards of the 26 national newspapers in Italy, it emerges that 166 men versus 17 women appear in the roles of directors, deputy directors, and chief editors (Veli, 2018). In fact, a study conducted by the CPO in 2018 shows that in 5 years in Italy, there has been no progress in terms of vertical segregation. Analyzing the Italian newspapers, tabloids, a weekly and monthly publication, indeed, only 21% of the managing directors and 30% of the editorial directors are women (CPO, 2018).

### ***2.4.1. Political orientation***

According to Shor et al. (2015), media outlets' political agenda often interfere in "decisions such as the selection of editors and journalists, topics on which newspapers focus, the political tilt that the coverage takes" (p.966) and influences the coverage of women and how they are framed (Armstrong, 2004). If quantitative research suggests that media-political slant is not associated with the amount of media attention devoted to women versus men (Shor et al., 2014), others (Brescoll & LaFrance, 2004) argue that conservative outlets, compared to the more liberal ones, are less likely to frame women positively because more inclined to advocate for traditional values and roles.

In this regard, if according to Lehman-Wilzig and Seletzky (2010), the popular press is mass-oriented, meaning that the political target of the newspaper's readership has an influence when adopting linguistic styles, journalism strategies, as well as communicating values, on the other hand, Lämsä and Tiensuu (2002) stress that the choice made by the outlets about the way to represent goings-on in the social environment have in turn political, social, and moral implications such as leading readers to base their evaluations on the media texts. It follows that, as Shor et al. (2015) demonstrate, a newspaper's patriarchal approach towards women in a leadership position is more likely to appeal to readers who believe in conservative principles, while a professional discourse related to a progressive editorial line, that legitimates the female leader's success based on meritocracy, attracts a more liberal readership.

For this reason, one can assume that the newspaper's political orientation plays a crucial role in framing women since it contributes to building a collective imagination accepted by those who share the same values. According to a study on news media's audiences' attitudes and habits published by the Pew Research Center (2018), it emerges that Italians who read newspapers tend to associate a specific source to their left or right ideological position and choose them accordingly. Shor et al. (2015) point out that the media coverage of a source aligned to the left-wing of the political spectrum presents different perspectives and approaches compared to those supported by those belonging to the right-wing.

Therefore, the first assumption is that there is a relationship between the way female leaders are portrayed by the articles and the political orientation of the newspapers. In particular,

- H1a: "There is a relationship between the way female leaders are traditionally portrayed by the articles and the political orientation of the newspaper."

- H1b: "There is a relationship between the way female leaders are progressively portrayed by the articles and the political orientation of the newspaper."

#### **2.4.2. Women on editorial boards**

A subject that is getting growing interest in research is the issue related to the correlation between gender representation and women's participation in leadership positions (Carbone & Farina, 2020). In this regard, the findings emerged from several studies that analyzed the Italian context prove a generalized difficulty on the part of women to settle in authoritative positions within institutions and parties (Macharia, 2015; Agcom, 2017; Watson, 2021), even those commonly recognized for being of the left-wing such as the Communist Italian Party (Carbone & Farina, 2020).

To this, it should be added the *theory of the critical mass*, developed by Kanter (1977), which assumes that a higher presence of women within the decision-making arena would ensure greater sensitivity towards gender issues and issues. In other words, the lesser relevance of these topics within the public debate should be attributed to the low number of female representatives compared to their male colleagues (Shor et al., 2015). However, as more recent studies (Rudy et al., 2010; Collins, 2011) point out, the reported arguments present few critical aspects, such as the fact that, in practice, gender representation is an extremely complex political mechanism that is linked to the assumptions of diversity but that, beyond one's own identity, involves a multitude of aspects and personal beliefs.

On the other hand, other research, such as the study carried out by Craft and Wanta (2004), demonstrates that media outlets with predominantly male editors propose news with a more negative connotation about women than those where women have a more salient presence. Therefore, one might expect that when the proportion of women on editorial boards increases, a change in newspapers' organizational culture occurs and, in this case, the coverage sentiment becomes more favorable when dealing with women.

Therefore, the second assumption is that the ratio of women on the editorial board of newspapers influences the extent to which female leaders are represented in the articles. In particular,

- H2a: *"The ratio of women on editorial board of the newspaper has a positive influence on the way female leaders are progressively represented in the articles."*

- H2b: *"The ratio of women on editorial board of the newspaper has a negative influence on the way female leaders are traditionally represented in the articles."*

### **2.4.3. Female journalists**

Shor et al. (2015) claim that the real decision-making power about what kind of approach the journalists must adopt is held mainly by the newspaper boards' executives. Likewise, Steiner's qualitative research (2019) demonstrates that journalists' stories reflect newsroom policies more than their own beliefs. Moreover, the same study describes many female reporters as unconsciously blind to gender issues because of the normalization and internalization of hegemonic dominating norms and values process (Steiner, 2019).

At the same time, however, other critical studies (Volčič, 2008) have demonstrated that, given the increasing autonomy and awareness on the issue among women of the last decade, female journalists provide a slightly more gender-sensitive information rate than male colleagues (Macharia et al., 2015). More specifically, in Italian national newspapers where, according to the outcomes of a report published by EJO (2018), 63% of bylines belong to men and only 21% to women, the news covered by female journalists defy stereotypes quantitatively more than those covered by males (Macharia, 2015).

This could be explained by the tendency to assign male journalists the so-called "hard" topics, traditionally considered more important, such as politics, business, and sports, where male subjects have a stronger presence; furthermore, Hentschel et al.'s research's findings (2019) reveal that generally women do not make any distinctions between men and women when rating agentic features, such as leadership competence and independence. On the other hand, it emerges that men consider female leaders as more communal than man leaders (Hentschel et al., 2019).

Therefore, the third and last assumption is that female and male journalists frame female leaders in a different way. In particular,

- H3a: *"Female journalists frame leaders more progressively."*

- H3b: *"Male journalists frame leaders more traditionally."*

## ***2.5. Overview of present research***

The present research aims to understand how female leaders are portrayed by the Italian newspapers and the extent to which each source's approach towards women representations is related to their political alignment, the ratio of women on the board, and the sex of the articles' journalists. For these multiple purposes, the study employs a mixed-method design which, according to Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010), is ideal for collecting, analyzing, and combining both qualitative and quantitative data within a single study, to dig deeper into the sample material and evaluate a more comprehensive picture (Creswell, 2009). Indeed, the rationale for mixing methodologies is that neither qualitative nor quantitative methods are sufficient by themselves to both captures how the complex issue of female leaders' representation is dealt with by Italian newspapers and explore the extent to which patterns are related to the demographic variables that characterize the media outlets.

The choice to combine methods stems from the need to obtain as much complete analysis as possible that is finalized not only to present a general overview of newspapers attitudes towards female leader figures, but also to analyze the context and test the hypotheses supposing that newspapers political alignment, the ratio of women on the editorial board, and the bylines' sex might be considered responsible (Greene et al., 1989; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). In this sense, the qualitative analysis attempted to explore a limited and representative number of articles aiming to detect common emerging themes through a thematic analysis in such a manner that the findings were extended to the entire sample at a later stage through a quantitative analysis. As mentioned before, the systematicity of the method allowed the researcher to explore 30 units in depth, examine every single part of the corpus, and finally identify and form common themes. For this reason, the researcher chose to focus on the articles with the greatest number of words in the first analysis. The first coding frames have been constructed individually to compare the different approaches adopted at a later stage, aiming at ensuring a thorough outcome and gradually gaining mastery of the material. Thus, the findings of the first study allowed to answer the qualitative RQ1 and build the coding frame useful for analyzing the entire sample quantitatively, in order to validate or reject the hypotheses formulated by the researcher, and, finally to answer the RQ2.

### ***3. Study 1***

#### ***3.1. Qualitative research: thematic analysis***

For answering the first research question, designed to comprehend how Italian newspapers frame female leaders, a qualitative thematic analysis was conducted. First, according to Berkwits & Inui (1998), qualitative research is useful in gathering cultural knowledge on people' social dynamics and, in this case, it allows to distinguish general patterns which are related to what kind of approach the Italian press, specifically 6 of the most influent newspapers, adopts in promoting female leaders to the Italian audience. Furthermore, the choice to analyze articles thematically stems from the need to identify, analyze, synthesize, and finally interpret the common themes that emerge both inductively, meaning from the data corpus selected (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) and deductively, thus by relying on existing frames identified by the literature (Lämsä & Tiensuu, 2002; Collins, 2011; Vandenberghe, 2019). The scheme proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was employed throughout all the analysis, allowing the researcher to identify themes embedded within the text and that are meaningfully related to the research question.

Once meaningful preliminary frames were systematically detected, they were categorized and collected through a coding process by assigning summative salient and evocative attributes to a portion of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Subsequently, similar and related codes were categorized and collected into broader preliminary representative themes that capture and summarize the data's core point of meaningful patterns. Furthermore, being the role of the researcher subjective when dealing with the qualitative interpretation of the text (Given, 2008), during the final reviewing step, a set of candidate themes were refined and improved with reflexivity and flexibility. Finally, some of the themes collapsed into each other, while others were broken down into separate categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

#### ***3.2. Data collection***

Since the primary purpose of the first qualitative study was to find patterns that, in the subsequent research, would be employed to guide the test of the hypotheses on more extensive data, the first sample has been collected through a representative sampling technique (Flick, 2007). Therefore, as the RQ1 suggests, the study aims to analyze textual and secondary data that, as explained by Jaideep (2015), involve published and already existing data collected from external sources. In the first analysis, the corpus, meaning the

"population of texts to be analyzed" (Grimmer & Stewart, 2013, p.272), includes 30 articles published by the 6 Italian national newspapers (5 articles each), namely *la Stampa*, *il Manifesto*, *Corriere della Sera*, *ItaliaOggi*, *la Nazione*, *il Giorno*, consistently placed on the political spectrum according to their editorial line's political alignment, as outlined in Appendix 1. The choice of selecting these specific 6 generalist national newspapers arises because, as reported by Watson (2021), they are owned by the most relevant Italian publishing companies in terms of economic power. Additionally, from the outcomes of the national scale study conducted by ADS (2020), it emerges that the 6 newspapers in question are among the most consumed by Italians both on paper and electronic devices.

Moreover, for the current research, the articles of 5 newspapers out of 6 have been retrieved from LexisNexis® Uni, an academic online database that provides access to and allows to download full-text news published by national and international business, legal, and worldwide news sources (LexisNexis, n.d.); the articles published by *il Manifesto*, as not available on the database, were recovered from the digital archive of the newspaper's website, consultable via personal subscription. To minimize any selection bias that could threaten the generalizability of the results (Thorndike, 1997), the following qualifications were taken into account as selection criteria. Firstly, to retrieve articles that were homogeneous, consistent with the objectives of the study, and therefore that allowed obtaining feasible outcomes, the articles selected for the first qualitative study covered news around 5 representative female leaders who in the last 10 years became popular in Italy because of their public role and their career's achievements in the academic, economic, political, entertainment, and sports field. The women (5 in the first qualitative study and 10 in the second one, as shown in Appendix 2) were purposively selected by the researcher among the female subjects who hold leadership roles in the Italian public sphere and have been the focus of the national media attention for events that involved them personally as leaders, such as their election or designation. In the first study, they were: 1) Laura Boldrini, President of the Chamber of Deputies of the Italian Parliament, 2) Giorgia Meloni, leader of the right-wing party "Brothers of Italy", 3) Samantha Cristoforetti, European Space Agency astronaut, 4) Sarah Gama, footballer and captain of the Juventus club and the Italy national football team, 5) Virginia Raggi, the current Mayor of Rome.

