

The Effects of Vietnamese Online Newspapers on Gender Inequality: A Case Study of the Representation of Women Leaders in Vietnamnet and VnExpress

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Abstract: Online newspapers have a key role in contemporary societies in shaping public opinion about women, and correspondingly, stereotyping them, especially women in leadership roles. In Vietnam, previous research has primarily focused on women leaders' visibility in the media and stereotyped frames, leaving their roles when featured in news articles largely unexplored. This research proposes a multi-layered framework to understand how Vietnamese online newspapers represent women leaders and how this can create an additional challenge for women in general by examining 400 samples from Vietnamnet and VnExpress. Overall, women leaders's voices are disproportionately featured in all fields. In addition, a discursive pattern is also found: a woman can only be seen as a successful leader when she can excel at business and family simultaneously. Such exclusion, misrepresentation, and discrimination in the news toward women leaders would send messages to audiences that women are not eligible to hold high positions and, therefore could deepen gender inequality and obscure challenges faced by women. The result suggests that journalists should shift their views on women leaders and involve more women in news articles as well as highlight gender inequality problems.

Keywords: Women leaders; Online newspapers; Gender stereotypes; Vietnam.

1. Introduction

Vietnamese women have a pivotal role in the history and development of the cause of national defense, construction, and development. Stories of Vietnamese

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female heroes date back to 40 A.D. with the Trung sisters, Trung Trac and Trung Nhi, and across all of Vietnam's historical periods. "When war comes, even women have to fight" is the spirit that made the victory of Vietnam against the colonialism of France and the US. Vietnamese women have fought bravely for their country, from frontline nursing, weapons smuggling, and digging trenches to engaging in high-level diplomacy. Fifty years ago in 1973, a woman named Nguyen Thi Binh, with her iron-clad convictions and diplomatic skills, played a central role in communicating with global powers at the signing of the Paris Agreement that marked the supposed end of the Vietnam War.

From fighting for independence alongside their male counterparts to working in every sector of the economy, women have been a vital part of Vietnam's social, cultural, and economic development. Women account for 50,1% of Vietnam's population and 46,76% of the country's workforce, according to the General Statistics Office (GSO) of Vietnam (2022). Over the past years, the Vietnamese government has made significant efforts to advance women's status and opportunities. The country adopted CEDAW, the United Nations Convention to end all kinds of discrimination against women in 1982. In 2010, Vietnam passed the National Strategy on Gender Equality for 2011-2020. This served as the basis for the more recent 2021-2030 National Strategy on Gender Equality. These policies also include important goals for women's leadership and development. Women are expected to represent at least 25% of the Party Committees, and 35% of the National Assembly and People's Councils at all levels by 2030. By 2025 and 2030, it is expected that there will be at least 27% and 30%, respectively, of female directors and business owners.

However, some of the important facts point to a critical gap between making and implementing public policy in Vietnam. Despite the country's advancements in gender equality, Vietnamese women continue to endure limitations in comparison to their male counterparts in terms of political and economic leadership. Women are no longer represented in the top four highest leadership positions in the nation and only one female member occupies a seat in the current Politburo. The majority of women work in agriculture, light service, and industry sectors which generate lower incomes than those of the sectors dominated by men, although women contribute significantly to the economy. In the Small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) and Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises

(MSEM) context, women-owned businesses are typically small, informal businesses in low-productivity industries, which pushes them at higher risk during economic downturns.

The “2020 Human Development Perspectives: Tackling Social Norms - A Game Changer for Gender Inequalities” (UNDP, 2020) suggests that the major obstacle to genuine gender equality is the deeply rooted bias within society. In Vietnam, many studies (Mai Trang Vu & Thi Thanh Thuy Pham, 2021; Vu, Tien Manh and Yamada, Hiroyuki, 2020) have argued that the country is still in the shadow of Confucianism. This traditional Chinese belief system, which promotes male supremacy, has left a profound impact on Vietnam due to centuries under the persecution of China. Furthermore, the current development model of embarking on a market economy while maintaining its ideals of “Socialist orientation” is not only unable to free women from their traditional cultural standards but also puts a burden of acting as breadwinners on their shoulders (Khuat Thu Hong, 2016).

With most Vietnamese having access to smartphones and the Internet nowadays, media advocacy, with the influence it holds in shaping perceptions and understanding, is proven to be a critical measure in driving gender equality. Hence, it is important to understand how women leaders at all levels are featured in Vietnamese online newspapers and whether it sustains or challenges the existing gender ideologies.

2. Gender stereotypes, stereotyping in leadership and media coverage

A gender stereotype is defined as “a generalized view or preconception about attributes, or characteristics that are or ought to be possessed by women and men or roles that are or should be performed by men and women”. However, stereotypes are not necessarily negative, for instance, “women are empathic” or “women are weak”. Both hostile or positive stereotypes (often referred to as “benevolent sexism”) can be harmful as they limit men’s and women’s choices in life (UNHCR, 2014). Cook and Cusack (2010) point out that while gender stereotypes affect both women and men, they often degrade and subjugate women more.

Earlier research has noted that gender stereotypes are a major reason for the scarcity of women holding high positions in businesses and government. Female

leaders are afflicted with double standards: they are expected to demonstrate sensitivity and strength while their male counterparts only have to show strength (Stefanie K. Johnson et al, 2008). Indeed, leadership traits are still received as being aligned with men's typical characteristics. “Throughout much of the world, the ideal worker seems to be gendered masculine, embodies leadership and technical skills, privileges competition and autonomy, and has unlimited time to spend at work” (D’Enbeau et al., 2015). Therefore, being competent does not ensure that a woman will advance to the same organizational level as an equivalently performing man (Madeline E. Heilman, 2002).

