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**The role of linguistic choices and
stylistic and visual devices in the
gendered representation of British
female leaders:**

A multimodal analysis of British online news with a focus on headlines

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ABSTRACT

Throughout history, women have always been victims of long-established biases that mirrored and supported collectively approved views of gender. Although many stereotypes have declined over the years, traditional gender roles still govern and affect women and men's lives around the world. In particular, as women have progressively reached male-dominated professions globally, discrimination based on gender still challenges their professional careers at executive positions. These prejudices can be observed in the way online news articles construct the identity of British female leaders. Within this framework, the present study aims at analysing specific linguistic, stylistic and visual devices of news headlines following the Discursive News Values Analysis (DNVA) and Multimodal News Analysis (MNA). The corpus includes articles from four British online newspapers which differ in terms of political affiliation, namely, the right-leaning *Daily Mail* and *The Telegraph*, the center-left *The Guardian*, and the left-leaning *Mirror*. The textual and visual elements examined often contribute to constructing a gendered representation of female leaders, which may shape the readers' perception on their leadership skills and consequently damage their professional careers.

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INTRODUCTION

Notwithstanding women's remarkable career advancement over the years, stereotypes that encourage traditional assumptions on their gender still affect their professional journeys. Notably, these prejudices are even more damaging for those women who decide to pursue a political career due to long-established beliefs on leadership roles as predominantly male professions. In particular, female leaders often face discrimination due to the incongruity between the *communal* traits of emotionality and kindness stereotypically associated to women, and the prototypical leadership attributes of toughness and determination typically associated to men. These gendered assumptions negatively influence the perception of female leaders' professional skills and may have detrimental consequences for their careers. Within this framework, one of the most pervasive sources of influence on gender bias in the political field is news media. Accordingly, one way of looking at how dominant assumptions of female leaders are perpetuated in order to reduce their authority is analysing online news articles. Specifically, the current research aims at investigating the way these stereotyped constructions apply to British female leaders through the analysis of a corpus of news headlines and accompanying images taken from British online news brands across the political spectrum. The present study is structured in four sections that first outline the theoretical framework and literature review, which lay the foundations for the subsequent analysis of news headlines and their visual material.

The first section addresses the relevance of gender biases against female leaders in the political realm. To start with, a brief introduction on historical tendencies and influential theories on gender stereotypes in the workplace is provided to set the basis for contemporary gender and leadership debates and studies. Moving forward, an insight into the American scholar Kanter and her 'role traps' is given to show how the specific stereotypes of 'battle axe', 'seductress', 'mother' and 'pet' are applied to female leaders in male-dominated environments. In addition to that, the following paragraph draws from historical gender theories to demonstrate their persistence within female leaders' discrimination in the political domain. In this view, particular attention is drawn to the role of gender stereotypes of emotions in the evaluation of women leaders' political skills. Following this theoretical background, a more general overview on the influence of media on gender-role stereotypes in the workplace is provided to show how mass communication may significantly affect

people's attitudes and assumptions about the roles of men and women and may eventually lead to gendered depictions of female leaders. In particular, this section discusses the dominant role online newspapers have upon leaders' professional construction which may contribute to creating more disparities between men and women in senior positions. Lastly, a detailed overview on the news coverage of British female leaders is offered to show concrete data of British news brands' biased constructions against women politicians.

The second section provides a theoretical background for the analysis of news headlines and accompanying images. In this perspective, the first part addresses news as a multimodal phenomenon in which the interplay between written and visual content plays a crucial role in news texts, and therefore in analysing such texts. Drawing from Caple and Bednarek's study on multimodality and news values, those relevant for the subsequent analysis are theoretically defined to show how they enhance newsworthiness in news headlines and accompanying visual material. Within this framework, this section provides an insight into the importance of imagery in online news articles. Moving forward, theory on the relevance of newspaper headlines and their main functions introduces linguistic and stylistic features which are useful for the subsequent analysis. Within this context, the concepts of stance and stance taking are introduced to show how specific analytic tools employed by journalists include their embedded viewpoints and may eventually encourage biased constructions. As for linguistic features, another device used to establish newspapers' point of view and persuade the audience is reported speech, which is briefly outlined and discussed before delving into naming strategies. The latter linguistic devices can also be seen as powerful ideological tools since applied to news subjects they categorize them into social groups or professional identities to construct specific representations and influence public opinion. Lastly, this section includes the theoretical definitions of the stylistic devices of metaphor and alliteration whose persuasive effects may further contribute to bringing to the surface news articles' underlying viewpoints and ideologies.