For the first study, the researcher filtered the search by manually selecting the 5 newspapers chosen, filtering only "news" as sources of concern, typing the name of the subject as a search term, choosing the time interval ranging to one month since the date of the news in question, selecting only those with a word count ranging from 400 to 1000 (with few



exceptions, as shown in Appendix 2). Finally, once the database provided the list of articles to scrape, in order to increase the study's validity (Flick, 2007), the researcher downloaded the first article that showed up according to their relevance on the database. The same procedure was manually followed on the *il Manifesto* website when consulting the newspaper's digital archive. The list of topics, information about the events, and the demographics of the articles are available in Appendix 2.

### **3.3. Data analysis**

As already explained, the method adopted by the researcher was the thematic analysis that allows to observe material patterns and develop categories from the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). When scanning the texts, the researcher focused on the content and contextual meanings of the language instead of the latent meanings that quantitative research focuses on (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Particularly, each article was segmented into coding units (Appendix 3), meaning those parts of the material that "can be interpreted in a meaningful way concerning the subcategories" (Schreier, 2013, p.178). As reported by the trial coding frame provided in Appendix 3, the unit of analysis was at the level of both words and sentences. In this first table, a preliminary coding frame was designed as the first step of the pilot phase and extended to the entire corpus in a second stage (Schreier, 2013).

Besides the intrinsic meaning, another element worth looking into to obtain a more in-depth analysis is the use of Italian grammatical forms. As pointed out by Pescia (2011), as in almost all Latin languages, in the Italian language the gender system is characterized by a basic distinction between female and male. As highlighted by recent socio-linguistic related literature (Fairclough, 2014; Robustelli et al., 2014), the absence of a neutral grammatical form impacts the lexicon and, in some cases, contributes to normalizing inequalities when addressing different genders. In addition, this leads to reinforcing those linguistic norms that are socially determined realization of the system and, as Robustelli et al. (2014) point out, currently reflects an androcentric society. For example, as the quantitative study about Italian newspapers' language conducted by Robustelli et al. (2014) suggests, the misrepresentation of woman leaders might occur due to the use of grammatically legitimate lexical choices founded on stereotypes and gendered agentive. The last phenomenon is related to "the lack of the asymmetrical feminine form to the masculine, especially when referring to offices, professions, and titles" (Sabatini et al., 1987, p.25). As a result, because the language allows using the masculine gender as a universal neutral, newspapers often resort to masculine

adjectives when addressing women, therefore producing a discriminatory connotation (Pescia, 2011).

Keeping this into consideration, the researcher segmented the corpus through thematic criterion, which allowed to group the units according to specific topics, emerging systematically (Rustemeyer, 1992). Consequently, the approach chosen to build the initial coding frame was the one that Schreier (2013) calls “subsumption”, which implies the construction of subcategories whenever relevant concepts were identified (inductively or deductively) while reading. As mentioned, the way the themes were generated and theorized derives from the combination of two different approaches: the deductive and inductive techniques, which ensured a complete understanding of the topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The deductive approach uses theory as a point of departure (Pearse, 2019). According to the literature (Lämsä & Tiensuu, 2002; Plakoyiannaki & Zotos, 2009; Collins, 2011; Vandenberghe, 2019), some ways to represent woman leaders were predicted, and therefore employed as a starting point in the preliminary thematic map building process. Thus, the research findings just cited proposed two main approaches adopted by the media outlets analyzed when addressing female leaders, namely ‘traditional approach’ and ‘progressive approach’, used in the present research too.

In addition to the deductive approach, inductive reasoning was adopted to identify new themes closely related to the data and not any other predetermined theory or assumption (Pearse, 2019). It follows that, according to Flick (2007), through an iterative procedure, multiple subcategories, each covering similar concepts in terms of meaning, were produced by combining the two techniques. After generating initial codes by examining all the data, similar frames were merged and grouped in larger categories throughout the categorizing process (Braun & Clark, 2006). Once the point of saturation was reached, meaning that all the most relevant concepts were allocated, main themes were generated first, revised, extended, or summarized at a second stage to reduce the amount of data. Once themes and subcategories (or subthemes) were found, the researcher assigned them an indicative name, proper definitions, and indicators. Finally, the main analysis phase ends with developing the thematic map, available in Appendix 4.

### ***3.4. Results and discussion study 1***

The present chapter presents the results that emerged from the thematic data analysis in relation to the main research question. As the goal of the research is to provide an insight

into Italian newspapers' ways of portraying women who hold leadership positions, the findings, deductively detected when scanning the corpus, have been gathered into two groups that refer respectively to the 'traditional approach' and 'progressive approach' (thematic map in Appendix 4).

### ***3.4.1. Traditional approach***

From the data set, several insights referring to the manner female leaders are perceived and described emerged. As the literature suggested in advance, despite Western societies are increasingly used to see females covering power positions in the public sphere given the transformations that have affected the economy, organizations, and management, the conception that women are unsuitable for leadership is still largely widespread (Cancedda, 2002). This social construct is related to the notion of a "traditional approach" (Lämsä & Tiensuu, 2002) and is rooted in a patriarchal and gendered conception of power.

In this regard, throughout the analysis of the entire corpus, the researcher identifies a constant traditional representation of the subjects on two different levels, defined by the researcher as two overarching themes of the traditional approach: on the one hand, newspapers represent female leaders as subordinated to male leaders (Vandenberghe, 2019), on the other, they describe women as gender role performers, therefore merely focusing on their gender characteristics (Plakoyiannaki & Zotos, 2009). Finally, for both traditional representations concerning female leaders, two further subthemes emerged inductively, as outlined below.

#### ***Traditional representation of female leaders***

##### ***Female leaders represented as masculine***

A common traditional belief is that the role of the leader is exclusively reserved for men. In this regard, the first finding that emerged is that Italian newspapers frame female leaders according to the mainstream culture, which restricts the access to power to those women who do not conform their leadership style to masculine standards. Consequently, a typical pattern recognized during the analysis is the newspapers' tendency to refuse to portray female leaders neutrally, favoring a narrative that emphasizes their agentic traits, reinforces their images, and confer them aggressivity.

The researcher detected patterns in the portrayal of woman leaders as masculine in two distinct ways: identifying sentences or words and assessing linguistic choices. As the

following examples highlight, the text was coded according to this theme any time that the researcher encountered meaningful attributions of masculine traits and agentic characteristics to the woman leaders.

Example 1:

“Per tutto questo servirebbe un fisico bestiale. Ma pure autorevolezza e credibilità, condizioni necessarie per quell'autonomia decisionale della quale molti hanno dubitato.” [“For all this we need a beastly physique. But authority and credibility as well, necessary conditions for that decision-making autonomy of which many have doubted.”]

– 27, Corriere della Sera, 20/06/2016

The statement reported in Example 1 emphasizes the agentic traits that must belong to the leader, according to the traditional approach. Furthermore, masculine values and norms such as authority and physical strength are underlined by the writer, implying a subordination of the female subject to masculinity. Therefore, the subject's figure is strongly stereotyped as it is represented as a member of a specific category that behaves and acts according to social expectations.

Example 2:

“Nella mia famiglia sono tutti artisti, tranne me e mio fratello Ugo: noi siamo i pragmatici di casa.” [“In my family they are all artists, except me and my brother Ugo: we are the pragmatists of the house.”]

– 6, La Nazione, 17/03/2013

The statement reported in Example 2 represents the traditional conception that evaluates a woman who presents rationality and agentic traits as unnatural and exceptional. Furthermore, the analysis conducted highlighted a common practice employed to validate the role of the woman leader by mentioning a male subject (in Example 2, “the brother”) as a basis for comparison. Consequently, the message conveyed is that to become a successful female leader, women must assimilate effective masculine traits and take men as a reference point to resemble them as much as possible.

As mentioned, besides the intrinsic meaning of the text (sentences and words), another element that the researcher coded concerns the Italian grammatical forms used in the articles. For this reason, the researcher coded the text according to the theme “*Women leaders*”

*represented as masculine*” any time that the articles assigned to women masculine gendered titles or agentive nouns.

Example 3:

“Capitano dell’Aeronautica Militare Italiana.” [“Captain of the Italian Air Force.”]

– 13, La Stampa, 24/11/2014

“Virginia [...], il sindaco prova a resistere.” [Virginia [...], the mayor tries to withstand.”]

– 23, La Stampa, 30/06/2016

The statements reported in Example 3 prove how linguistic choices can play a meaningful role that can produce gender stereotypes by assign masculine gendered titles or agentive nouns for addressing female leaders as a general pattern for the theme. In this case, both the terms *capitano* (“captain”) and *sindaco* (“mayor”) are masculine titles that, as Sabatini et al. argued already in 1987, are grammatically incorrect but socially accepted and conventionally used. In this regard, as other linguists (Francesconi, 2012; Robustelli, 2014) stress, unlike what occurs in different languages, in Italian there is no general rule, and to date, it is rather the writer or speaker’s choice whether to decline nouns in the feminine forms when addressing women. Therefore, the lexical uncertainties of the Italian grammar on the question depend on extra-linguistic reasons, attributable to the changes in the social status of women that, in recent decades, have accelerated their access to new professions and institutional roles previously reserved only to men (Robustelli, 2014).

It follows that any rejection to use the feminine noun’s declination accordingly with the subjects (female) sex is the result of an approach that refuses to evolve and keeps employing traditional masculine forms, such as *capitano*, *ministro* (“secretary”), *sindaco* (“mayor”), rather than the equivalent feminine, namely respectively *capitana*, *ministra*, *sindaca*.

*Feminine leaders represented as exceptions*

If, as illustrated, the first way to represent women suggests the tendency of the writer to conform the subject identity and characteristics to masculine norms and values as taken for granted, a second traditional approach identified throughout the articles assumes that women who present communal traits are inadequate for holding leadership positions. Therefore, the exceptionality of their role is emphasized. The study of Lämsä and Tiensuu (2002) shows

that, according to a patriarchal perspective, the female leader belongs to a “universal type of woman leader” (p.368) through a process of stereotypes and generalizations. In this case, thus, the main conception conveyed concerns the atypicality of those women who can succeed in leadership positions despite their natural femininity. As evidence of this traditional approach, different examples that emphasize the gender of leaders where not necessary have been detected through the analysis of both the meaning of sentences and words and linguistic choices. Therefore, the text was coded according to this theme any time that the researcher encountered references to the feminine traits related women, implying that they are leaders while they shouldn't be.

Example 4:

“Virginia, donna, per giunta giovane.” [“Virginia, woman, and even young.”]  
– 27, Corriere della Sera, 20/06/2016

Example 4 demonstrates the need to explicitly mention that the leader is female. Interestingly, this never occurs when the subject is male because, according to the traditional approach towards leadership, man leaders are conceived as the standard.

Furthermore, the researcher coded the text according to this theme any time that the articles report the definite feminine article before female leaders' names to emphasize their gender and, therefore, to underscore the exceptionality of their positions.

Example 5:

“Alla Meloni.” [“To Meloni.”]  
– 11, Il Giorno, 15/03/2019

“Della Raggi.” [“Of Raggi.”]  
– 30, La Nazione, 20/06/2016

From the textual analysis, an ingrained linguistic tendency concerns an exceptional treatment in the way of referring to women when revealing their factual identities. As Example 5 shows, a tool that serves the writer to emphasize the gender of the subject is the use of the feminine article (“la”) before reporting the last name. This results in a non-symmetrical treatment that, as the work of Sabatini et al. (1987) suggests, is never used when

addressing men (compare the difference with Example 11). The aim, in this case, is to emphasize the fact the subject in question is female and inform the reader about the leader's gender.

Furthermore, the researcher coded the text according to this theme any time that the articles address female leaders, calling them by their proper names or nicknames.