In news content, a formidable amount of research has revealed a similar pattern of underrepresentation and misrepresentation of women leaders (Saga Mannila, 2017; Vu et al., 2018; Van der Pas, 2022). For example, Baitinger (2015) looked at popular Sunday television programs in the US and found that these programs notably gave preference to male officials, journalists, and political activists over their female colleagues. When studying the media coverage of politicians, Van der Pas and Aaldering (2020) conclude that the media devotes more attention to the families and appearances of female politicians than their male counterparts, their gender is discussed in regards to their position, and their aggressive conduct is accentuated. In Vietnam, Oxfam (2016) examined 2,168 articles from well-known online newspapers and TV programs and found that female leaders accounted for only 14.3% of the sources. They were hardly present in fields or topics that frequently receive more weight in governmental administration, such as the military/security, real estate, economics, international relations, science and technology, etc. Journalists also focus on describing successful women who can maintain dual roles both in families as traditional women and in the workplace as modern women.

The literature review shows a consistent pattern of female leaders being underrepresented and misrepresented in the news. However, the generalisability of much-published research on this issue often compares media coverage of women and men or how they are portrayed through the lenses of the media (Devitt, 2002; Jacobs, & Claes, 2015; Samuel Siringi & Veronica Nduva, 2018). Few researchers have been able to draw on any research into the functions of leaders in news content, whether they are the subjects or the opinion providers. Adding a geographical layer to this concern, in Vietnam, the issue becomes even

more pronounced. There is a conspicuous absence of recent, comprehensive studies focusing on the visibility of women leaders in Vietnamese media.

3. Research question

Building on and adding to earlier research, this study focuses on Vietnam, a country that gendered communication researchers have hardly ever examined. With its rich cultural history and evolving socio-political landscape, this country offers a unique backdrop for analyzing gender dynamics in media representation. In this context, this research aims to determine whether press coverage of female leaders differs from that of male leaders, both in terms of the quantity (Are women leaders featured less in news stories?) and the quality (Are female leaders perceived differently than male leaders in the news?) of the coverage.

4. Data and methods

Scope of work

To respond to the main research question mentioned above, this study collects data from Vietnamese online newspapers based on several criteria: (1) popularity, (2) national audience, (3) public affairs focus, and (4) high frequency. The data sources are limited to two online newspapers, namely Vietnamnet and VnExpress, since most Vietnamese online newspaper websites don't provide tools to sort articles by date, making it infeasible to gather large data for this research.

VnExpress was founded in 2001 and it was the first newspaper in Vietnam that was not produced in paper format. According to VnExpress, in 2020, this newspaper attracted more than 40 million regular readers, more than 10 billion views, and 5 million comments from readers. Each reader spends an average of 5 minutes 44 seconds on each visit. The newspaper also claims to be the most-read Vietnamese newspaper.

Vietnamnet is an online daily newspaper of the Ministry of Information and Communications of Vietnam. On January 23, 2003, Vietnamnet got the operating license and became one of the first online newspapers in Vietnam. According to Similarweb, Vietnamnet ranked number 5 as the leader of the News and Media Publishers websites in Vietnam in March 2023 and has always been in the top 10.

Both agencies produce daily news in English and Vietnamese. However, in the context of this study, only Vietnamese content will be examined. To create a clear picture of the way the press treats women and men, the timeframe for data collection is October 2022 which includes October 20th (the Vietnamese Women's Day) and December 2022.

Methodology

This research relies on the framing theory. Gregory Bateson first presented the idea of framing in 1972. He described psychological frames as a “spatial and temporary bounding of a set of interactive messages” (Bateson, 1972). Since the 1990s, framing theory has evolved as a category of media studies and is applied to the analysis of media discourse. Entman (2004) added that framing in the context of journalistic practice is defined as “selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues and making connections among them to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution”. When examining the relation between framing theory and agenda-setting theory, McCombs et al. (1997) argue that not only are these two theories related, but that framing theory, in fact, also draws on agenda-setting theory's work. They used the term “second-level agenda setting” to describe the impact of highlighting features of media coverage on the audience's understanding of the issue.