The third section presents the corpus analysed in this study and also introduces the methodology adopted for the multimodal analysis of news headlines. Specifically, the corpus includes news titles taken from four British online newspapers with different political affiliations, namely, the right-leaning *Daily Mail* and *The Telegraph*, the center-left *The Guardian*, and the left-leaning *Mirror*. The data selected were published online between 2014 and 2024, a crucial period that witnessed the career progression of many women

political leaders in UK who reached important executive positions. To proceed with the analysis of news headlines and accompanying images, the present research relies on the Discursive News Values Analysis (DNVA) and Multimodal News Analysis (MNA) to detect general topics employed by journalists to construct a gendered representation of British female leaders. Within this framework, the use of a specific word choice, naming strategies, reported speech, alliterations and metaphors are relevant to understand the ideological viewpoint perpetuated by British online newspapers to represent news subjects.

The fourth section includes results and discussion of the multimodal analysis of news headlines. In particular, the aim of this section is to investigate how the combination between linguistic, stylistic and visual devices across the selected online news brands contributes to reinforcing a stereotyped portrayal of British female politicians. Accordingly, the analysis reveals that the interplay between these features may produce specific patterns such as Kanter's role traps of the 'iron lady', 'pet' and 'mother' or construct the recurrent themes of female leaders' lack of emotional control, the focus on their appearance or fashion choices and a profound distrust against their political skills.

I

LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Historical tendencies of gender stereotypes in the workplace

Over time, women have found themselves as victims of long-established stereotypes that mirrored and supported socially approved view of gender. The term gender has been defined as ‘a layered concept; it is not only a category of individual identity, but also of symbolic constructions, and a dimension of social relations and social organization’ (Scott, 1986, p. 1067). In this perspective, people’s beliefs about gender reflect the distribution of men and women into specific social categories based on traditional patterns of masculinity and femininity (Eagly, 1987, p. 345). Gender studies belonging to the 80s, 90s and 2000s developed relevant theories to address gender inequalities in the workplace. These models continue to have relevance for contemporary scholars since women still experience gender discrimination in their professional careers. Within this framework, stereotypical beliefs about men and women are exemplified by the role congruity theory (2002), according to which gender roles are aligned with social positions based on personal characteristics such as sex, ethnicity or age (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 576). According to this theory, women were generally associated to the lower ranks of society and were confined to the private

domestic sphere. Opposed to them, men usually held positions of authority since they worked in the public sphere (Eagly & Steffen, 1984, p. 735). These assumptions about the roles of men and women contributed to the spreading of gender stereotypes, namely generalizations shared in a society about masculine and feminine attributes. Gender-role stereotyping intensifies recognized boundaries between the sexes and supports the symbolic and societal implications of traditional gender roles and social disparity (Halper et al., 2019, p. 550). Within this framework, gender stereotypes include both descriptive components, namely portraying how women and men are, and prescriptive components which ‘denote not only differences in how women and men actually are, but also norms about behaviors that are suitable for each – about how women and men *should be*’ (Heilman, 2001, p. 659). Therefore, gender bias deeply affects those who are exposed to these evaluations, more than those who rely on stereotypical expectations to judge others (Heilman & Caleo, 2018, p. 738).

One of the primary beliefs about gender concerns the difference between communal and agentic traits, associated to women and men respectively. The term ‘agentic’ refers to qualities leading to the achievement of a goal, such as competence, perseverance, and self-control, while the term ‘communal’, refers to features functional to the creation of relationships, such as being supportive, pleasant and honest (Eagly & Steffen, 1984, p. 736). Within this perspective, men are assumed to have ‘agentic traits’, which qualify them as suitable to hold positions of power, whereas women are assumed to have ‘communal traits’ which exclude them from higher status positions (Heilman & Caleo, 2018, p. 726).