Example 6:

“Draghi ha rapito Giorgia.” [“Draghi enchanted Giorgia”]

– 9, Corriere della Sera, 10/02/2019

“Astrosamantha”

– 13, La Stampa, 24/11/2014

Both the statements reported in Example 6 underline further asymmetrical linguistic practices that were recurrent in the articles analyzed. They concern the choice to address woman leaders calling them by their proper name or nickname instead of their last name, as it is always done for men (in this regard, the first statement in Example 6 shows a significant difference in treatment between the man who is called by the last name, and the woman, named by her proper name only). This approach, according to Robustelli (2014), results in publicly undermining women leaders' reputations and authority. In fact, as the study of Atir and Ferguson (2018) reveals, calling professionals by the last name by the mass media increases their prestige in the eyes of public opinion, while the choice to resort to nicknames and metaphors might shift the focus of attention from the news itself to the gender of the subjects.

***Traditional representation of female leaders as gender role performers***

*Female leaders represented as emotional subjects*

The image of women holding leadership positions is strongly influenced by gender stereotypes which, as suggested by Eagly's social role theory (1987), tend to associate the feminine with values such as family, motherhood, caring for others. In this regard, a general pattern identified throughout the analysis shows that newspapers represent woman leaders by emphasizing their gender affiliation and therefore by setting the narrative on a personal level rather than the professional one. This way, it emerges that the media coverage focuses

considerably on who the subjects are, rather than on what they do (Hanappi-Egger, 2011). Consistently with the traditional principles thus, the researcher found that newspapers frame female leaders resorting to communal characteristics such as weakness, emotionality, need for attention, and defining them as sweet, caring, maternal. This results in exposing female leaders merely as emotional subjects.

Throughout the analysis conducted, a recurrent theme identified concerns the representation of the subjects emphasizing their belonging to the gender role and underscoring conventional communal characteristics and femininity. According to this theme, the text was indeed coded any time that the researcher encountered references to the female leader's communal characteristics related exclusively to their gender.

#### Example 7:

“Ha etica del lavoro e (...) qualcosa in più di pulsante, il cuore.” [“She has work ethic and (...) something more pulsating, the heart.”]

– 29, Il Giorno, 24/06/2016

Example 7 shows how newspapers place communal characteristics before professional merits. In this case, the fact that the subject in question has a big heart (this is an assumption that emerged because she is a woman), has been marked and put before her work ethics.

#### *Objectification of female leaders*

A further pattern identified in the traditional representation of women as gender role performers concerns the focus on women's bodies. According to the definition provided by Langton (2009), women are treated as objects when their depiction is reduced to their body and physical appearance. As emerged from the analysis, in fact, this theme includes both the sexualization of their body and the focus on their outfits. As largely illustrated, with reference to women, the categories of representations and judgment is generally more severe and focuses on politically marginal aspects. The findings that emerged from the present thematic analysis suggest that body image, physical appearance, bearing, language, look, and outfits are characteristics that media describe when addressing women. According to Elliott and Stead (2017), this is a marketing strategy for enticing readers and detracting attention from “an evaluation of women's successful attainment of leadership positions” (p.31).



Consequently, the growing spectacularization and trivialization of leadership have led over time to the spread of an extremely sexualized image of the woman that, according to Shor et al. (2015), is not found in the male counterparts. According to this theme, the text was coded any time that the researcher encountered references to the female leader's outfits, body, and physical appearance.

Example 8:

“Perché (Laura Boldrini) è bella, è bella almeno quanto le sue parole.” [“Because (Laura Boldrini) is beautiful, she is at least as beautiful as her words.”]

– 1, la Stampa, 17/03/2013

Example 8 shows the common tendency of newspapers to frame women remarking about their bodies, and commenting on their outfits, thus reconfirming roles and gender stereotypes in a more or less implicit, indirect, or accidental way. This way to represent women causes judgments regarding their subordination to men and sexual desirability, irrelevant for the purposes of the professional circumstance in which it is inserted. As a result, the leader's reputation is demeaned, and her figure is reduced to an alleged object of power that, according to the patriarchal culture, is held solely by men (Cancedda, 2002).

*Female leaders represented in the private sphere*

The last theme related to the traditional approach that emerged from the analysis demonstrate the current prominence of the main principles described by the *sexual division labor theory* (White et al., 1977) that conceives men as “breadwinners” and specialized in market work, and women as the “housewife”, specialized in domestic work. The text was coded according to this theme any time that the researcher encountered references to the female leaders' domestic sphere, which are not related to their leadership roles, such as their mother or wife status.

Example 9:

“E' Giorgia ed è prima di tutto una mamma.” [“She is Giorgia and she is a mother first and foremost.”]

– 12, La Nazione, 29/03/2019

Example 9 demonstrates how a political leader is framed when prioritizing her status as a mother.

### ***3.4.2. Progressive approach***

From the data set, besides the insights related to the traditional approach towards women leaders, relevant themes concerning a more progressive perception emerged. This kind of portrayal has been identified according to several principles featuring the progressive approach that does not resort to stereotypical references and includes more rational and information-dominant themes compared to the traditional approach (Koerning & Granitz, 2006). In this regard, throughout the entire corpus, the researcher identified a constant progressive portrayal of the female leaders on two distinct levels, grouped into two overarching themes.

The first theme was coded by examining textual units that addressed women with the exclusive aim to emphasize their professionalism, leadership styles and underscore their competencies and merits in a neutral manner and with economic rationality (Lämsä & Tiensuu, 2002). Furthermore, the researcher detected patterns in the portrayal of woman leaders as professionals in two distinct ways, meaning identifying sentences or words whose intrinsic meaning leads to the progressive perspective, and assessing the linguistic choices.

On the other hand, the second overarching theme was inductively detected where the article disclosed a perspective towards gender diversity in leadership, advocating women's empowerment, that reflects the progressive approach's principles (Windscheid, 2018). This approach is called "moral and business perspective" (Windscheidm 2018, p.46) and acknowledges the issue of gender inequality in leadership, defines gender diversity as an added value in terms of individual well-being as well as performance effectiveness, ensures a portrayal that promotes equal treatment of any individual regardless their gender because it is both "simply the right thing to do", and productive for the leadership itself (Green et al., 2018, p.2).

In this regard, as argued by Koerning and Granitz (2006), the progressive approach relies on a gender-blindness idea, which does not underscore any subordination or differences between genders' performances in leadership (as it occurs with the traditional conception) and denies the importance of gender in career advancement (Valdivia, 2003). In this case, the units of analysis coded according to this theme were sentences and words.

Finally, for both main themes related to the progressive approach, two subthemes emerged inductively, as outlined below.

### ***Professional representation of female leaders***

#### *Female leaders represented as professional*

The first main overarching theme that falls within the progressive approach concerns the representation of female leaders as professionals. In this regard, as suggested by Lämsä and Tiensuu (2002), a woman leader is portrayed as professional when the subject of interest is not the gender but competence, skills, and professional background. The text was coded according to this theme any time that the researcher encountered references to the female leaders' experiences, qualities, and competencies.

#### Example 10:

“Sara Gama ha vinto con la maglia della Juve dove è arrivata dopo un'avventura al Paris Saint-Germain.” [“Sara Gama won with the Juve shirt where she arrived after an adventure at Paris Saint-Germain.”]

– 19, La Stampa, 09/12/2020

Example 10 reports a neutral illustration of the professional achievements obtained by the subject in question.

Besides sentences and words, a further unit of analysis coded to identify the progressive representation of professional women concerned grammatical choices that resort to genderblind Italian forms. This because the figure of the professional leader, according to a progressive approach, implies the concept of ‘gender blindness’ or ‘sameness’, meaning that women and men are alike (Lämsä & Tiensuu, 2002). According to the text analysis conducted, the strategy adopted to address women in a neutral way is by resorting to genderblind forms that do not emphasize gender when calling women by name. To achieve this purpose, the article’s writer chooses to remove any article before the subjects’ names.

#### Example 11:

“A Cristoforetti.” [“To Cristoforetti.”]

“Di Cristoforetti.” [“Of Cristoforetti.”]

– 14, Il Manifesto, 25/11/2014

The statements proposed in Example 11 prove a neutral way to introduce the name of the subject without necessarily emphasizing their gender. It is noteworthy the comparison between the current example and Example 5, where the name of the leader was preceded by the article (“la”). According to Robustelli (2014), resorting to the definite feminine article is a sign of familiarity and intimacy toward the subject in question, a sentiment that belongs to a paternalistic approach and, instead, clashes with a rational and progressive one (Valdivia, 2003).

### ***Progressive representation of gender diversity in leadership***

#### *Promoting gender diversity in leadership (moral perspective)*

According to Green et al. (2018), a way to promote gender diversity in leadership from a moral perspective is identified through the transmission of messages that prove that the source in question acknowledges the issue of gender inequalities and stands on the side of the minority group. Furthermore, advocating female empowerment and describing their success as a driving force toward progress might encourage a process of awareness, prevention, and removal of gender stereotypes (Subašić et al., 2018).

#### Example 12:

“Il diritto alla maternità, in tutti gli ambiti lavorativi è tutelato, nel mondo dello sport italiano non è affatto contemplato.” [“The right to maternity leave is safeguarded in all areas of work, but in the world of Italian sport it is not contemplated at all.”]

– 20, Il Manifesto, 06/01/2021

“Ieri in Italia abbiamo scritto una pagina importante nella partita della parità di genere.”

[“Yesterday in Italy we wrote an important page in the gender equality game.”]

– 23, Il Giorno, 01/12/2020

Both statements reported in Example 12 convey an awareness of the issue of gender inequality affecting leadership in Italy. The choice to bring the issue to light is therefore seen as an attempt by the media to sensitize readership on the issue, condemning inequalities on the one hand and representing the concept of female redemption as moral progress made by women.

Example 13:

“È simbolo per le generazioni di ragazze del futuro.” [“She is a symbol for the generations of girls of the future.”]

– 24, La Nazione, 16/12/2020

Example 13 gives the subject the merit for achieving success and frames her as a positive role model for other women, an approach that encourages women's empowerment and implies the willingness by the media to see more and more women covering leadership positions.

*Gender diversity in leadership represented as a business case*

Besides the moral one, the researcher identified patterns related to the business perspective towards gender diversity in leadership. According to the fundamental principles of the business perspective, the inclusion of women in power positions is not only seen as a chance to bring progress on a societal level but it is conceived as an added value in terms of leadership effectiveness and success (Green et al., 2018). The text was coded according to this theme any time that the researcher identified sentences and words related to the value that women in power bring to the leadership in terms of success.

Example 14:

“L’Italia al femminile è arrivata dove gli azzurri hanno fallito.” [“Italian women get where men have failed.”]

– 19, La Stampa, 09/12/2020

## ***4. Study 2***

In addition to the RQ, the theoretical framework also led to diverse hypotheses tested through quantitative analysis. The themes that emerged from the first thematic analysis were extended to the larger sample and used as variables to validate or reject the hypotheses formulated in the second study. Moreover, since the second research was based on the frames that emerged from the thematic map, an occurrence-based content analysis was conducted on the entire corpus of data. A coding framework including rules to assign values to the variables was developed. Finally, the coding map was implemented into Qualtrics, a web-based survey tool that acts as a digital questionnaire and allows to collect data.

As shown in Appendix 5, besides the number (values) of times the themes (variables) that were identified in each article, the coding frame included all the relevant demographic and control variables relative to each sample unit. Finally, once the questionnaire was filled in with the actual information, the dataset was downloaded and inserted on SPSS. This statistical software platform allowed to carry out the research using frequencies, descriptives, means, correlation analyses to explore the relationships between the variables and test the hypotheses.

### ***4.1. Data collection***

When conducting the quantitative research, the researcher expanded the sample through two steps. Firstly, the first study's sub-sample was doubled by adding a new article per (6) newspaper, dealing with the same topics; the same selection criteria were used. Secondly, the sample collection was extended to 5 new subjects. This means that other than the 5 women objects of the first study, new 5 female leaders were chosen in the second research. The additional subjects were: 1) Lucia Azzolina, Minister of Public Education in 2020, 2) Chiara Ferragni, entrepreneur, fashion blogger, influencer, and designer 3) Fabiola Gianotti, experimental particle physicist and currently the CEO of CERN 4) Antonella Polimeni, the current rector of La Sapienza University, 5) Carola Rackete, ship captain of the sea rescue organization Sea-Watch.