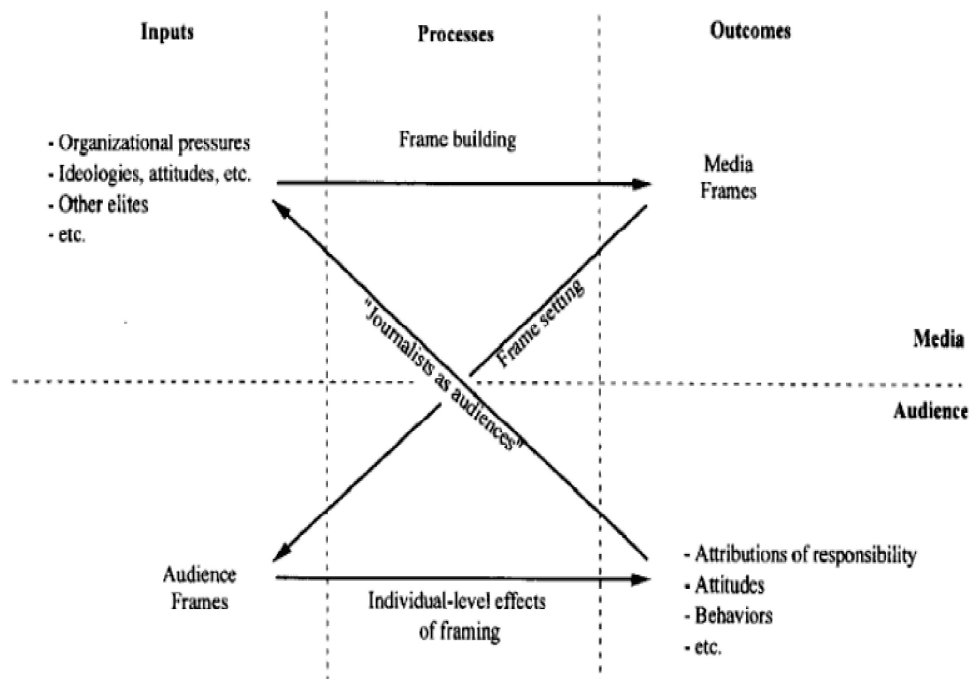
In a news story, frames can be identified by examining the numerous elements that form a frame. Gamson and Modigliani (1989) have developed an approach called “media package” that considers the keywords and common language used in the news: metaphors, examples, catchphrases, depictions, and visual images. According to Pan & Kosicki (1993), the boundaries for how the audience should perceive news text are established by its structural and linguistic elements, including syntactic, thematic, script, and rhetorical. James Tankard (2001) suggested an 11-point typology of framing mechanisms to assist coders in content analysis: headlines, subheads, photographs, photo caption, leads, source selection, quotes selection, pull quotes, logos, statistics and charts, and concluding statements and paragraphs.

Scheufele (1999) has conceptualized framing as a continuous process with four sub-processes: frame building, frame setting, and individual-level effects of framing and the relationship between individual frames and communication frames (Journalists as audiences). When examining the effects of news frames, Scheufele argues that they demonstrate at both the individual and societal levels.

On an individual level, a news receiver's attitude can change on an issue based on their exposure to certain frames. At the societal level, frameworks can help shape social-level processes such as political socialization, decision-making, and collective action.

Based on framing theory (Figure 1), this study adopted a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative content analysis of articles featuring Vietnamese leaders in selected news outlets as well as in-depth interviews and secondary data analysis. Specifically, news content is used to examine the representation of men and women leaders in the news; interview and secondary data are used to analyze the impacts of gender bias in media and provide recommendations for news providers.

Figure 1. Framing Process by Scheufele (1999)



The final data includes 400 articles. Specifically, 100 articles from VnExpress were chosen each month within October and December of 2022. The same method is applied for Vietnamnet. The data is screened based on two criteria: (1) Every news article needs to feature at least one leader source; (2) the leaders have to be Vietnamese, living and working in Vietnam and (3) the articles must involve real events and real people.

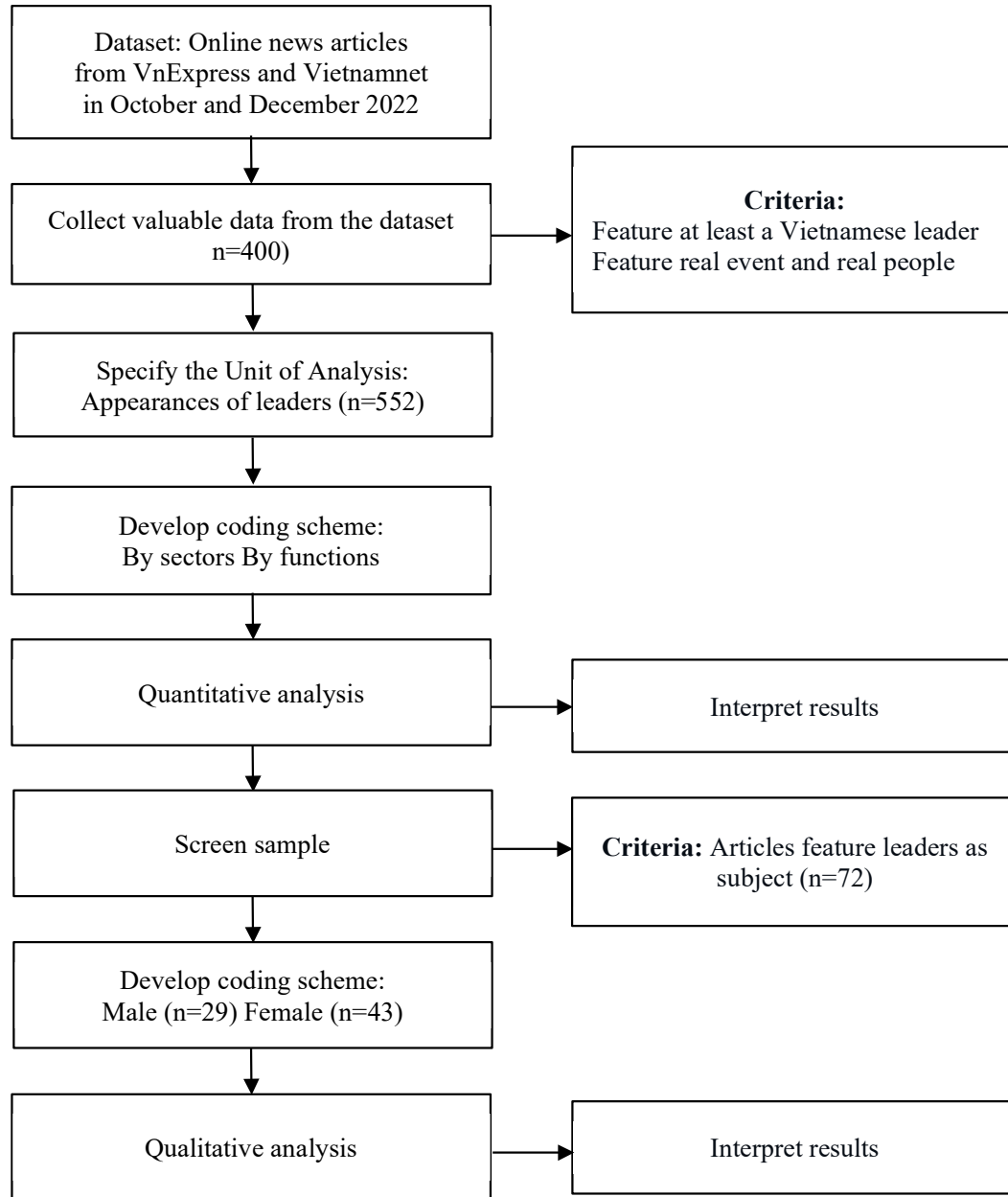
The samples could be divided into two categories for the quantitative analysis: by work sectors of leaders (politics and government, business, education, culture, social and legal, science and health) and by functions of leaders (spokesperson, subject, commentator). According to Macharia (2015), men and women when appearing in the news could play some roles that include: an expert or commentator, a spokesperson, a subject, an eyewitness, a person expressing a popular opinion, and a person speaking of their personal experience. However, when it comes to leaders appearing in the news, the author finds that they mostly present as a subject (who are typically reported for their problems, concerns, or achievements in feature stories), a spokesperson (whose opinions represent a group of people or an organization) and a commentator (who provides additional perspectives or advice based on their expertise). The news sources' genders are coded as (1) male and (2) female. Since one news piece could feature more than one leader, the research unit of analysis is appearances. Of exactly 400 online articles chosen from VnExpress and Vietnamnet, a total of 552 leaders' sources were detected.