From 1990s, gender self-descriptors of ‘agency’ and ‘communality’ progressively lost their original strength in favor of a greater egalitarianism between the sexes, but still had a significant social impact (Haines et al., 2016, p. 7). Relevant to changes in gender stereotypes, women and men gradually assumed more equal occupations in the workplace since the mid 20th century. Accordingly, women reached many male-dominated professions that demanded proper education and conferred them a new position of authority. Nevertheless, the distribution of men and women among specific occupations was still influenced by gender bias according to which women should work for social contribution, such as helping others, while men were expected to develop logical and technical skills (Eagly et al., 2020, pp. 2-3). This last concept has been defined as ‘horizontal segregation’ which places women and men in professions requiring different abilities to promote their individual ambitions. ‘Vertical segregation’ instead, views men as more suitable for positions of authority at the expense of women, who should perform more ‘communal’ roles

(Blackburn et al., 2001, p. 513). These expectations can have a powerful impact on how women are treated in a male-working environment. Indeed, the assumption that women are unsuitable to handle senior roles may prevent their hiring for such positions, as well as their career progression. According to Heilman's lack-of-fit model (1983), outcomes that are discriminatory against women stem from a mismatch between the attributes that women are thought to possess, and the attributes seen as necessary for success in male-typed positions and fields (Heilman, 2001, p. 660). This resulting incongruity creates the basis for negative expectations about women's professional performances, which, by that means, influence the processing of information and encourage gender prejudice. In business terms, this is also labelled as 'unconscious bias', namely the way in which incredibly quick decisions about people are made on the basis of their gender, race, class or their experience and backgrounds (Baxter, 2018, p. 5).

Another phenomenon experienced by women in the workplace is the 'stereotype threat', namely 'the fear of validating a negative stereotype of a group of which an individual is member' (Baxter, 2018, p. 5). Even nowadays, the stereotype threat challenges women's professional performances at executive positions, conventionally associated to male figures, and eventually obstacles their career progression. Accordingly, women who are relatively new to long-established male organizations often get more attention, receive less support and are perceived as exceptions compared to their male colleagues (Bielby, 2000, p. 123). In this perspective, the study of particular proportions of women in predominantly male-organizations is thus relevant within the political domain, where women are still outnumbered by men in executive roles and stand out as different from their male counterparts (Insenga, 2014, p. 183). Under these conditions, female figures are targeted as a 'numerical rarity' into a range of stereotyped roles that are considered acceptable for women to perform within a traditionally male environment.

1.1.1 The ‘tokenization’ of women in leadership roles

In Kanter’s book *Men and Women of the Corporation* (1993), the scholar originally claimed that senior women are ‘tokenised’ in male-dominated organizations where they represent a small portion of senior administrators. Additionally, women ‘are targeted in their professions because they are highly visible as people who are different and whose appearance and behavior do not conform to normative expectations of leadership’ (Baxter, 2018, p. 24). In this perspective, women are forced into gendered but approved subject positions, or in Kanter’s terms, ‘role traps’ (Kanter, 1993, p. 210). The American scholar famously identified four ‘tokens’ which provide women with a range of approved ‘tokenistic’ leadership roles, eventually seeking to marginalize their professional profiles to their ‘gender category’ (Baxter, 2018, pp. 24-25).

‘Tokens are not simply people who differ from other group members along any one dimension. They are people identified by ascribed characteristics (master statuses such as sex, race, religion, ethnic group, age, etc.) or other characteristics that carry with them a set of assumptions about culture, status and behavior highly salient for majority category members. They bring these auxiliary traits into situations in which they differ from other people not in ability to do a task or in acceptance of work norms but only in terms of these secondary and informal assumptions’ (Kanter, 1984, p. 56).

Kanter further argued that these gendered positions play a major role in the way people perceive and value women’s expertise in the workplace since they are judged according to their gender rather than according to their successes in executive positions (Baxter, 2018, p. 25). If on the one hand tokenism guarantees women an instant highly visible identity, on the other hand they ‘are not permitted the individuality of their own unique, non-stereotypical characteristics’ (Kanter, 1993, p. 211). Once categorized in these tokens, in order to assert themselves in organizations, female figures have two different options. Specifically, ‘they can choose assimilation by becoming insiders and turn against their social category as women, or they can consider isolation, producing a counterculture among tokens, but eventually risking being excluded from key public activity or informal social events’ (Baxter, 2018, p. 25). As a social psychologist, Kanter (1993, p. 212) strongly believed that patriarchal gendered stereotypes were completely responsible for creating these four role traps within the political domain, so she famously categorized them using comical names

based on familiar and historical archetypes of women in authority, namely 'Iron Maiden', 'Seductress' 'Mother' and 'Pet'.