Therefore, the sample obtained for the second analysis was made up of 120 units, covering 10 different female leaders whose news was dealt with by 2 articles per newspaper (a neat exemplification can be found in Appendix 6).

As mentioned, the selection criteria followed in the second study are the same as the ones that guided the research during the data collection for the first research: the articles purposively selected covered the 10 events that occurred in the last decade, revolving around 10 female leaders in the Italian public sphere. The researcher filtered the search selecting the 5 newspapers available on LexisNexis® Uni, filtering only “news” as sources of concern, typing the name of the subject as a search term, choosing the time interval ranging to one month since the date of the news in question, selecting only those with a word count ranging from 400 to 1000.

Finally, once the database provided the list of articles to scrape, to increase the study's validity (Flick, 2007), the researcher downloaded the first two articles that showed up according to their relevance on the database. The same procedure was manually followed on the *il Manifesto* website when consulting the newspaper's digital archive.

#### ***4.1.2. Operationalization and measurements***

As described above, the first analysis conducted was extended to the entire data set, and the themes detected were coded as variables in the second study. Therefore, each variable (e.g. ‘female leaders represented as professional’) was assessed with the value corresponding to the number of times it was identified throughout the article. Thus, the numeric values assigned to each variable were a numeric value ranging from ‘0’ onwards. The hypotheses tested through the quantitative research aimed to test whether 1) the political orientation of the newspapers, 2) the ratio of women on the editorial board, 3) the sex of the journalist is related to the way female leaders are represented in the articles. For this reason, once the dataset was exported into SPSS, the data was cleaned, and the variables were correctly coded according to their level of measurement. The descriptives and frequencies obtained according to the demographics of the newspapers were coded as: ‘newspaper\_name’, ‘newspaper\_orientation’, ‘newspaper\_board\_composition’, while those about the articles were coded as: ‘topic’, ‘article\_title’, ‘article\_date’, ‘article\_words’, ‘byline\_name’, and ‘byline\_sex’. The information related to the articles was found in the articles downloaded, while the information about the newspapers was retrieved from the websites of the sources. The predictor variables used for testing the hypotheses were coded as follows: 1) the categorical variable ‘newspaper\_political\_orientation’ was assigned with the values ‘1’, ‘2’, ‘3’, namely ‘Left-wing’, ‘Centre’, ‘Right-wing’; 2) the categorical variable ‘byline\_sex’ was assigned with the values ‘1’, ‘2’, ‘3’ standing respectively for ‘male’, ‘female’, ‘ND’; 3) the

continuous variables ‘newspaper\_board\_composition’ was assigned with numeric values ranging from ‘0’ onwards.

Because the hypotheses assume a relationship between the abovementioned predictor variables and the extent to which female leaders are progressively or traditionally represented, the researcher computed two distinct continuous outcome variables that addressed the two main approaches labeled as ‘traditional\_approach’ and ‘progressive\_approach’. The former included 9 existing continuous variables related to the traditional representation themes, whose values were obtained by filling the questions ranging from Q10 to Q18 in the questionnaire (Appendix 5) and represent how many times each article resorted to traditional ways of representing female leaders. The latter included 5 continuous variables related to the progressive representation themes, whose values were obtained by filling the questions ranging from Q19 to Q23 in the questionnaire (Appendix 5) and represent how many times each article resorted to traditional ways of representing female leaders.

Finally, it must be underscored that, since the length of each article, represented by the variable ‘article\_words’, might impact the outcomes, the researcher used it as a control variable.

## ***4.2. Results study 2***

Firstly, according to the literature, the researcher assumes that there was a relationship between the political orientation of Italian newspapers and the way female leaders are represented. Because 1) the predictor variable ‘newspaper\_orientation’ is categorical and it includes three unrelated groups (‘left-wing’, ‘center’, ‘right-wing’) which refer to the political belongingness of the newspaper on the political spectrum, 2) the dependent variable concerning the approach employed to represent female leaders is continuous, 3) the variable ‘article\_words’ was considered as a potential control variable, the analysis performed was the one-way ANCOVA. This analysis was conducted to determine whether there is any statistically significant difference between left, center, and right-wing newspapers on the way female leaders are represented, controlling for the length of the articles that might affect the results.

Furthermore, since the hypothesis aims to test how and to what extent the political orientation has an impact on the approach employed, and the approaches identified throughout the research are two (‘traditional\_approach’ and ‘progressive\_approach’), two



one-way ANCOVA tests were performed, one per each dependent variable. Therefore, to determine differences between the political orientation of newspapers and the way of representing female leaders, the researcher analyzed the potential effect that the independent groups have on the traditional and the progressive approach separately. Finally, by carrying out a post hoc test, the researcher determined which one of the independent groups impacts each representation the most.

For the reasons outlined above, the first assumption was that:

*H1a: "There is a relationship between the way female leaders are traditionally portrayed by the articles and the political orientation of the newspaper."*

As shown in Table 1 in Appendix 7, the first ANCOVA analysis revealed that there is no significant effect between the political orientation of newspapers and the extent they represent female leaders traditionally, since the p-value was found  $> 0.05$  ( $p = 0.052$ ). Furthermore, Table 2 in Appendix 7 shows how right- and left-wing newspapers differ regarding the 9 variables included in the traditional approach. According to an independent t-test analysis, it emerges that the only variable that appears to be statistically different is the one concerning the use of the feminine article before the subjects' name ( $p = .000$ ). Indeed, it emerges right-wing newspapers resort to this grammatical form significantly more often than the left-wing ones, with the ultimate purpose of underscoring the leaders' female gender.

The second assumption was that:

*H1b: "There is a relationship between the way female leaders are progressively portrayed by the articles and the political orientation of the newspaper."*

As shown in Table 3 in Appendix 7, ANCOVA revealed a relationship between the newspapers' political orientation and the extent they represent female leaders progressively,  $F(2, 116) = 6.48$ ,  $p = .002$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .10$ . Furthermore, the Tukey posthoc test was run to compare every single group of the independent variable with any other possible group once the means had been adjusted for the control variable. The posthoc comparisons revealed that the newspapers that belong to the left-wing on the political spectrum ( $M = 4.33$ ,  $SD = 3.52$ ) represent female leaders more progressively than both those belonging to the right-wing ( $M = 2.37$ ,  $SD = 2.39$ ),  $p = .006$ , and those belonging to the centre-wing ( $M = 2.52$ ,  $SD = 2.17$ ),  $p = .009$  (as the bar chart in Appendix 7 shows).

Furthermore, Table 5 in Appendix 7 shows how right- and left-wing newspapers differ regarding the 5 variables included in the progressive approach and, interestingly, one of the variables that appear to be more statistically different is the one concerning the use of the gender blind forms when addressing female leaders. In fact, it emerges left-wing newspapers resort to neutral grammatical forms significantly more often than the right-wing ones, suggesting a more careful attitude and effort towards a progressive language evolution. Indeed, since the p-value of Levene's test was found  $< .005$  ( $p = .001$ ), the assumption of equal variances does not hold, and because the t-statistics p-value (2-tailed)  $< .05$  ( $p = .011$ ), a statistically significant difference between the two groups was found.

Further significant differences that were detected concern the importance that newspapers belonging to different political orientations confer to the subject's competencies and professional background ( $p = 0.11$ ; 2-tailed p-value  $< .05$ ,  $p = .006$ ), and how they consider women as a business added value ( $p = .000$ ; 2-tailed p-value  $< .05$ ,  $p = .009$ ). Also in these two last cases, the left-wing newspapers prove to be more progressive compared to the others.

Secondly, to determine whether the approach adopted when representing female leaders is predicted by the ratio of women on the editorial board, the researcher run the regression analysis. Furthermore, since the approaches identified throughout the research are two ('traditional\_approach' and 'progressive\_approach'), two separate regression analyses were performed, one per each dependent variable.

For this reason, the first assumption formulated was that:

*H2a: "The ratio of women on editorial board of the newspaper has a positive influence on the way female leaders are progressively represented in the articles."*

The model summary in Appendix 8 shows that the R-square value, which indicates how much of the total variance in the dependent variable ('progressive\_approach') can be explained by the independent variable ('newspaper\_board\_composition'), is .134 ( $R^2 = 13,4\%$ ). Furthermore, the ANOVA table (Appendix 8) indicates that the regression model predicts the dependent variable significantly well since the p-value was found  $< .005$  ( $p = .000$ ). The ratio of women on the editorial board of the newspaper has a positive influence on the progressive way to represent female leaders in the articles since the value provided by the standardized beta value was found  $> 0$  ( $\beta = .367$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Finally, because the

unstandardized beta value, meaning the value representing the slope of the line between the predictor and the outcome variable was .080, the researcher can conclude that for every unit increase in % of women on board, the way to progressive representation of female leaders in the newspapers increases by 0.080 units. Therefore, H2a was retained.

The second assumption was that:

*H2b: “The ratio of women on editorial board of the newspaper has a negative influence on the way female leaders are traditionally represented in the articles.”*

The model summary in Appendix 8 shows that the R-square value, which indicates how much of the total variance in the dependent variable (‘traditional\_approach’) can be explained by the independent variable (‘newspaper\_board\_composition’), is .085 ( $R^2 = 8,5\%$ ). Furthermore, the ANOVA table (Appendix 8) indicates that the regression model predicts the dependent variable significantly well since the p-value was found  $< .005$  ( $p = .001$ ). The ratio of women on the editorial board of the newspaper has a negative influence on the traditional way to represent female leaders in the articles since the value provided by the standardized beta value was found  $< 0$  ( $\beta = -.291, p = .001$ ). Finally, because the unstandardized beta value, meaning the value representing the slope of the line between the predictor and the outcome variable was  $-.102$ , the researcher can conclude that for every unit increase in % of women on board, the way to the progressive representation of female leaders in the newspapers decreases by 1.02 units. Therefore, H2b was retained too.

Thirdly, to determine to what extent there is a statistically significant difference between the means in two unrelated groups (male/female bylines) in how they frame female leaders, the researcher performed a t-test analysis.

Furthermore, since the approaches identified throughout the research are two (‘traditional\_approach’ and ‘progressive\_approach’), two separate t-test analyses were performed, one per each dependent variable.

Therefore, the first assumption formulated was that:

*H3a: “Female journalists frame leaders more progressively.”*

As the group statistics table in Appendix 9 shows, among all the data collected, 59,2% of journalists were male [n=71] and 30,8% were female [n=37]. However, although females

are considerably fewer than males, interestingly, the mean related to how progressively they represent female leaders is higher for women ( $M = 3.40$ ) than for men ( $M = 2.93$ ). Besides, for checking how statistically significant they differ in representing female leaders progressively, the researcher looked at the independent sample test table (Appendix 9). Since the p-value of Levene's test was found  $> .005$  ( $p = .019$ ), the assumption of equal variances holds, meaning that Levene's test is significant. However, because the t-statistics p-value (2-tailed)  $> .05$  ( $p = .436$ ), no statistically significant difference was found between male and female journalists (Appendix 9).

To conclude, the t-test showed that there is no significant difference between male and female journalists regarding the extent to which they represent female leaders progressively. Therefore, the H3a was rejected.

The second assumption was that:

*H3b: "Male journalists frame leaders more traditionally."*

As the group statistics table in Appendix 9 shows, among all the data collected, 59,2% of journalists were male [ $n=71$ ] and 30,8% were female [ $n=37$ ]. However, from the statistics table, the mean related to how traditionally journalists represent female leaders is higher for women ( $M = 5.84$ ) than for men ( $M = 5.68$ ). Besides, for checking how statistically significant they differ in representing female leaders traditionally, the researcher looked at the independent sample test table (Appendix 9). Since the p-value of Levene's test was found  $> .005$  ( $p = .793$ ), the assumption of equal variances holds, meaning that Levene's test is significant. However, because the t-statistics p-value (2-tailed)  $> .05$  ( $p = .870$ ), no statistically significant difference was found between male and female journalists (Appendix 9).