The dataset is screened again for the qualitative analysis with only articles featuring leaders as subjects chosen. The samples are coded as (1) male, and (2) female and focus on the description of a variety of details on sources' duties (such as family, domestic labor, and care work); and experience (such as life experience, professional experience, etc.). The results are interpreted to detect the difference between men's and women leaders' portrayal in the news.

To contextualize the analysis of how women leaders were profiled in the Vietnamese online newspapers, the author asked women working in the field of communication and gender equality what they thought about how the press profiled women in high positions and how it would impact gender inequality. Afterward, they were asked to make some suggestions for communication specialists to promote gender equality in news reporting. Five women working in the field of gender and communication were chosen to participate in this interview. The questions flowed from general to specific to create discussions concerning gender discrimination in the news content, and advice to communication practitioners. In addition, a number of data from secondary sources such as previous interviews, research articles, books, journals, periodical records, and organizational publications on relevant topics are used to dig deeper into the issue. The results from interviews and the secondary

dataset are then analyzed to provide a conclusive answer to the problems posed in the study.

Figure 2. Content analysis process



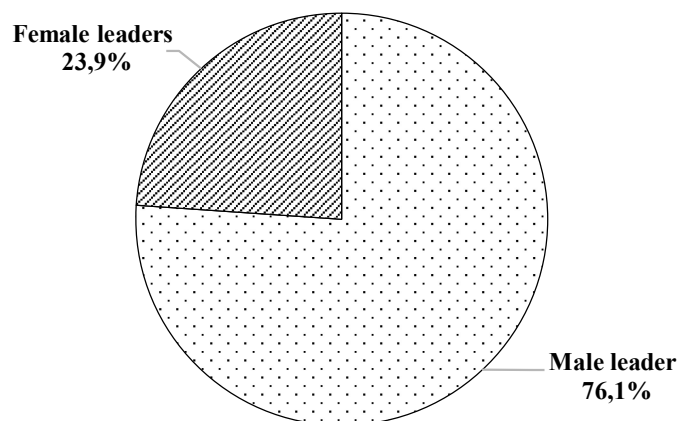
5. Results

The under-representation of women leaders in Vietnamese online newspapers

As pointed out in the “Gender-sensitive indicators for media: framework of indicators to gauge gender sensitivity in media operations and content”

conducted by UNESCO, the use of women as spokespersons or experts in news content is an important output indicator for gender equality. According to the study, male sources dominated the online news content with 420 sources being used, accounting for 76.1% of total sources. In contrast, female sources accounted for only 23.9%, which could be explained by their low representation in Vietnamese state agencies and businesses.

Chart 1. Male/female leaders sources in the news
(Articles from VnExpress and Vietnamnet, October and December 2022)