The 'iron maiden' or 'battle axe' is evidently the most conventionally virilised of Kanter's four stereotypes. The 'iron maiden' is an unnaturally masculinised depiction of female figures since, according to this stereotype, women are considered to speak and act in an aggressive way and are commonly portrayed by their colleagues as 'frightening', 'hard' and 'aggressive', almost having bullying attitudes (Baxter, 2018, p. 26). Conforming to it, being violent and mean contrasts with a woman's caretaking and protective nature, so in this perspective, such masculinised women are viewed as insane. Even though this stereotype seems to enclose the most overt power of the four, it is arguably damaging for female leaders. The reason is that the 'iron maiden' is so autonomous and self-reliant that she does not face obstacles individually, therefore she does not require her colleagues' assistance. (Baxter, 2018, p. 26). This role trap can be also the subject of bad jokes from both men and women about its apparent lack of feminine qualities such as collaboration, caring and sensuality, eventually leading to women's portrayal as 'just like a man' (Baxter, 2018, p. 26).

Another relevant women leaders' stereotype is the 'seductress', which encompasses a sexualised view of women as mainly serving to please the sexual desires of influential men (Baxter, 2018, p. 28). As stated by Kanter (1993, p. 214), the 'seductress' typically joins the company of a senior man in the institutions. Accordingly, she can be seen as having witch-like items to fascinate and seduce men who are totally incapable of refusing her. Then, she uses her attractiveness to achieve prestige with other senior men, eventually resulting in a threat to both male and female collaborators, who may consecutively exclude her. In any case, the 'seductress' colleagues use her external attractiveness in order to undermine her knowledge and potential. This role trap shows a more dangerous and controversial position for a senior woman than other tokens (Baxter, 2018, p. 29). This is due to the fact that the 'seductress' is commonly seen as using her sexual appearance to achieve professional success in the institution rather than to improve her professional competences (Baxter, 2018, p. 29).

An additional 'role trap' formulated by Kanter is the 'mother' or 'school marm', legitimized by the ideological link between women's domestic role and their nurturing and empathetic qualities. This stereotype exemplifies the only traditional positions of authority women have been assigned to, namely within the domestic sphere of the family or within traditionally feminine professions such as teaching (Baxter, 2018, p. 29). According to Kanter (1993, p. 215), the role of the 'mother' is both sociological and emotional rather than linked to

professional proficiency. The ‘mother’ or ‘school marm’ is expected to be a confidant and assistant to colleagues since she is seen as a boring and temperate woman who is not considered a sexual threat to men and may be depicted as ‘mild’, ‘caring’ and ‘well-disposed’. Therefore, the ‘school marm’ is also regarded by colleagues as sexless, namely someone who lacks attractiveness and treats both men and women like her supposed students (Baxter, 2018, p. 29). Both these role traps are limiting for senior women. The ‘mother’ is not considered to have a major role as she is expected to offer assistance to her colleagues rather than to be acknowledged for her professional abilities and critical thought (Baxter, 2018, p. 29).

Another famous stereotype identified by Kanter is the ‘pet’, which is less likely to be associated to women nowadays since its ‘implications of girlishness and dependence’ (Baxter, 2018, p. 31) do not correspond to the leadership traits female politicians should develop, such as self-confidence and determination (Baxter, 2018, p. 29). According to Kanter the ‘pet’ ‘is adopted by the male group as a cute, amusing little thing and symbolically taken along on group events as a mascot’ (Kanter, 1993, p. 235). Within this context, the ‘pet’ may be ridiculed by her senior male collaborators, but on the other hand, she may be depicted as ‘cute’, ‘funny’, ‘a laugh’ and ‘a good sport’ (Baxter, 2018, p. 31). This stereotype may also be considered as innocent and naïve, yet it produces gendered conventions which discourage women from showing their real capabilities as leaders.

Kanter’s female constructions across different professions strongly influenced Baxter who proposed a fifth stereotype deriving from the ‘queen bee syndrome’ which was studied by Staines, Jayaratne and Tavris in 1973 (Baxter, 2018, p. 32). Kanter (1993, p. 230) herself, refers to the syndrome as the ‘popularised women-prejudiced-against-women hypotheses’, claiming that prominent women address subordinate colleagues more conflictingly if they are women. In some ways, the stereotype encompasses characteristics of the other four, since the ‘queen bee’ is a woman who struggled to reach a powerful senior role and yet is unwilling to help other women to achieve an equal position (Baxter, 2018, p. 32). Similarly to the role trap of the ‘seductress’, the ‘queen bee’ reinforces her status at senior level and creates a supporters’ group of senior men, who often feel respect mixed with fear towards her. One way to maintain her fascination is by merging features of conventionally feminine and masculine aspects, such as the ‘seductress’ combined with the ‘iron maiden’. Moreover, the queen bee also preserves her charisma and integrity by claiming that her professional self-realization is due to extraordinary capacities rather than to her gender category, thereby potentially undermining other female professionals (Derks et al., 2016, p. 178).