To conclude, the t-test showed that there is no significant difference between male and female journalists regarding the extent to which they represent female leaders traditionally. Therefore, the H3b was rejected too.

### **4.3. Discussion study 2**

The outcomes provide interesting food for thought to the researcher, especially regarding the differences that emerged between the portrayal detected from the right- and left-wing newspapers. The two one way-ANCOVA analyses conducted to test H1 revealed

that there is no significant effect between the political orientation of newspapers and the extent to which they represent female leaders with a traditional approach, meaning that there is no statistical significance difference between left, center, and right-wing newspapers in resorting to the traditional approach when portraying female leaders. However, the same finding cannot be extended to the progressive perspective. Indeed, the analysis demonstrated that the newspapers belonging to the left-wing represent female leaders more progressively than those aligned to the center or right-wing. In particular, it is noteworthy that liberal newspapers emphasize more often aspects such as the competencies and professional background when they address female leaders, and they portray the subjects as an added value in terms of productivity in the organizations. This finding suggests that left-wing newspapers, although they resort to the same traditional formulas that characterize the more conservative sources, focus more on the objective skills and abilities of the subjects in question. At the same time, the fact that the more conservative newspapers such as ‘La Nazione’ and ‘Il Giorno’ tend to depict female leaders less progressively than sources like ‘Il Manifesto’ and ‘La Stampa’ confirms what the researcher had assumed in the first place. On the other hand, as the sensitivity about the gender issue is more theoretically linked to the left whose ideology is founded on social evolution and equality, a more outstanding commitment to keeping up with the intrinsic liberal values has been noted in the left-wing sources.

According to the literature, a not expected finding concerns the fact that newspapers belonging to the left-wing did not show any significant difference compared to the conservative ones when it comes to the traditional representation of female leaders.

In fact, it emerges that the left-wing newspapers do depict women traditionally as much as the more conservative ones. However, an aspect proved to be different concerns the use of the Italian language: it emerges that left-wing newspapers are significantly more careful to choose genderblind linguistic forms when addressing female leaders compared to the ones belonging to the right-wing, for example by avoiding the feminine article before women’ names or resorting to neutral grammatical forms not to emphasize the subjects’ gender.

Furthermore, according to the literature, the researcher assumes that the ratio of women on the Italian newspapers’ editorial board has an influence on the way female leaders are represented, meaning that the more women hold a position of power on the newspaper’s board, the more progressive the representation of female leaders in the articles is, and the fewer women are in the editorial boards, the more traditional the newspapers’ approach appears. Furthermore, in this case, a greater female representation on editorial boards is

associated with more progressive coverage of female leaders. On the other hand, the analysis demonstrates that the editorial boards led by more men tend to portray women relying on a shared patriarchal and traditional perspective.

Besides these two outcomes that allowed to retain both the hypotheses, an alarming data observed by the researcher concerns the low presence of women on the Italian newspapers' boards analyzed. As shown in Appendix 9, in fact, three newspapers (La Stampa, ItaliaOggi, and Il Giorno) have no women in the editorial boards, two of them (Corriere della Sera and La Nazione) have around 16% of women, and one (Manifesto) has approximately 37% of women on board. Finally, it is worth noting that this figure does not depend on the political orientation of the newspaper.

Finally, according to the literature, the researcher assumes a relationship between the gender of the journalists and the approach employed when they portray female leaders in the articles. However, the researcher found no correlation between the way female leaders are represented and the sex of the byline. For this reason, the hypothesis that the approach adopted towards women might be predicted based on the sex of the individual journalist is rejected.

## ***5. General discussion***

### ***5.1. Overview of findings***

The findings emerging from the whole study contributed to answering the following qualitative research question: “How are Italian female leaders framed by the Italian newspapers?”. Then, once having thematically analyzed the articles’ text, the researcher aimed at answering the following second quantitative research question: “How is the framing related to the newspaper’s political alignment, of women on the board, and sex of the journalist?”, by testing several hypotheses. In other words, because the language is largely recognized as having a fundamental role in the social construction of reality and thus of gender identities (Fairclough, 2014), the main purpose of the present research was to explore the attitudes of the Italian national press when addressing female leadership, by analyzing the articles and investigating the surrounding national socio-political context.

The patterns detected through the qualitative analysis revealed that there are two main approaches adopted by newspapers, namely ‘traditional’ and ‘progressive’, where the former includes a narrative that depicts woman leaders according to the patriarchal perspective outlined by Lämsä and Tiensuu (2002), and the second sees female leadership as an added value according to a moral and business perspective (Windscheid et al., 2018) and aims at normalizing women in positions of power. As the findings highlight, the Italian newspapers adopt the traditional approach with two main purposes: on the one hand, they represent woman leaders with agentic traits as the only way to validate their leadership role, on the other, they portray female leaders as feminine, to emphasize their exceptionality and, thus, inappropriateness in covering a leadership position. Second, great attention was paid to female leaders’ gender social roles rather than their leadership status. In this case, the tendency identified is to portray leaders according to their traditional communal traits, representing them as emotional, sexual objects, and reporting facts about their private life, reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes. It follows that the depiction of influential female leaders as gender performers instead of respectable and competent women leads inevitably to a limited representation of their merits and success.

As regards the traditional portrayal of female leaders, due to statistical analyses conducted in the second study, a deeper discussion was developed. It emerged that the extent to which newspapers resort to a traditional narrative is not significantly related to the political orientation. This outcome was expected to be found in the right-wing newspapers since the

culture of the right-wing political narrative is still strongly characterized by a view of gender relations and roles (Brescoll & LaFrance, 2004). In fact, the main perspective of conservative sympathizers (who are expected to consume right-wing media) relies on rhetoric that exalts traditional models of gender and family where the systematic issues related to gender are considered apolitical, individualized, and belong exclusively to the private sphere.

Additionally, in contrast to what the researcher assumed at first, the left-wing newspapers proved to adopt traditional formulas as much as the right-wing ones. A reason why the liberal newspapers struggle to demolish reactionary formulas when framing women in leadership might be identified with the decline of the Italian left, due to the structural weakness of the movements in recent years, the disintegration of its political culture and identity, and the crisis of its intrinsic democratic values (Shor et al., 2014). Therefore, the moderate position taken by the left Italian newspapers seems to reflect the lack of resoluteness that the political left has demonstrated over time. In addition to this structural problem, a further issue that might explain the significant employment of traditional portrayals by the left-wing newspapers, especially when choosing conventional linguistic and lexical forms, concerns the politically correct phenomenon which opposes the tendency to delete from the current Italian language uses considered discriminatory towards minorities (Nigoević & De Pol, 2019). Mainly because the left fails when it comes to providing political solutions to social injustices and inequalities, according to the study conducted by Nigoević and De Pol (2019), the left-wing Italian newspapers often happen to deal with the moderates who accuse them of being moralist and dangerously incoherent. This because the gender issue is considered a political and polarizing issue, which makes it more difficult to take a strong position, abandon and subvert the paradigm where male power and domination are founded, to remove structural gender inequalities.

In addition, the second approach detected through the first study was the progressive one, adopted with the aim to support the emancipation of women covering leadership positions and normalize their public role. This attitude emerged in two distinct circumstances. On the one hand, Italian newspapers demonstrate to portray women rationally, focusing on their professional background, emphasizing their merits, and illustrating qualities and competencies. On the other, the media prove, more or less explicitly, to take a favorable stand towards the female leadership in general. In this regard, two different perspectives have been identified: one related to the moral approach that advocates women's empowerment as a tool for progressivity in social terms, the other regarding the business value that women can bring to the leadership.



About the progressive representation, the second study confirmed what the researcher assumed at first, meaning that the political orientation of the newspapers might predict the extent to which female leaders are progressively represented. In fact, compared to the right-wing ones, a greater progressive representation of women has been recorded in the left-wing sources. This can be explained by the fact that the institutions and traditional media today must deal with changing the expectations of the public opinion which is increasingly mindful and attentive towards the issue (Tota, 2008). The main factor contributing to this evolution is the advent of social media that, according to Lehman-Wilzig and Seletzky (2010), represents the driving force to the anthropological change that substantially impacts the cognitive styles and mindset of people. Indeed, most of today's new media scene consists of social networks, defined as a continuous conversation that promotes new narratives and favors a more progressive representation due to the diversity of sources and points of view. This would not be possible with the exclusive consumption of traditional media. As evidence, a recent comparative study on the female leadership conducted by Capecchi (2018) shows a different trend between mainstream media and, for instance, Instagram, in terms of the choice of the news in the agenda, the approach, the room dedicated, the resonance. In 2018, therefore, Capecchi suggested that the male-centric professional culture of Italian journalism that influences all the production phases of information could change only through a systematic revision of the language, the style, imaginary, symbolic and power relations that are appealing and largely shared by a new audience that is more and more familiar with feminist movements and increasingly engaged with progressive cultural transformations.

For this reason, one can conclude that the left-wing newspapers are more watchful to publicly employ a more progressive approach to meet the expectations and priorities of their own readership. An important element identified in this regard was their awareness towards using a not discriminatory language. In fact, according to the findings, left-wing newspapers use more genderblind forms when writing articles compared to the right-wing ones that, instead, tend to emphasize the sex of female leaders when it is not necessary (e.g., reporting the feminine article before their names).

A further element that seemed to be significantly related to the kind of female leadership representation was the ratio of women on the editorial board. Indeed, it was found that the more women are present in the editorial boards, the more progressive the representation of the newspaper is. On the other hand, the more men compose the editorial board, the more traditional the newspaper's approach is. In this concern, consistently with the critical mass theory of Kanter (1977) that claims that to suppress a social convention and thus

produce a social change considered socially useful on a large scale, the minority group must have visibility and decision-making power in the executive. According to this conception, the number of women in a decision-making group within a largely male-dominated environment such as the newspapers' editorial boards (which, according to each newspapers' websites include the following professional figures: managing director, deputy directors, do-directors, editorial and digital directors, central editors) was found positively significant in terms of producing a narrative that favors woman leaders and empowers them. In addition, observing the statistics, the ratio of women on board in the Italian newspapers analyzed was generally quite low, if any at all. Moreover, it emerged that the figure relative to the presence of women on the editorial board is not significantly related to the political orientation of the newspaper. This figure is in line with the issue of female underrepresentation that affect the Italian left political spectrum described above.

A third factor considered a predictor of the approach adopted towards female leaders was the sex of the journalists. The findings, however, prove that there is no correlation between the two variables. This finding can be explained by two leading causes, both related to the identity and subjectivity of the journalist or reporter. First, as Shor et al. (2015) suggest, the fact that Italian newspapers predominantly focus on the very top of occupational and social hierarchies, and men occupy an overwhelming majority of these positions, limits the impact of the singular journalists on the media routines and narrative's styles. Indeed, as argued by Breed (1955), often, journalists' stories reflect newsroom policies and the editorial line and style more than their personal beliefs. On the other hand, as Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010) claimed, the choice of writing solutions to use and how to frame female leaders might depend exclusively on the writer's context and sensitivity. For instance, the use of inclusive lexical choices such as the over-extended feminine (Robustelli et al., 2014) can be either a journalist's attempt to overcome the established norm of the neutral masculine or an editorial choice.