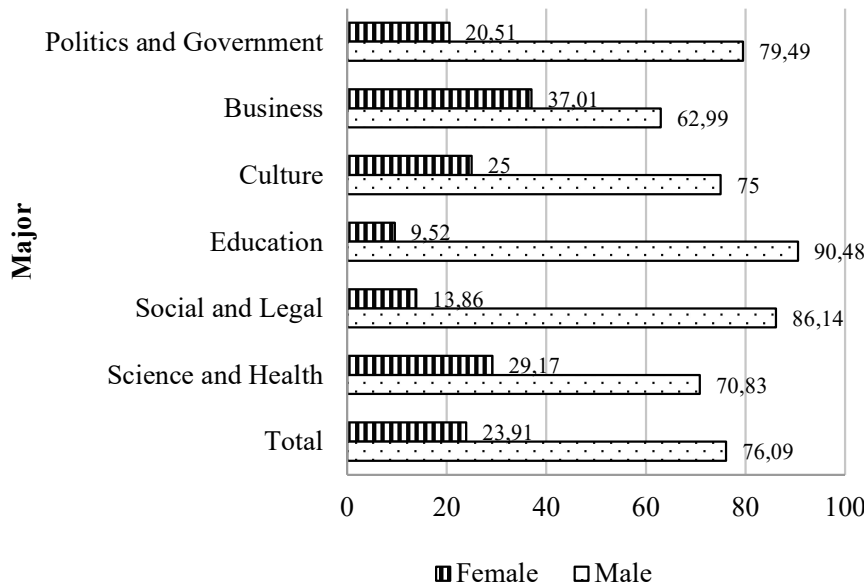


Examining the sectors which the sources come from, it is clear that women leaders' perspectives in the news have yet to be included in all sectors, especially in the education sector, in which only 10% of the articles featured female leaders. However, it is important to note that of the total 400 article samples, only 35 pieces are from the education sector, with 21 leaders mentioned or quoted. The data also shows that out of 552 leaders are used as news sources, 35% of them are from politics and the government sector which mostly happens to be about the National Assembly session.

According to Shor et al. (2015), news tends to focus on people at the very top of social and occupational hierarchies, which are typically male-dominated. Given that 30.26% of female deputies were elected to the 15th National Assembly, it is understandable that only 40 female leaders are quoted or interviewed in this sector, accounting for 20.51%. Another industry in the sample where there are significantly more male leaders than female leaders is the social and legal sectors, with 86.14% and 13.86% respectively. The proportion of female leaders' voices highlighted in news articles about culture and social & health sectors is slightly higher than the average with 25% and 29.17% respectively. Out of all,

the Business appears to have the least imbalance presence of two genders, with 37% of its news sources being from women leaders.

Chart 2. Male/female leaders in the news by sector
 (Articles from VnExpress and Vietnamnet, October and December 2022)



Source: Articles from VnExpress and Vietnamnet, October and December 2022.

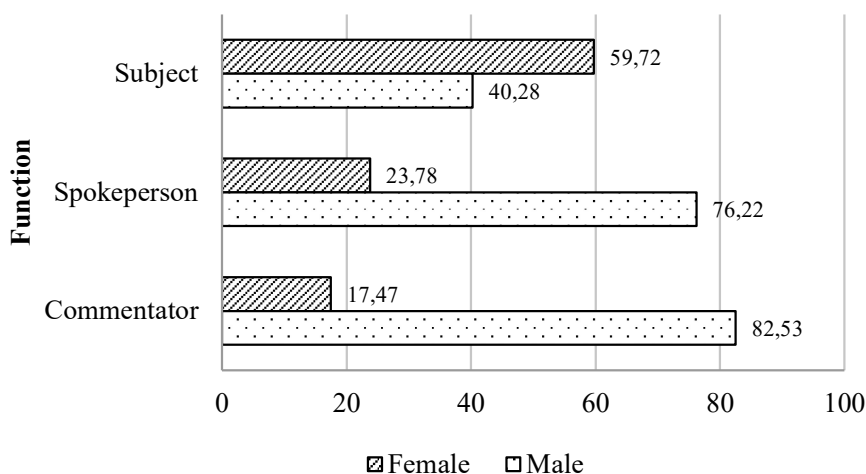
As shown in the graph, approximately 60% of leaders featured as subjects in the news are women. Yet, among those used to giving opinions as a spokesperson and an expert, women’s voices have been highly underrepresented, with only 23.78% and 17.47% respectively. This difference could be explained by the fact that the data were collected in October and December of 2022, which include Vietnam Women’s Day - October 20th. Seven of the 13 articles, which were chosen at random on this day, feature women leaders to recognize the accomplishments of Vietnamese women.

Overall, the analytical results have confirmed the existing gap in news coverage between men and women, with women leaders' share of voice needing to be more represented. This underrepresentation of women leaders suggests that news outlets prioritize the experiences, expertise, and opinions of men over those of women. In other words, it is assumed that such an imbalanced appearance could underreport the contribution of women to social, economic, and cultural life, therefore further marginalizing their participation in civic life.

Moreover, the fact that they are featured more than men as protagonists couldn't make a positive sign but rather suggest the status quo gender bias

among journalists. On one hand, the media only values women leaders for their exceptional success stories instead of their perspectives or knowledge, as evidenced by the news content recognizing them as figures of success but failing to highlight their expertise. On the other hand, this rather contradictory result may be due to the lack of gender sensitivity in the media, which is proven by the fact that stories featuring women leaders only appear more on Vietnam Women’s Day.

Chart 3. Percentage of male/female leaders in the news by function
(Articles from VnExpress and Vietnamnet, October and December 2022)



Source: Articles from VnExpress and Vietnamnet, October and December 2022.

Manager or Mother? A successful woman can be both

According to UNESCO (2012), fair depiction of women and men through the elimination of stereotypes and the promotion of multi-dimensional portrayal is a key objective to achieve gender equality in the media, with the proportion of stereotype-filled stories serving as one of the indicators. In this case, although there aren’t many articles that described men and women leaders in further depth, those that did reveal significant stereotypes against women in comparison to their male colleagues.

For news stories that had women leaders as central characters, journalists tend to use words that are explicitly gendered like "female," "Mrs," or "bóng hồng" (a metaphor for young beautiful women) as a way of “honoring” women, especially on Vietnam Women’s Day. Statistically, 17 out of 26 women leaders-centered headlines emphasize the gender of the subject while only 4 in 29 headlines featuring male leaders as protagonists mention their gender. But when

it comes to male leaders, journalists simply place “Mr” in front of their name, unlike the variety of gendered words they use for women. This fact suggests that women in higher positions are seen as exceptions, and as a result, their gender is used in titles to draw more attention from readers.