Overall, these five stereotypes are recognizable as the predominant ways in which senior women are commonly portrayed in the workplace. Nonetheless, in recent years, the interest in feminine leadership has progressively grown, due to increasing numbers of women entering executive positions. From this perspective, Kanter's theories of tokenism and role traps continue to have relevance to today's voting behavior and newspapers media, acting as retrogressive forces in the depiction of women leaders. This is due to the fact that some components of the industry still reproduce old stereotypes on gender roles dividing women and men into sharply opposing factions, especially in the political sphere.

1.2 Women leaders in politics: the struggle for equality

As women have continued to reach male-dominated professions around the globe, discrimination based on gender stereotypes still obstructs their leadership journeys. Originally called the *glass ceiling*, the new expression of a *leadership labyrinth* implies a challenging journey in which women have to overcome obstacles related to prototypical leadership attributes (Hancock et al., 2018, p. 1). In the political realm, the role of gender stereotypes may have an influence on both perceptions of women's political leadership and actual voting behavior. Accordingly, deeply rooted prejudice against female leaders arises from the cultural definition of leadership in masculine terms, which excludes women for their 'communal traits' of compassion and kindness (Schein, 1973, p. 99). Influential psychological theories of gender and power have all emphasized the central role of traditional stereotypes in the marginalization of women in leadership positions (Bauer, 2019, p. 3). These old models laid the foundations to contemporary debates and studies on gender bias since they can be still applied to today's female leaders who struggle against deeply

rooted stereotypes. Following Eagly and Karau's (2002, p. 576) role congruity theory, discrimination against female politicians results from the inconsistency between the *take charge*, or agentic, stereotype associated to leadership and the *take care*, or shared, stereotype associated to women. In other words, the stereotypical image of a leader is someone who has agentic masculine attributes in contrast to women's communal traits (Eagly & Diekmann, 2005, p. 1171). Therefore, prejudice against women leaders develops from the incongruity between stereotypes about women and prototypical leadership attributes (Koenig et al., 2011, p. 619). This eventually leads to different forms of gender stereotyping in male-dominated institutions, which portray masculine professional activities and male leaders as the normative while female leaders as the exceptional case (Manzi & Heilman, 2021, p. 2).

Within this framework, female leaders often experience a *double bind*. On the one hand, highly 'communal' women are condemned for being too weak or insufficiently skilled leaders, on the other hand, highly 'agentic' female leaders are condemned for not being feminine enough (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016, p. 387). However, in both cases, women experience backlash effects, defined as 'social and economic penalties for defying stereotypic expectations' (Rudman et al., 2012, p. 166). Indeed, women leaders who aspire to govern may be humiliated when expressing anger or disappointment, in contrast to their male counterparts, who are instead legitimated. An example of gender-based hostility and backlash effects was experienced by the former American Senator Hillary Clinton at the beginning of the 21st century. Throughout her career, the American senator has been considered as a 'radical feminist' and 'nasty woman', two labels which provoked Americans' hostility towards women and feminism (Bligh et al., 2012, p. 580).

In research literature the 'stereotype threat' has been further investigated to reinforce 'the stereotyped lack of fit between women's characteristics, skills and aspirations, and those deemed necessary for effective leadership' (Baxter, 2018, p. 25). These gendered expectations supporting female inferiority threaten women to the point that some give up their achievements as leaders. The consequences of experiencing the 'stereotype threat' are damaging for different reasons. It may damage women's performance in leadership and eventually undermine their sense of belonging in a field or institution. Moreover, it may annihilate their ambitions to pursue success and destroy women's dignity and aspirations (Hoyt and Murphy, 2016, p. 209).

Prejudices and inequalities are also seen as one of the biggest obstacles to women's success as leaders by Derks et al., (2016, p. 456) who analysed women's treatment of other women

in the workplace. The authors argue that conventional assumptions of female leaders as victims of a patriarchal world misunderstand the obstacles they face, endorsing the view that the problem lies with senior women. Therefore, those women who want to pursue a high-flying career, which is still considered as exceptional for them, may embrace a masculine ‘self-description’ and become distant from other women to enter a profession (Baxter, 2018, p. 6). It follows that, although women have made significant career progress in conventionally male-typed positions of leadership, they are still more likely to be undermined and marginalized within the public sphere (Bligh et al., 2012, p. 565).