Finally, although not included in the purpose of the study, it is worth emphasizing a substantial difference between the representation of male and female leaders observed throughout the analysis. Whereas women in leadership are often still considered outsiders by the mass media and portrayed through a stereotypical narrative, the same cannot be said about men. This appears evident especially when the researcher focused on the distinct linguistic choices adopted by the journalists when addressing the two genders. However, as the literature illustrated, these lexical choices are often considered grammatically legitimate and cannot exclusively be ascribed to the writer but rather to a static language that struggles

to evolve. In this regard, although some dissimilarities have been recorded, the fact that the newspapers belonging to the right and left-wing have not shown outstanding differences in terms of female leaders' representation leaves the discussion open and accentuates the need for an ideological review and adhesion to reformism by politics, the media, and the mass. The matter around gender equality in leadership must be put at the center of an inclusive discussion where social constructs and language use must be questioned constructively.

## ***5.2. Limitations and future research***

While this research was conducted, few limitations occurred. Although the 6 sources were selected among the most influential Italian newspapers, several important ones were excluded from the sample. If added to the analysis, they might have shown a more comprehensive picture and increase the validity. Furthermore, despite the mix of methodologies guarantees a deeper analysis, the quantitative study was based on the themes detected in the first study through the subjective interpretation of the researcher. The contribution of a second Italian speaker coder, then, would have been convenient to increase the overall research's reliability.

Besides, because the subjects that make up the current study's sample belong to different business and organizational realms, for future research, it is recommended to use the dataset built for this research to investigate how and to what extent the representation changes regarding the different leaderships' areas, such as sport or politics. A further recommendation to extend the study is to include different types of media such as the television that, as Brogi and Carlini (2020) reveal, nowadays is still very much consumed given the powerful and symbolic role that it plays in Italy. In addition, to investigate whether and how differently Italian mainstream and nontraditional media address female leaders, a comparison between press and news media channels is recommended.

To conclude, a final recommendation would be to use the dataset designed in this research and employ it to compare with other countries.

## ***5.3. Practical implications***

The media make choices on how they represent the goings-on in the external environment, and this representation can then be seen to have political, societal, and moral implications. Furthermore, the power used by the women and men who communicate in the media is discursive by nature. Consequently, the readers are likely to base their evaluations

on the media texts, or newspapers' articles like in this case. For this reason, several are the consideration that can be done according to the findings of the present research.

First of all, according to the study's findings, it emerges that to best serve the public audience and society in general as truth objective representers, news media need a broad array of voices and perspectives. The findings themselves suggest that the presence of an equitable number of women in the newspaper boards might significantly influence the narratives and the sensitivity given towards social issues. Therefore, an effective solution is needed to end this culturally based issue concerning the misrepresentation, objectification, and victimization of women. Because the social approval is accrued by an individual when enough people express their attitudes and behave similarly, besides questioning the intrinsic social norms, it is necessary to change the narrative of the mass media.

Finally, since the Italian language is based on an androcentric principle according to which man is normally the parameter around which the linguistic universe revolves and organizes itself, press and publishing houses are recommended to follow the guidelines reported in the "Recommandations" chapter in Sabatini's work (1987), designed for the news media. Indeed, according to the author (1987), through the information channels, styles and narratives, individuals form and definitively fix their own perception of reality and can therefore be more influenced by images and stereotypes that perilously address men and women in an asymmetrical and unequal way.

## ***6. General conclusions***

In conclusion, by analyzing the relationship between genders and media, the present research provided insights that could be useful for exercising a quality communication practice, which gives meaning to the communication relationship, the production of information and the construction of more inclusive and equal social constructs. Furthermore, from the thesis emerged the conception that conceives language not only as a simple communication tool, but also and above all as an instrument of perception and classification of reality, sometimes linked to a discourse of political ideology and social belonging.

Finally, at the present time, where enormous social changes are occurring and are taking place concerning the gender roles issue, works like the present thesis might be beneficial in terms of encouraging and refining communication practices, by giving indications for a liberation from trivializing and mutilating stereotypes and linguistic signals that reveal and reinforce male dominance.

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## 8. Appendices

### 8.1. Appendix 1: Overview political alignment of the 6 Italian national newspapers

	Newspapers' name and link	Media corporate owner	Political alignment
1	La Stampa <a href="http://www.lastampa.it">www.lastampa.it</a>	GEDI Gruppo Editoriale S.p.A.	Left-wing
2	Il Manifesto <a href="http://www.ilmanifesto.it">www.ilmanifesto.it</a>	Il Nuovo Manifesto Società Cooperativa Editrice	Left-wing
3	Corriere Della Sera <a href="http://www.corriere.it">www.corriere.it</a>	RCS MediaGroup	Centre
4	Italia Oggi <a href="http://www.italiaoggi.it">www.italiaoggi.it</a>	Class Editori S.p.A.	Centre
5	Il Giorno <a href="http://www.ilgiorno.it">www.ilgiorno.it</a>	Ed. Editoriale Nazionale S.r.l.	Right-wing
6	La Nazione <a href="http://www.lanazione.it">www.lanazione.it</a>	Monrif. Group	Right-wing

### 8.2. Appendix 2: Entire sample of the qualitative study, information subjects and articles

1. Laura Boldrini				
Event: she becomes the first female President of the Chamber of Deputies of the Italian Parliament				
16/03/2013				
	Newspapers	Title article	Date of publication	Word count
1	La Stampa	Boldrini, dai profughi alla Camera	17/03/2013	802
2	Il Manifesto	Bologna, Boldrini fa la pace	18/03/2013	645
3	Corriere Della Sera	La non politica e i suoi calcoli; le elezioni appaiono più vicine	17/03/2013	629
4	Italia Oggi	Neo-presidentessa in quota Sel, o sinistra caviar; Giornalista, funzionaria Onu, premi di qui premi di là, discorsi frou-frou, emozionata e risoluta	19/03/2013	592
5	Il Giorno	Boldrini, tirata d'orecchie ai Grillini: il 25 Aprile è più vivo che mai; Il presidente della Camera Boldrini per la prima volta a Milano	18/03/2013	597
6	La Nazione	"Difendo i diritti degli uomini" la nuova scommessa di Lura dall'ONU a Montecitorio	17/03/2013	595

## 2. Giorgia Meloni

Event: she, as a leader of the main Italian right-wing party, achieves great success from the regional elections  
10/02/2019

	Newspapers	Title article	Date of publication	Word count
7	La Stampa	Meloni e Toti archiviano Berlusconi “Dopo le Europee governo con la Lega”	15/04/2019	721
8	Il Manifesto	Per il centrodestra scelta lacerante. Meloni:” Asteniamoci tutti insieme”	04/02/2019	670
9	Corriere Della Sera	Ora Meloni evoca l’astensione: prima squadra e programma	10/02/2019	434
10	Italia Oggi	Fratelli (d'Italia) ma con Draghi; Nel partito di Giorgia Meloni la corrente ex-Msi contesta la scelta di opposizione al governo	16/02/2019	1083
11	Il Giorno	Fiducia ok, il governo Draghi dispiega le vele	15/03/2019	706
12	La Nazione	Giorgia Meloni da lezioni di stile al professore	29/03/2019	809

## 3. Samantha Cristoforetti

Event: she is the first Italian female astronaut who goes to a space mission  
23/11/2014

	Newspapers	Title article	Date of publication	Word count
13	La Stampa	“Astrosamantha” è in orbita; perfetto il lancio ella Sojuz	24/11/2014	586
14	Il Manifesto	Cristoforetti nell’orbita della pandemia	25/11/2014	1204
15	Corriere Della Sera	Samantha svela il sonno	24/11/2014	545
16	Italia Oggi	Samantha Cristoforetti è arrivata nella Stazione spaziale	24/11/2014	416
17	Il Giorno	Samantha, prima italiana tra le stelle	25/11/2014	586
18	La Nazione	Samantha, prima italiana in orbita “Vi porto con me nello spazio”. Stazione internazionale, partita dal Kazakistan la navicella Soyuz	24/11/2014	506

#### 4. Sarah Gama

Event: she becomes the first woman VP of AIC (Italian Footballers Association)

01/12/2020

	<b>Newspapers</b>	<b>Title article</b>	<b>Date of publication</b>	<b>Word count</b>
19	La Stampa	Show mondiale, il calcio è delle donne: “Abbiamo capito che si può osare”	09/12/2020	540
20	Il Manifesto	Le donne del calcio avanzano, per gentile concessione	06/01/2021	954
21	Corriere Della Sera	Italia da 10	01/12/2020	722
22	Italia Oggi	Alla Boldrini non sembra vero: “In campo ci sono 22 giocatrici, un'arbitra e due guardalinee col reggiseno”	18/12/2020	564
23	Il Giorno	La sindacalista e la regina degli arbitri Donne al potere nel calcio maschile; Sara Gama nuova vicepresidente dell'Aic	01/12/2020	599
24	La Nazione	Montalcino rende omaggio all'azzurra Sara Gama	16/12/2020	403

#### 5. Virginia Raggi

Event: she becomes the first female Mayor of Rome

19/06/2016

	<b>Newspapers</b>	<b>Title article</b>	<b>Date of publication</b>	<b>Word count</b>
25	La Stampa	Virginia accerchiata sulle nomine. Il sindaco prova a resistere	30/06/2016	768
26	Il Manifesto	Raggi si blindava e rimuove il vicesindaco	24/06/2016	612
27	Corriere Della Sera	Virginia, ascesa ed incognite in tanti le chiederanno di mantenere le promesse. Il ritratto.	20/06/2016	776
28	Italia Oggi	Primi annusamenti in Capitale; Alla Lateranense fra la neosindaca grillina, Virginia Raggi, e gli esponenti del Vaticano	24/06/2016	674
29	Il Giorno	La giunta Raggi nasce solo il 7 luglio. Sparisce la 'penale' per gli assessori; La sindaca di Roma ha ricevuto molti no, Lo Cicero torna in bilico	24/06/2016	630
30	La Nazione	Grillini boom, conquistata Roma Raggi: “Comincia una nuova era”; Asfalta Giachetti e apre al dialogo: pronta a collaborare con tutti	20/06/2016	666



### 8.3. Appendix 3: Step-by-step procedure applied to one article as an example: Trial coding frame and segmentation

Subject: Laura Boldrini

Article title “Boldrini, dai profughi alla Camera” (Boldrini, from refugees to the Chamber)

Source: La Stampa

Unit of Analysis	Description	Preliminary codes
- Dovremo combattere la sofferenza sociale ( <i>We will have to fight social suffering</i> )	- “We” as subject. All must make their part to make the worlds more equal, women included (the subject is a woman)	- Acknowledgment of gender inequalities and asking for everyone to make their part – professional.
- Parla di diritti, inizia ogni frase con un “dovremo”, e per la prima volta si ode l’inaudito, il mai detto, il noi, e la fraternità, responsabilità, dignità ( <i>She talks about rights, begins each sentence with a “we must”, and for the first time we hear the unheard of, the never said, the “us”, and fraternity, responsibility, dignity</i> )	- Exceptional role of woman who claims for the first time that it’s time to work all together to fill the gap and take responsibilities	- Woman awareness of the gap that everyone must contribute to fill - Newspaper perspective: exceptionality of woman’s role
- Non è Francesco, è Laura Boldrini ( <i>It’s not Francisco (the Pope), it’s Laura Boldrini</i> )	- Comparison with the Pope (woman see as a pure soul, emotionality rather than rationality)	- Communal characteristics - Comparison with man leader
- “Il” nuovo presidente della Camera (2) ( <i>The new president of the chamber of deputies</i> )	- Use of the masculine definite article before the role (president) hold by a woman (correct: “la” nuova presidente)	- Use of masculine article/agentive when addressing to women: traditional/patriarchal standards
- Non ha avuto paura, quando ieri mattina alle 7 e mezzo le hanno chiesto il via libera ( <i>She was not afraid when yesterday morning at 7.30 am they asked her for the go-ahead</i> )	- “She was not afraid”: assumption/insinuation that she should have been afraid for holding such an institutional leader position of power (male-perspective)	- Woman portrayed as an exception, because she presents masculine traits
- Stretta in una giacchina nera ( <i>Huddled up in her small black jacket</i> )	- Focus on her outfit → objectivation of the woman leader’s body (instrumental role)  - “Giacchina”: diminutive of “giacca” (form which is traditionally used with kids → subordination) – objectification	- Outfit: objectification - Giacchina (use of the diminutive form): emotionality and subordination + outfit (objectification)
- Perché è bella, Laura Boldrini è bella almeno quanto le sue parole ( <i>Because she is beautiful, Laura Boldrini is as beautiful as at least her words</i> ) - “E quel suo volto espressivo” ( <i>And that expressive face of hers</i> )	- “She’s beautiful, as much as her words” → reference to her physical appearance (objectivation of the body)	- Beautiful: sexualization (objectification)
- (Sta) accanto a chi è caduto, anche al tavolo, in pizzeria, la sera con gli amici a Roma ( <i>She stands next to those who have fallen, even at the table, in a pizzeria, in the evening with friends in Rome</i> ) - Per lei non c’è separazione, non c’è un prima e un dopo, tra la vita e il lavoro ( <i>For her there is no separation, there is not a before and after, between life and work</i> )	- Reference to her private sphere - No boundaries between her private and public life (traditional approach)	- Reference to the private sphere (irrelevant information)
- E poi un po’ è vero quel che delle donne pensano di solito gli uomini, la vita di ogni	- “It is what men usually think about women” → prioritizing what “men” as the dominant	- Male perspective: exception - Mother, housewife: private