Table 1. List of female leaders-centered headline

20/10/2022 VnExpress	14/12/2022 VnExpress	06/12/2022 Vietnamnet
Những bông hồng trong làng blockchain Việt	Nữ giám đốc bỏ lương nghìn USD về kinh doanh burocục	Người phụ nữ Việt lọt top truyền cảm hứng thời trang toàn cầu
<i>(The roses in the Vietnamese blockchain ecosystem)</i>	<i>(Female director gave up thousands-dollars salary to do business in the post office)</i>	<i>(Vietnamese woman in the top of global fashion influential figure)</i>

Table 2. List of male leaders-centered headline

14/10/2022 VnExpress	29/10/2022 Vietnamnet	25/10/2022 Vietnamnet
Ông Nguyễn Đắc Vinh: 'Còn tâm lý e ngại đầu tư văn hóa'	Ông Nguyễn Văn Thê: 'Đây là những dấu ấn tôi sẽ nhớ mãi'	Ông Mùa A Sơn được giao điều hành hoạt động của Tỉnh ủy Điện Biên
<i>(Mr. Nguyen Dac Vinh: 'There is still a fear of investing in culture')</i>	<i>(Mr. Nguyen Van The: 'These are the milestones I will remember forever')</i>	<i>(Mr. Mua A Son is assigned to administer of the Dien Bien Provincial Party Committee)</i>

In addition to being indicated in the headline, news content also shows a similar tendency to underscore the gender of women in leadership roles. For example, in a news article published on VnExpress with the title “Women who contribute to the branding of BEST Express”, a female post office manager is described as: “Among a large number of male post office managers, Mrs. Nguyen Thi Anh is the only female manager, who attracts attention when at the same time, she can manage the business of Binh Thuy post office (Can Tho) and take care of her two-year-old child at home”.

The above paragraph also reveals a common stereotype made by reporters in news stories on female leaders: their role in the family. Female leaders are described as having dual responsibilities in managing careers and families, which bring them to a crossroads in seeking a balance between home and work.

For married female leaders, additional information on how they manage to raise their children despite professional pressures is given in detail. Take an article about the first Vietnamese female officer working at the EU Training Mission as an example.

Article: First female officer to work at the EU Training Mission¹

“Để yên tâm lên đường sang Trung Phi, chị Liên đã sắp xếp chu toàn việc gia đình. Cậu con trai 8 tuổi và con gái đang học lớp 9 sau khi được mẹ thủ thi, đã hứa học tập chăm chỉ và ngoan ngoãn chờ mẹ trở về. Con trai nói hàng ngày trước khi đi ngủ sẽ gọi điện cho mẹ để nhờ hướng dẫn làm bài tập khó, còn con gái thì cho biết rất tự hào khi mẹ đi làm nhiệm vụ gìn giữ hòa bình Liên Hợp Quốc”.

“To be at ease before going to Central Africa, Lien has made all the necessary preparations for the family. The 8-year-old son and daughter, who is in 9th grade, after a discussion with their mother, has promised to study hard and act nicely while waiting for their mother's return. The son said that he would call his mother every day before going to bed to ask for guidance on doing difficult homework, while the daughter said she was very proud when her mother went on a UN peacekeeping mission”.

It was also stressed in the news coverage that their husbands provided them with a lot of assistance, without which they would not have been able to achieve the reported achievements. For instance, an article about a woman who quit her high-paid job to start up placed a lot of emphasis on how fortunate she is to have her husband's support and how she cares for her children.

Surprisingly, none of the narrative frames mentioned above appear in articles featuring male protagonists. The results of the qualitative data show that not even one in 29 male leaders get interviewed or reported about their personal life, their family, kids, or who supports their career. Instead, most of the articles focus on their achievements, their expertise, and the difficulties they have to overcome. In other words, the news seems to associate male leaders with their public life while linking female leaders with their private life like the Vietnamese traditional ideology that men earn the bread and women make the home.

¹ Sơn Hà, “Nữ sĩ quan đầu tiên làm việc tại Phái bộ huấn luyện của EU” [Sơn Hà, “First female officer to work at the EU Training Mission”], VnExpress, December 4th 2022, <https://vnexpress.net/nu-si-quan-dau-tien-lam-viec-tai-phai-bo-huan-luyen-cua-eu-4541204.html> (accessed 10 March 2023).

Article: Female director gave up thousands-dollars salary to do business in the post office²

"Đầu tư vào thời điểm đó có thể xem là một quyết định mạo hiểm với tôi và gia đình. Số vốn 2 tỷ đồng không hề nhỏ. Tôi và chồng đã phải tích góp rất lâu. Đúng lúc dịch bệnh đỡ căng thẳng, tôi quyết định lên kế hoạch khởi nghiệp nghiêm túc để không lãng phí số tiền này", chị Trang chia sẻ.

...

Quyết định chuyển mình của chị Kiều Trang may mắn được chồng và gia đình ủng hộ. Vợ chồng chị sau thời gian sắp xếp công việc, gia đình đã cùng nhau quản lý bưu cục.

...

