

‘NEWS’ ANALYSIS RESEARCH PRESENTATION PROPOSAL

(Best completed electronically, expanding text boxes if necessary)

Student Name

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Research Project Title [should not be too long, suggest max 15 words]:

How are female political leaders represented in the online versions of the Sun and Daily Mail?

Research Question [Definitive focus: Identifies object of study to realise objectives]:

How are female political leaders represented in the online versions of the Sun and Daily Mail?

Research Aims and Objectives [specific realistic goals/ends or intended outcomes & how to achieve them]:

- Uncover the difference in representation to male counterparts, if any
- Identify the general pattern of women’s portrayal in tabloids
- Detect similarities and differences between the Daily Mail and the Sun
- Discover how the representation of female leaders changes their perception in the public
- Find out if the media’s depiction of female politicians is linked to less female participation in politics

These research aims and objectives will be achieved through Discourse and Content Analysis of various online articles of the chosen newspapers, while mostly concentrating on two case studies (Angela Merkel and Hillary Clinton) and the thorough study of previous research and relevant books.

Context/Background & Rationale [link with society & similar work, past & current; why project is important now]:

The lack of female representation in politics is not a secret. Worldwide 10 women are Head of State and 9 women are Head of Government. Furthermore, women still only make up 22.8% of all national parliamentarians. (UN WOMEN, 2016/2017)

However, does this change how the media portrays them?

Tabloids have the reputation of not really representing women in the same way as men. Often they are objectified, over-sexualised or just reduced to their role of being a good wife and mother. Some people think that women who follow the ‘ideals’ of womanhood shouldn’t engage in politics, painting them as unfit for ‘serious’ business. “Politics is one field in which patriarchy has enjoyed some level of acceptance over the years.”(Diabah, 2011)

Do the Sun and the Daily Mail promote this absurd idea in their online content?

It is important to ask this question now, as gender inequality is still a problem across many sectors, yet many (both women and men) don’t recognise this.

The intended outcome of this research is to educate the general public about discrepancies in how female and male political leaders are represented and inspire journalists to make a change.

Literature Review [theories to be employed in making sense of, or analysing, the chosen topic, citing theorists, most common theories in literature]:

“The study of women and politics in the media is a relatively young subfield” (Larson, 2011)
However, there is a lot of helpful existing research out there about the various challenges women in politics face and their effects, mostly focusing on the bias in the press:

- “Unique narration styles” used by (also predominantly male) journalism industry when reporting on female politicians (Robinson and Saint-Jean, 1991)
- McIntosh attributes the bigger media scrutiny of female political leaders to the media’s gender stereotypes that see men over women in positions of power. “More frequently than not, the designer of her clothing, her hairstyle of choice, and emotional demeanour tend to overshadow a female politician’s formation of arguments, opinion on policies, and projections for future endeavours.”
- Research suggests that the British press still depicts female politicians through a number of frameworks involving their physical appearance, familial and emotional status, always reminding the public that a female political leader is “always a woman, sometimes a politician” (Insenga, 2012)
- Studies examining the “dual influence of gender stereotypes and types of media coverage in influencing public perceptions of women politicians”, suggest that female politicians have to be more aware of their media image, as it has “particular influence on judgments of [their] likability.” (Bligh et al, 2012)
- Historical trends of media bias against women candidates in US Elections since 1872 (Falk 2010)
- Carlin analysed the media coverage of the 2008 American presidential elections to find out that sexism in politics is “still alive and well”. Research showed “considerable amount” of negative coverage against Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin.
- Media bias sometimes hard to determine, as not always obviously sexist, yet “subtle discrimination persists” (Braden, 1996)
- Aalberg and Jenssen investigate “whether stereotyping influences how the electorate views the communication skills of political candidates” in their article. The research was conducted in Norway, one of the most advanced nations regarding gender equality.
- The lack of females in politics appearing in the media is having a negative impact on the knowledge and engagement of the female electorate (O’neill and Savigny, 2014)

Methodology and Sources [Tools/techniques to be employed in the gathering and analysis of data; methods of accessing/acquiring data or evidence or information; sources of the data]:

As this research is being conducted on existing text, the question will be answered by using:

Content Analysis (Quantitative)

- Content Analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication (Neuendorf, 2017)
- “As a method specifically intended for the study of messages, content analysis is fundamental to

mass communication research.” (Lombard et al 2002)

- To answer the research question Content Analysis will be applied to identify the most popular adjectives used to describe female political leaders in the chosen texts.

Discourse Analysis (Qualitative)

- Aims: producing enlightenment and emancipation, unmasking ideologies
- Critical investigation of social inequality as it is expressed in discourse (social practice) or by language use (Wodak et al, 2009)
- 2 steps: structure analysis, fine analysis
- Record and analyse the spectrum of linguistic relations
- Main theoretical attractors in this case: Critical Theory + Symbolic Interactionism
- Discourse Analysis has many different approaches, the following 3 will be used in this research: Discourse-Historical Approach, Corpus-Linguistics Approach and Social Actors Approach

Ethical Implications (if any) [briefly indicate whether/how there is an ethical implication for the researcher in this work. What do you need to consider as a researcher?]:

As both methodologies are textually based, there are none at this time.

Strengths/Weaknesses of the Project [briefly indicate any strengths or weaknesses of the project across all areas]:

Strengths:

- Subject is timeless as women’s media portrayal is always in discussion amongst the public
- Focusing on two specific papers and case studies will make research more specific and less time consuming
- As textually based methodologies will be used, there is no involvement of other people in the research process, thus no ethical implications and no reliance on others needed
- Plenty of similar research available, yet project remains still authentic because of its detailed question

Weaknesses:

- Outcome of research won’t be representative for all media outlets as question narrows down to online versions of two specific papers
- The chosen newspapers are very similar, as they are both British tabloids with the same political alignment, which could end up in one-sided findings