1.2.1 How gender stereotypes of emotion lead to biased constructions of female political leaders

Gender stereotypes of emotion supporting the view that women are more emotional than men are one of the strongest gender role beliefs held in Western culture. These prejudices present a strong obstacle to women’s ability to reach and succeed in senior positions leading to biases against female leaders which influence the public debate (Brescoll, 2016, p. 415). Accordingly, the emphasis on women leaders’ emotionality during political campaigns reiterates the traditional stereotype that positions women as the more emotional sex and, thereby less suited for leadership roles.

The most authoritative behavioral theories of gender and power have all underlined the fundamental role of gender stereotypes in the marginalization of women in leadership positions. Influential theories such as Heilman’s lack of fit model (1989) and Eagly and Karau’s role congruity theory of prejudice against female leaders (2002), all underline that beliefs about gender roles cause the public to see women as less competent for leadership

than men and even to experience social and economic penalties such as backlash. Even though there is compelling evidence that women leaders are criticized when they ‘behave agentically or fail to behave communally’ (Brescoll, 2016, p. 416), according to Brescoll communality and agency may not demonstrate why women encounter obstacles when they reach executive roles (p. 416). In order to be considered as good leaders, women do not just need agency, but they also must possess specific characteristics which involve emotional self-control such as being rational and judicious. This shows the relevance of ‘emotion stereotypes’ to recognize discrimination towards women in leadership positions (Brescoll, 2016, p. 417). The biased assumption that women are the more emotive sex may be the result of people ‘simply observing them displaying more emotions than men, and not because they believe that women are necessarily feeling a wider range and greater intensity of emotions’ (Brescoll, 2016, p. 417). Therefore, women may be considered as more emotional because they are seen as less able to control the external expression of their feelings compared to men (Brescoll, 2016, p. 416).

One of the primary consequences for women politicians is the belief that there is a potential relationship between the capacity to control the emotional display and the ability to make logical and objective decisions. The idea that an individual should regulate whether and to what extent his emotions influence his judgment reflects the long-established belief that emotivity negatively affects rational thinking (Brescoll, 2016, p. 418).

A second consequence of the assumption about women’s lack of emotional control on their behavior is that they are often seen as too sensitive and unable to acknowledge and cope with negative feedback and disappointments. In order to be a good leader, besides strategically managing the outward expression of feelings to others, it is important not to allow emotions influence self-judgment. In other words, leaders should not ‘take things personally’ and should be able to separate business and personal life without losing focus on their professional goals (Brescoll, 2016, p. 418). Indeed, since women are more likely to express and discuss their emotions, people generally assume that they take criticism and disappointments more personally compared to their male colleagues. Therefore, the assumption that women are incapable of controlling the influence of their feelings may not only induce people to consider them as irrational and incompetent, but it can also encourage negative thoughts about their ability to learn from critical feedback and improve over time. This results in a diminution of people’s trust in female politicians’ leadership skills.

A third consequence arises from the belief that women are more sentimental and softer than men while dealing with others in the workplace. While being altruistic and sympathetic with

others in difficulty is commonly considered as a quality for leaders, it is assumed that empathy should not weaken leaders' capacity to make complex decisions (Brescoll, 2016, p. 418). Consequently, even if leaders have compassion for a collaborator in distress, they have to prevent those feelings from altering their capacity to make rational choices, as their duty is to prioritize the interests of the organization. Within this perspective, women are commonly seen as lacking sufficient amount of 'emotional toughness' to successfully guide others (Heilman, 2001, p. 659). Therefore, female figures occupying a leadership role may find themselves unable to balance the emotional display expected of them as women and the qualities expected of them as leaders. Despite this difficulty, politicians are supposed to manage their emotional performance and display their professional abilities to exercise power (Brescoll, 2016, p. 420).

Emphasis on female leaders' emotivity is one of the features news users take into account when they evaluate candidates' leadership potential. Such evaluations can have a real impact by discouraging electorates to vote for politicians who have been depicted as 'too emotional', and therefore not suitable for leadership. This is of crucial importance for female leaders since the focus on politicians' facial expressions perpetuates gendered norms about leadership and damages their professional careers. In other words, during political campaigns, leaders are supposed to find a balance between nonverbal communication and authoritative behavior to maintain a positive public image (Manusov & Compton, 2023, p. 5).