Hàng ngày, ngoài công việc ở bưu cục, chị Trang thường dành thời gian cho gia đình, đưa con đến trường và cùng các cháu học bài. "Tôi may mắn được gia đình hỗ trợ nhiều. Hai bé cũng rất ngoan, biết mẹ bận rộn nên luôn tự giác học tập chăm chỉ, đạt học sinh giỏi nhiều năm liền. Tôi đến nay vẫn luôn cố gắng cân bằng giữa công việc và gia đình để không bên nào bị xem nhẹ hay lơ là", chị cho hay.

Vì cả hai vợ chồng cùng quản lý bưu cục nên thời gian biểu được phân chia hợp lý để đưa đón, chăm sóc con cái. Sáng, chị thường đến bưu cục quản lý nhập kho, phân chia hàng hóa, đảm bảo hàng đi đúng giờ. Đến chiều, chồng chị sẽ lên "thay ca" để chị về nhà nội trợ, đón con.

"Investing at that time is considered a risky decision for me and my family. The capital of 2 billion dong is not small at all. My husband and I have had to accumulate it for a long time. Right at the time when the epidemic was less stressful, I decided to plan a serious start-up to not waste this money," Trang shared.

...

Kieu Trang's decision of changing career is fortunately supported by her husband and family. After a period of work arrangement, the couple managed the post office together.

...

Every day, in addition to her job at the post office, Mrs. Trang often spends time with her family, taking her children to school and studying with them. "I am lucky to have a lot of support from my family. The two children are also well-behaved, they know that their mother is busy, so they always study hard and achieve the title of good students for many years. I have always tried to balance work and family so that neither side is overlooked or neglected," she said.

Since both husband and wife are managing the post office, the timetable is reasonably divided to pick up and take care of the children. In the morning, she often goes to the post office to manage inventory, divide goods, ensure them arrive on time. In the afternoon, her husband will go up to "change shift" so that she can go home and pick up the children.

² Cấn Y, "Nữ giám đốc bỏ lương nghìn USD về kinh doanh bưu cục" [Can Y "Female director gave up thousands-dollars salary to do business in the post office"], VnExpress, December 1th 2022, <https://vnexpress.net/nu-giam-doc-bo-luong-nghin-usd-ve-kinh-doanh-buu-cuc-4547797.html> (accessed 10 March 2023).

6. Conclusions and discussions

In conclusion, half of the world's population are women but women still couldn't account for half of the voices in the media, nor do media messages cover half of women's abilities and concerns. From 400 sample articles, we can get a general picture of an ideal female leader created by journalists. On the one hand, she should have a successful career and undertake a high position in business. On the other hand, she is expected to be the one responsible for taking care of the family. By producing such depictions of women leaders, the news media have contributed to the existing gender ideologies that stop women from escaping traditional roles while putting the burden of being an important half of the labor force on their shoulders.

Notwithstanding the relatively limited sample, findings from this study are consistent with previous literature in both global and regional contexts that women leaders' voices in news stories remain firmly marginalized. The statistics show that progress toward gender equality in news coverage has been made in comparison to those conducted by Oxfam (2016), which reveals that female leaders only make up 14.3% of the total number of news sources. Even now, seven years later, news frames against female leaders that are indicated in Oxfam research can still be found in online news articles. Although it seems that journalists are less concerned with the appearance of female leaders, their discourses on modern women continue to glue women to their traditional caregiving roles. Online newspapers continue to undervalue fathers and overburden mothers. This indicates that ultimate gender parity is a distant goal and news outlets need to work towards optimal solutions that make a real difference in their treatment of both genders.

This gender-differentiated coverage could be explained by several reasons. First, the fact that women are less likely than males to hold leadership positions could result in their lack of representation in the news. Moreover, this rarity seems to be newsworthy and satisfies the news value of novelty. As a result, the press will explicitly highlight the leader's gender more often as a way to bring out the "uniqueness" of female leaders.

Second, the stereotype that women are disassociated from public life and leadership roles could lead to journalists's expectations regarding their private

lives. News coverage concentrating more on personal background, physical attractiveness, marital status, and children can be seen as a reflection of the association of women with private life, physical beauty, and nurturing, supporting roles (Van der Pas, Loes Aaldering 2020).

Third and finally, the existing social norms on gender could be directly reflected in the news. Due to deeply systemic gender stereotypes, journalists could lack gender sensitivity and cannot recognize stereotypes in their work. In this case, women have traditionally been associated with qualities like sensitivity, honesty, passivity, gentleness, and compassion. As a result, journalists tend to refer to females in higher roles with "feminine" characteristics or "feminine" competencies such as taking care of children or housework. Additionally, since leadership is aligned with men, it has been assumed that women in politics will receive less attention for their leadership qualities.

The effects of news frames on gender inequality

According to the study's findings, media coverage of male and female leaders differs. In addition, women seem to be treated less favorably in the media. How could such stereotypical representation of women leaders affect gender inequality? Up to now, a large number of communication scholars in different countries have examined this question. Although the effects might be inconsistent depending on the different contexts, it is important to keep the implications in mind as they have a profound impact on the field of gender equality in Vietnam.

The literature review, along with all women interviewed, was unanimous in the view that biased representation of men and women leaders hinders our efforts in achieving gender parity. The negative effects include:

One, entrenching social prejudice against women by sending false messages. Ms. Phuong, the cofounder of communication for a development agency, refers to women leaders and newspapers' current relations as "an unending circle" that deepens social norms against women. "Female leaders's invisibility in the media will make people believe that women are indeed less likely to hold high positions and thus will decrease their aspiration to leadership". Another respondent, Mrs Hanh, Project Coordinator in Gender Equality, suggests that such biased representation "sends messages to audiences that female leaders are not as

competent as their male counterparts, or they are not capable of speaking in the media”. This view was echoed by two informants who added that false ideas could be spread, such as “women have no voice and are not important in life” and “they are not qualified to hold high positions or high positions are only for men”. Hong Tien Vu et al (2018) hold a similar view that such underreport may convey to audiences the idea that female leaders lack the power or credentials to hold positions of responsibility.