<p>         donna è come una casa  <i>(And then what men usually think of women is true, every woman's life is like a home)</i>          - La vita di Laura Boldrini è come la sua casa  <i>(Laura Boldrini's life is like her home)</i>          - L'ha trovata (la casa) sul giornaleto di annunci "PortaPortese"  <i>(She found it (the house) in the "PortaPortese" advertisement magazine)</i>          - Quella (la stanza) della figlia ventenne Anastasia che trepida ad ogni esame di università (e invece naturalmente è bravissima come la mamma che si laureò con 110 in legge)  <i>(That (the room) of the twenty-year-old daughter Anastasia, who is anxious at every university exam (and instead of course she is very good like her mother who graduated with 110 in law)</i>          - Incinta di Anastasia, le diedero l'incarico  <i>(Pregnant with Anastasia, they gave her the job)</i> </p>	<p>         group see women (stereotyping women according to the traditional masculine values)          - Women's life is like a house. Laura Boldrini's life is like her house → intrusion into her private sphere + association women/housewife          - Information related to her private sphere → violation of privacy and not taken seriously          - Boldrini framed as a good mother          - Focus on the fact that she got the job while she was pregnant       </p>	<p>sphere</p>
<p>         - Boldrini viene dall'Italia di Matteo Ricci e dei Marco Polo  <i>(Boldrini comes from the Italy of Matteo Ricci and the Marco Polos)</i>          - He un'etica del lavoro e (...) qualcosa in più di pulsante, il cuore  <i>(She has a work ethic and (...) something more pulsating, the heart)</i> </p>	<p>         - Choice of two Italian male historical figures such as Matteo Ricci and Marco Polo as a comparison (her success sounds exceptional) → Male dominant group          - Beside her devotion to work and work ethic, she has something more: a beating heart (emotionality → communal characteristics)       </p>	<p>         - Comparison with man leaders          - Emphasis on her communal characteristics: emotionality (she has a big heart)       </p>

#### 8.4. Appendix 4: Final thematic map

Theme	Overarching theme	Main concept	Unit of analysis	Codes	Examples of textual cues
1. Traditional approach	1A. Traditional representation of female leaders	1AA. Female leaders represented as masculine	Sentences/ words	<b>Emphasis on the subject's agentic traits</b> (women are leaders when, according to the double-blind paradox, they embody men's leadership style and behavior)	"Oggi è come una guerra e (...) Meloni deve combatterla" <i>[Today it's like a war and Meloni must fight this]</i>
			Linguistic choices	<b>Use of masculine gendered titles/agentive nouns</b> assigned to female leaders	"Capitano dell'aeronautica militare" <i>[Air force's captain]</i>
		1AB. Feminine leaders represented as exceptions	Sentences/ words	<b>Underscoring the female leaders' gender/feminine traits</b> (they are leaders while they shouldn't be)	"Donna, per giunta giovane" <i>[Woman, and even young]</i>
			Linguistic choices	<b>Use of the feminine article before women's name</b> (underscoring the gender to inform the reader about the subject's gender)	"La Raggi"
		<b>Calling the subjects by their proper name only/nickname</b> (women are not taken seriously – unprofessionally)		"Samantha"	
		1B. Traditional representation of female leaders as gender role performers	1BA. Female leaders as emotional subjects	Sentences/ words	<b>Women represented as emotional</b> (communal traits)
	Sentences/ words				
			Sentences/ words	<b>References to the subject's domestic sphere</b>	"Perché è bella, Laura Boldrini è bella almeno quanto le sue parole" <i>[Because she is beautiful, Laura Boldrini is as beautiful as at least her words]</i>
	<b>References to the subject's domestic sphere</b>				- (Sta) accanto a chi è caduto, anche al tavolo, in pizzeria, la sera con gli amici a Roma <i>[She stands next to those who have fallen, even at the table, in a pizzeria, in the evening with friends in Rome]</i>
	2. Progressive approach	2A. Professional representation of female leaders	2AA. Female leaders represented as professional	Sentences/ words	Neutral representation of the subjects who cover leadership positions because of their <b>competencies/professional background</b>
Linguistic choice				<b>Use of genderblind forms</b>	"Di Meloni"
2B. Progressive representation of gender diversity in leadership		2BA. Advocating women's emancipation in leadership	Sentences/ words	<b>The issue of gender inequality</b> is acknowledged	"Deve mediare con gruppi di pressione molto forti" <i>[She must mediate with very strong pressure groups]</i>
			Sentences/ words	Supporting women's <b>redemption</b>	"Si tratta di un passo importante per il riconoscimento dei diritti del mondo dello sport" <i>[This is an important step for the recognition of the rights of the]</i>

					<i>world of sport]</i>
			Sentences/ words	Woman leaders are represented as a <b>role model</b> for other women	“Samantha è un modello per tutte le donne” <i>[Samantha is a role model for all the women]</i>
		<b>2BB. Gender diversity in leadership portrayed as a value</b>	Sentences/ words	Gender diversity in leadership (women in leadership) is defined as <b>a value</b>	“L’Italia al femminile è arrivata dove gli azzurri hanno fallito” <i>[Italy for women has arrived where the Azzurri have failed</i>

## 8.5. Appendix 5: Coding framework implemented on Qualtrics

### Newspaper's information

Q1 - What is the topic covered by the article?

- Laura Boldrini
  - Giorgia Meloni
  - Samantha Cristoforetti
  - Sara Gama
  - Virginia Raggi
  - Lucia Azzolina
  - Chiara Ferragni
  - Fabiola Gianotti
  - Antonella Polimeni
  - Carola Rackete
- 

Q2 - What is the name of the newspaper?

- La Stampa
  - Il Manifesto
  - Corriere della Sera
  - ItaliaOggi
  - La Nazione
  - Il Giorno
- 

Q3 - What is the newspaper's political orientation?

- Left-wing
  - Centre
  - Right-wing
- 

Q4 - What is the % of women on the newspaper's board?

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### Article's information

Q5 - What is the article's title?

---

Q6 - What date was the article published?

---

Q7 - How many words does the article have?

---

Q8 - What is the name of the the article's author?

---

Q9 - What is the byline's sex?

- Male
- Female
- ND

---

### **Traditional representation of female leaders**

#### **- Female leaders represented as masculine**

Q10 - How many times does the article emphasis the subject's agentic traits?

---

Q11 - How many times does the article use masculine gendered titles/agentives?

---

#### **- Feminine leaders represented as exceptions**

Q12 - How many times does the article underscore the female leaders' gender/communal traits?

---

Q13 - How many times does the article use the feminine article before their name?

---

Q14 - How many times does the article call the subject by their proper name/nickname?

---

---

### **Traditional representation of female leaders as gender role performers**

#### **- Female leaders represented as emotional subjects**

Q15 - How many times does the article stereotype women as emotional?

---

#### **- Objectification of female leaders**

Q16 - How many times does the article emphasis the subject's outfit?

---

Q17 - How many times does the article sexualize the subject's body?

---

#### **- Female leaders represented in the private sphere**

Q18 - How many times does the article invade the subject's private life?

---

## Professional representation of female leaders

### - Female leaders represented as professional

Q19 - How many times does the article emphasis female leaders' competencies and professional background?

---

Q20 - How many times does the article use gender blind forms?

---

Q21 - How many times does the article advocate women's redemption?

---

### - Progressive representation of gender diversity in leadership

Q22 How many times does the article portray women as a role model for other women?

---

Q23 How many times does the article define gender diversity in leadership as a value?

---

### 8.6. Appendix 6 – Example sample units – Study 2: La Stampa

	Newspaper	Subject	Article titles
1	La Stampa	Laura Boldrini	1. Boldrini, dai profughi alla Camera
			2. La Boldrini decide nuovi tagli alla Camera
2		Giorgia Meloni	3. Meloni e Toti archiviano Berlusconi “Dopo le Europee governo con la Lega”
			4. Meloni rilancia dopo il boom “Un'altra maggioranza c'è Bastiamo noi e il Carroccio”
3		Samantha Cristoforetti	5. Astrosamantha è in orbita; perfetto il lancio ella Sojuz
			6. Samantha pronta al decollo. Domani il sogno diventa realtà
4		Sara Gama	7. Show mondiale, il calcio è delle donne: “Abbiamo capito che si può osare”
			8. Il capitano che può portare un'Italia ai Mondiali di calcio
5		Virginia Raggi	9. Virginia accerchiata sulle nomine. Il sindaco prova a resistere
			10. A Roma la valanga Raggi. Non importa che sia donna conta solo che sia del M5S
6		Lucia Azzolina	11. La conferma del premier Conte: “Lucia Azzolina nuovo ministro della Scuola”
			12. Le maestre beffate dal governo. È colpa dell'Azzolina?
7		Chiara Ferragni	13. Chiara Ferragni da lezioni di trucco. Tutte in fila per un selfie a 650 euro
			14. Tutti in coda per i consigli della Ferragni.
8		Fabiola Gianotti	15. “Io, Lady della fisica, sogno una scienza per unire il mondo”
			16. Un sostegno a fondo perduto per dare futuro alle start up
9		Antonia Polimeni	17. Università Sapienza, si vota per un nuovo rettore. Successo del voto online
			18. Roma, alla Sapienza la prima retrice: “Ascolterò e esplorerò, accettando il rischio di sbagliare”
10		Carola Rackete	19. Carola Rackete interrogata ad Agrigento: “Contenta di aver spiegato”
			20. Non convalidato l'arresto di Carola Rackete: è libera. Ma il prefetto firma l'espulsione



## 8.7. Appendix 7: H1 SPSS outputs

### H1a – One- way ANCOVA SPSS outputs

**Table 1:**

#### Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: To what extent does the article represent female leaders in a traditional way?