There are many instances of women who achieved important executive roles demonstrating that their professional role did not prevent backlash effects when they showed feelings (Brescoll, 2016, p. 422). For instance, after the former Prime Minister Theresa May resigned in 2019, the British tabloid *Daily Mail* emphasized the leader's emotional reaction and depicted her as a weak politician (Weidhase, 2024, p. 464). Consistent with these findings, female leaders may have been more carefully examined than their male colleagues (Brescoll, 2016, p. 422). Accordingly, since the focus on political candidates' emotivity undermines their perception as authoritative and trustworthy figures, public opinion may be led to believe that women are not as reliable as men in leadership positions (Gruszcztnski et al., 2023, p. 503). Within the realm of political communication, research suggests that women candidates are expected to embody gender roles rooted in caring and nurturing behavior. These attributes eventually make them appear poorly suited for political positions that require the masculine 'toughness' (Brescoll, 2016, p. 424). Even though it may not be difficult to find examples in which news media negatively constructed male leaders for improper public

display of emotions, women leaders may be even more scrutinized for the same disposition (Brescoll, 2016, p. 422). Therefore, when female politicians behave in gender stereotypical ways, news media ‘may be especially likely to build a story out of it’ (Brescoll, 2016, p. 422).

1.3 The influence of media on gender-role stereotypes in the workplace

Although many gender-related biases have declined over the years, women’s leadership aspirations are still negatively affected by gender stereotypes, which influence employment prospects with old patriarchal expectations (Tabassum & Nayak, 2021, p. 192). These prejudices are potentially damaging to aspiring women as they encourage biased evaluations which define them as unsuitable for senior positions in male-dominated organizations. In recent years, the amount of academic research that examines women’s increasing inclusion in high office has grown, yet scholars also investigate the reasons why women still face barriers to reach these powerful roles (Baxter, 2018, p. 5). Among the many sources of influence on gender-role stereotyping, media is the most pervasive and powerful one since its relevance in people’s everyday life affects their attitudes and assumptions about the roles of men and women (Santonnicolo et al., 2023, p. 1). Commonly, men are depicted as powerful, sexually aggressive, and engaged in leading actions from which they gain rewards for their ‘masculine’ achievements (Ward & Grower, 2020, p. 180). In other words, media emphasize traditional cultural ideas of masculinity according to which men are considered independent, unafraid, in control of all emotions, and above all, in no way feminine. On the contrary, women’s depictions are in line with the cultural views of gender, describing them as emotional, passive, dependent and often lacking competency in the workplace since they

are believed to direct their main energies to improving their attractiveness and looking after children (Halper et al., 2019, p. 550). Both in visual and written media content, these gendered views pervade everyone's daily life, contributing to people's distorted perception of themselves and of what is believed to be normal and desirable for men and women (Aaldering & Van Der Pas, 2018, p. 915). Accordingly, research shows that most people are not aware of how gender stereotyping unconsciously affects their opinions, and are therefore convinced their thoughts are based on unbiased observations (Kiprotich & Chang'orok, 2015, p. 71).

A primary way in which media reiterates gender stereotypes is in underrepresenting women in the workplace. On a global scale, media coverage appears to mostly feature men, especially when they occupy executive positions, where women are still underrepresented despite a rise in coverage in the last years (Santoniccolo et al., 2023, p. 4). The scholar Sobieraj (2018, p. 1706) observes that 'gender is [...] at the very center of the attacks themselves. Femininity and femaleness are the weapons of choice used to undermine women's participations and contributions'. Accordingly, female figures who do not coincide with traditional gender roles are negatively depicted by media, and, as a result, their professional careers remain invisible. Therefore, stereotyping women in the workplace increases conformity to a long-established view of femininity which supports the idea that a woman may be affluent and triumphant if she embodies traditional female stereotypes of passivity and meekness (Sharda, 2014, p. 45).

Another central theme in mediated depictions of the relationships between the sexes is the representation of women on the basis of their appearance and personality traits (Santoniccolo et al., 2023, p. 4), in contrast to that of men which is more focused on their potential and capabilities. While men's stories deal with their professional achievements, conveying the dominant message that they are supposed to do and perform, stories about women usually focus on their private life and physical appearance. These gendered representations eventually carry to the extreme traditional and cultural views of gender in order to undermine women's claim and social position, including by means of (sexual) objectification (Bligh et al., 2012, p. 590). While most of media communication may not be directly provocative, research shows that viewing media depictions of female objectification may lead to dangerous consequences (Halliwell et al., 2011, p. 39). Precisely, these same patterns which pervade media may reinforce a connection between sex-stereotypical communication and acceptance of sexual violence against women (Santoniccolo et al., 2023, p. 6). In this perspective, women's integrity and professional achievements, together with their efforts to

oppose exploitation, are insignificant to media's representation to the point that they are often marginalized as online subjects. This last aspect may represent a significant barrier to women's ascendance into higher leadership positions (Bligh et al., 2012, p. 561).