According to Virginia Garcia Beaudoux (2017), the double standard women have to bear contributes to the idea that professional success and domesticity have a gender. Women must strike a balance between their employment inside and outside of the domestic sphere, which hinders their professional development. And they must be excellent at both while competing with male colleagues who likely don't have to deal with such difficulties. Either way, this could aggravate gender inequality by keeping women at the bottom of the economic pyramid.

Two, make women's issues in the workplace and life invisible. When a whole group of individuals isn't prominently featured in news stories, people could have an incomplete or misleading representation of the world. In doing so, journalists risk the danger of leaving out opinions that are important to society and miss out on fresh, intriguing stories that might not otherwise break. In this case, the content that the journalist might ignore is women's concerns. “Due to biological differences, women and men themselves have very different leadership experiences. Pregnancy or menstruation are two examples. Women's concerns in the workplace are less talked about as a result of the media's silence on female leaders. Female issues will always be the submerged part of the iceberg if they aren't given the chance to speak up, which will impact the efforts to advocate for better working circumstances for women”, says Mrs. Quynh Anh, project manager at TUVVA Communications.

Three, hinders the advancements of female leadership. Role Congruity theory suggests that a discrepancy between a social group's perceived traits and a social role's prerequisites, such as leadership skills, decreases opinions of the group's members in that role (Eagly & Karau, 2002). In this instance, the newspapers have emphasized the social standards for leadership positions, making women appear

to be incompatible with them, based on an in-depth interview with Mrs. Thuy, Communications officer at FES Vietnam. The portrayal of women leaders in the media not only has a negative impact on their career prospects and directly contributes to the underrepresentation of women in leadership, but it is also likely to reinforce the public's perception that leadership is a realm reserved for men.

Given that the press plays a credible role in any democratic society, findings from in-depth interviews and other studies could confirm that the prejudiced way women leaders are seen through journalists' lens contributes to an unequal perception of how men and women in society, therefore worsening gender equality progress. It is also said that not only women who gain from fair news representation but the whole world, men or women are in this together as gender equality benefits us all.

Suggestions for media

To promote a higher and more positive profile for women leaders, and to address some of the negative ways in which they are portrayed in online newspapers, this paper draws up some suggestions for people working in the media in general and journalists in specific based on the in-depth interviews, backed with secondary sources.

Facilitating multi-perspective gender equality thinking in journalists' mindset. "Media products that feature female leaders need to stop telling stories about a leader who is a woman but rather should focus on how she shows her leadership, how successful she is, and how she contributes to society. Don't focus too much on her gender as a way of marginalizing women from leadership roles", says Ms. Phuong. Journalists need to take into account the needs, concerns, and goals of women as well as how news coverage affects their self-image. Having similar ideas, Hoa, a communications graduate student, suggests that themes related to gender stereotypes should be included in formal journalism programs. "Start from the universities. Lectures on gender should be added to the curriculum, students should be encouraged to participate in activities and seminars about gender inequality/equality. Students are future journalists, so it is important to set up their minds early". Moreover, Oxfam (2016) suggests that for journalists to have enough time to both understand the subtlety and complexity of gender stereotypes and connect them to their work as journalists, the length of the

courses must be carefully examined. Instructors need to have a thorough understanding of journalism, newsroom procedures, and the process of creating news content to provide effective training programs. Another respondent adds that these changes in perspectives should be translated into gender-neutral language and an objective way of describing leaders.

Build a database of women leaders for journalists. According to Interviewee 1, “Journalists often have a list of leaders in each field to interview, and whenever a problem arises in that field, the leader they already know is selected. Gradually, they get used to interviewing the same people who are usually male. Therefore, journalists need to make a concerted effort and expand relationships with female leaders”. To influence behavioral changes, lists of female experts should be put together so that journalists may quickly access them when looking for an expert on the topic. When utilized in Scandinavian newsrooms, this approach has shown a lot of potential and strong success rates (Haggrén, 2017; McCracken et al., 2018).

Apply gender equality/inequality requirements in the editorial content of news media. “Media has a major role in influencing how we perceive the role of gender in society and therefore, it should work towards a greater respect for women’s dignity and get involved in the fight against gender stereotypes. To properly eliminate negative gender biases in media as well as in society, it is important that regulations and requirements on gender stereotypes stories should be incorporated in code of conduct for journalists to follow”, a participant explains. Furthermore, reporters ought to associate gender inequality concerns with those that are more important to the public and decision-makers, such as jobs, education, healthcare, crime, and the economy (Luba Kassova, 2020).

Increase the number of women working in media agencies, especially in leading roles. “It is now well evidenced that women in senior decision-making positions in any organization can improve efficiency and I believe it is critical to have a gender (and broader diversity) mix at this level, to help break down ‘group-think’ which will enhance creativity and innovation and help to make better organizational decisions that are informed by a wide range of perspectives. According to McCracken et al. (2018), for the media sector, diverse decision-makers, particularly in influential editorial positions, are more likely to help us

connect with and reflect a wider range of audiences, so clearly a good gender balance here is important too”, says Amanda Rice, Head of Diversity Department at the BBC. In fact, applying gender quotas in recruitment is a fast and effective temporary measure to achieve this goal.

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