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	360.017 <sup>a</sup>	3	120.006	6.064	.001	.136
Intercept	4.917	1	4.917	.248	.619	.002
article_words	280.017	1	280.017	14.149	.000	.109
newspaper_orientation	119.921	2	59.961	3.030	.052	.050
Error	2295.683	116	19.790			
Total	6352.000	120				
Corrected Total	2655.700	119				

a. R Squared = .136 (Adjusted R Squared = .113)

**Table 2: Comparing each variable included in “traditional\_approach” (Independent t-test analysis)**

	Group Statistics				
	What is the newspaper's political orientation?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
1 - How many times the article emphasises the subject's agentic traits?	Left-wing	40	.68	1.047	.166
	Right-wing	40	.75	.840	.133
2 - How many times the article uses masculine gendered titles/agentives?	Left-wing	40	.73	1.552	.245
	Right-wing	40	.63	1.125	.178
3 - How many times the article underscores the female leaders' gender/communal traits?	Left-wing	40	.88	1.265	.200
	Right-wing	40	1.10	1.297	.205
4 - How many times the article uses the feminine article before their name?	Left-wing	40	.20	.516	.082
	Right-wing	40	.68	1.163	.184
5 - How many times the article calls the subject by their proper name/nickname?	Left-wing	40	.90	1.646	.260
	Right-wing	40	.78	1.310	.207
6 - How many times the article stereotypes women as emotional?	Left-wing	40	.53	1.154	.183
	Right-wing	40	.63	.979	.155
7 - How many times the article emphasises the subject's outfit?	Left-wing	40	.05	.221	.035
	Right-wing	40	.13	.335	.053
8 - How many times the article sexualises the subject's body?	Left-wing	40	.13	.404	.064
	Right-wing	40	.18	.594	.094
9 - How many times the article invade the subject's private life?	Left-wing	40	.48	1.109	.175
	Right-wing	40	.70	1.224	.193

**Independent Samples Test**

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Differenc e	Std. Error Differenc e	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
1 - How many times the article emphasises the subject's agentic traits?	Equal variances assumed	.710	.402	-.353	78	.725	-.075	.212	-.498	.348
	Equal variances not assumed			-.353	74.481	.725	-.075	.212	-.498	.348
2 - How many times the article uses masculine gendered titles/agentives?	Equal variances assumed	.428	.515	.330	78	.742	.100	.303	-.503	.703
	Equal variances not assumed			.330	71.116	.742	.100	.303	-.504	.704
3 - How many times the article underscores the female leaders' gender/communal traits?	Equal variances assumed	.014	.905	-.786	78	.435	-.225	.286	-.795	.345
	Equal variances not assumed			-.786	77.950	.435	-.225	.286	-.795	.345
4 - How many times the article uses the feminine article before their name?	Equal variances assumed	16.241	<b>.000</b>	-2.360	78	.021	-.475	.201	-.876	-.074
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.360	53.796	<b>.022</b>	-.475	.201	-.878	-.072
5 - How many times the article calls the subject by their proper name/nickname?	Equal variances assumed	1.080	.302	.376	78	.708	.125	.333	-.537	.787
	Equal variances not assumed			.376	74.279	.708	.125	.333	-.538	.788
6 - How many times the article stereotypes women as emotional?	Equal variances assumed	.334	.565	-.418	78	.677	-.100	.239	-.576	.376
	Equal variances not assumed			-.418	75.972	.677	-.100	.239	-.577	.377
7 - How many times the article emphasises the subject's outfit?	Equal variances assumed	5.973	.017	-1.183	78	.241	-.075	.063	-.201	.051
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.183	67.499	.241	-.075	.063	-.202	.052
8 - How many times the article sexualises the subject's body?	Equal variances assumed	.893	.348	-.440	78	.661	-.050	.114	-.276	.176
	Equal variances not assumed			-.440	68.730	.661	-.050	.114	-.277	.177
9 - How many times the article invade the subject's private life?	Equal variances assumed	.438	.510	-.862	78	.392	-.225	.261	-.745	.295
	Equal variances not assumed			-.862	77.258	.392	-.225	.261	-.745	.295

**H1b – One- way ANCOVA SPSS outputs and post-hoc test**

**Table 3:**

**Tests of Between-Subjects Effects**

Dependent Variable: To what extent does the article represent female leaders in a progressive way?

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	206.714 <sup>a</sup>	3	68.905	9.776	.000	.202
Intercept	4.481	1	4.481	.636	.427	.005
article_words	69.564	1	69.564	9.869	.002	.078
newspaper_orientation	91.362	2	45.681	6.481	.002	.101
Error	817.611	116	7.048			
Total	2159.000	120				
Corrected Total	1024.325	119				

a. R Squared = .202 (Adjusted R Squared = .181)

**Pairwise Comparisons**

Dependent Variable: To what extent does the article represent female leaders in a progressive way?

(I) What is the newspaper's political orientation?	(J) What is the newspaper's political orientation?	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig. <sup>b</sup>	95% Confidence Interval for Difference <sup>b</sup>	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Left-wing	Centre	1.813 <sup>*</sup>	.595	.009	.369	3.258
	Right-wing	1.962 <sup>*</sup>	.618	.006	.461	3.463
Centre	Left-wing	-1.813 <sup>*</sup>	.595	.009	-3.258	-.369
	Right-wing	.148	.609	1.000	-1.331	1.628
Right-wing	Left-wing	-1.962 <sup>*</sup>	.618	.006	-3.463	-.461
	Centre	-.148	.609	1.000	-1.628	1.331

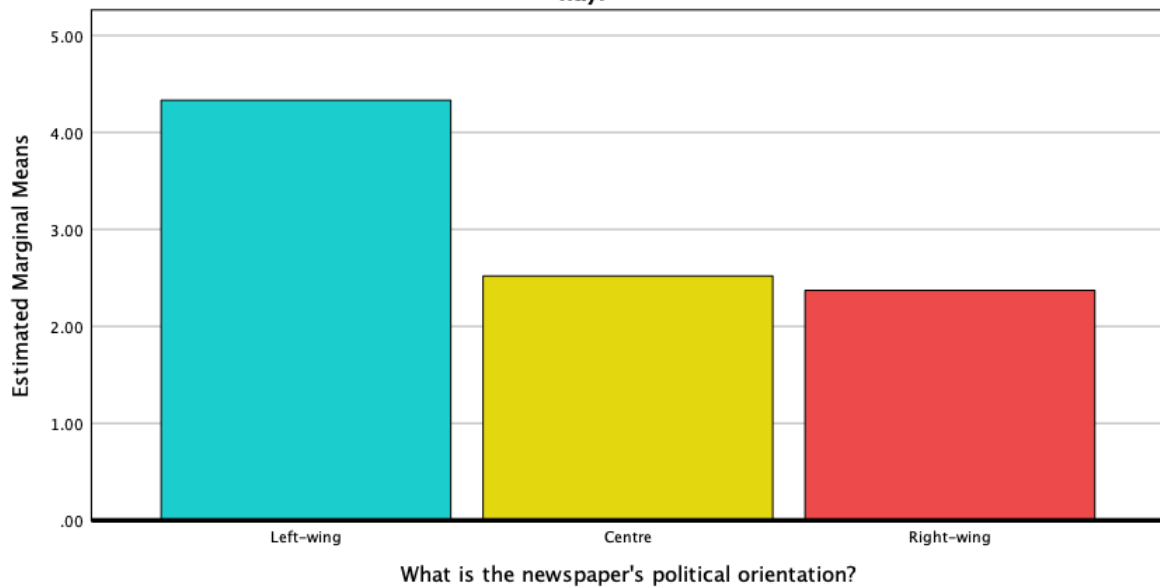
Based on estimated marginal means

\*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

b. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Bonferroni.

**Table 4:**

**Estimated Marginal Means of To what extent does the article represent female leaders in a progressive way?**



Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: How many words does the article have? = 587.017

**Table 5: Comparing each variable included in “progressive\_approach” (Independent t-test analysis)**

	Group Statistics				
	What is the newspaper's political orientation?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
1 - How many times the article emphasises female leaders' competencies and professional background?	Left-wing	40	1.58	1.375	.217
	Right-wing	40	.80	1.067	.169
2 - How many times the article uses gender blind forms?	Left-wing	40	1.43	1.752	.277
	Right-wing	40	.55	1.176	.186
3 - How many times the article advocate women's redemption?	Left-wing	40	.68	.971	.154
	Right-wing	40	.33	.829	.131
4 - How many times the article portrays women as a role model for other women?	Left-wing	40	.33	.829	.131
	Right-wing	40	.20	.608	.096
5 - How many times the article defines gender diversity in leadership as a value?	Left-wing	40	.55	.783	.124
	Right-wing	40	.18	.385	.061

### Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
1 - How many times the article emphasises female leaders' competencies and professional background?	Equal variances assumed	6.833	.011	2.816	78	.006	.775	.275	.227	1.323
	Equal variances not assumed			2.816	73.461	.006	.775	.275	.227	1.323
2 - How many times the article uses gender blind forms?	Equal variances assumed	12.753	.001	2.622	78	.010	.875	.334	.211	1.539
	Equal variances not assumed			2.622	68.190	.011	.875	.334	.209	1.541
3 - How many times the article advocate women's redemption?	Equal variances assumed	6.258	.014	1.734	78	.087	.350	.202	-.052	.752
	Equal variances not assumed			1.734	76.115	.087	.350	.202	-.052	.752
4 - How many times the article portrays women as a role model for other women?	Equal variances assumed	1.771	.187	.769	78	.444	.125	.162	-.198	.448
	Equal variances not assumed			.769	71.538	.444	.125	.162	-.199	.449
5 - How many times the article defines gender diversity in leadership as a value?	Equal variances assumed	24.115	.000	2.719	78	.008	.375	.138	.100	.650
	Equal variances not assumed			2.719	56.808	.009	.375	.138	.099	.651

## 8.8. Appendix 8: H2 SPSS outputs

### H2a – Simple linear regression analysis SPSS outputs

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.367 <sup>a</sup>	.134	.127	2.74115

a. Predictors: (Constant), What is the % of women on the newspaper's board?

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	137.684	1	137.684	18.324	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	886.641	118	7.514		
	Total	1024.325	119			

a. Dependent Variable: To what extent does the article represent female leaders in a progressive way?

b. Predictors: (Constant), What is the % of women on the newspaper's board?

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.160	.329		6.564	.000
	What is the % of women on the newspaper's board?	.080	.019	.367	4.281	.000

a. Dependent Variable: To what extent does the article represent female leaders in a progressive way?

**H2b – Simple linear regression analysis SPSS outputs**

**Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.291 <sup>a</sup>	.085	.077	4.53904

a. Predictors: (Constant), What is the % of women on the newspaper's board?

**ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	224.556	1	224.556	10.899	.001 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	2431.144	118	20.603		
	Total	2655.700	119			

a. Dependent Variable: To what extent does the article represent female leaders in a traditional way?

b. Predictors: (Constant), What is the % of women on the newspaper's board?

**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	6.719	.545		12.329	.000
	What is the % of women on the newspaper's board?	-.102	.031	-.291	-3.301	.001

a. Dependent Variable: To what extent does the article represent female leaders in a traditional way?

**8.9. Appendix 9: H3 SPSS outputs**

**H3a – Independent t-test analysis SPSS outputs**

**Group Statistics**

	What is the byline's sex?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
To what extent does the article represent female leaders in a progressive way?	Male	71	2.9296	2.62583	.31163
	Female	37	3.4054	3.62445	.59586

**Independent Samples Test**

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
To what extent does the article represent female leaders in a progressive way?	Equal variances assumed	5.630	.019	-.782	106	.436	-.47583	.60878	-1.68279	.73114
	Equal variances not assumed			-.708	56.224	.482	-.47583	.67243	-1.82274	.87108



**H3b – Independent t-test analysis SPSS outputs**

**Group Statistics**

	What is the byline's sex?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
To what extent does the article represent female leaders in a traditional way?	Male	71	5.6761	4.86320	.57716
	Female	37	5.8378	4.90755	.80680

**Independent Samples Test**

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
To what extent does the article represent female leaders in a traditional way?	Equal variances assumed	.069	.793	-.164	106	.870	-.16178	.98912	-2.12282	1.79925
	Equal variances not assumed			-.163	72.508	.871	-.16178	.99198	-2.13903	1.81546

**8.10. Appendix 10 – Frequencies ratio of women on editorial boards**

**What is the % of women on the newspaper's board?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	60	50.0	50.0	50.0
	16	40	33.3	33.3	83.3
	37	20	16.7	16.7	100.0
	Total	120	100.0	100.0	