1.3.1 Gendered media constructions of women political leaders

While media presence is necessary for women's career advancement, an online presence may be a 'double edged sword' that can contribute to gendered disinformation narratives (Jankowicz et al., 2021, p. 5). These can both obstruct young women's political ambitions and discourage political elites from electing them, leading to continued underrepresentation of women in the future (Van der Pas & Aaldering, 2020, p. 115). In the digital era, another form of abuse that obstacles women's professional achievements in the public sphere is 'online harassment', used as a tool to subdue female leaders during political campaigns and prevent the future participation of other women in the political sphere (Jankowicz et al., 2021, p. 6). The scholar Sobieraj (2020, p. 119) argues that this form of abuse pushes some women to censor themselves by avoiding certain subjects or limiting their participation in online political debates. This withdrawal from public conversation eventually reinforces the idea that men are more suitable for leadership than women and consequently damages female leaders' political aspirations and engagement. Such abuse is called 'gendered disinformation', a term coined by the scholar Nina Jankowicz in 2017, which has been later defined as 'the spread of deceptive or inaccurate information and images against women in politics, following story lines that often draw on misogyny and distrust for women in politics, frequently referring to their sexuality' (Jankowicz et al., 2021, p. 7). Within this framework, Sobieraj (2018, p. 1705) observes that media gendered representations 'exploit double

standards about women's sexual behavior and physical appearance to taint targets' in order to attack women's credibility and communicate that they are unfit for public life.

In 2016, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) investigated this issue against women in politics and distinguished between the direct and indirect impact of online abuse to the detriment of women:

While acts of violence against women in politics are directed at individual women, they have an intent beyond their specific target: to frighten other women who are already politically-active, to deter women who might consider engaging in politics, and to communicate to society that women should not participate in public life in any capacity (Jankowicz et al., 2021, p. 7).

Accordingly, despite their professional achievements in many professions around the globe, women are still victims of stereotyped constructions which send out the message that they are not suitable for leadership in male-dominated institutions (Baxter, 2018, p. 1). Specifically, gender differences in leadership roles are a recurrent theme in online news articles which use these concepts to create essentialised constructions of women leaders in order to shape voters' perceptions on their leadership potential (Insenga, 2014, p. 184).

1.4 Female political leaders in online news

In the contemporary world, the language of the news, in both its elite and popular forms, plays a major part in building a shared view of the world and setting criteria for human interpretation of current events. Language is at the center of many debates in modern society, and it is the means of communication in which those debates are embedded. This is of double importance for a practice such as journalism which records and therefore constructs social reality through reporters' specific linguistic and stylistic choices (Conboy, 2007, p. 2). The effects rhetorical devices have upon identity construction can be observed in the way gender stereotypes are perpetuated in online news articles. Correspondingly, assumptions about social categories often lead to gender biases of their assumed characteristics which in turn may incite media users to criticize news subjects (Baxter, 2018, p. 3). One way of looking at how language conveys dominant assumptions about the role, speech and behavior of men and women is analysing the gendered portrayal of women leaders in online news articles. Linguistic and stylistic features employed by journalists may consolidate women's traditional role in society, eventually discouraging them from leading or participating in public actions and political campaigns. Since only a small proportion of the electorate has the chance to meet candidates in person, voters often rely on news coverage and other forms of mass media in forming their opinion of those running for political office. Therefore, the journalistic lens through which the public views politicians is of crucial importance for leaders' professional careers (Devitt, 2002, p. 446). Within this framework, negative stereotypes about women politicians perpetuated in the news contribute to the large disparity between men and women in senior positions (Hoyt & Simon, 2013, p. 233).

The present research examines how British newspapers coverage discursively constructs women leaders through the use of stylistic and linguistic features which may bring to the surface a gendered representation of female politicians and undermine their social and professional status. These 'discursively constructed' news depictions about female politicians are closely tied to gender role stereotypes embedded in society, eventually spreading the message that women are less deserving of leadership roles in contrast to men who are thought to be more 'agentic' and ambitious, therefore worthy to be chosen as a political leader (Blight et al., 2012, p. 562).

Feminist theories analysing how gender is portrayed in the news 'have used both quantitative and qualitative approaches' to show that women are marginalized around the globe (Baxter,

2018, p. 10). Quantitative studies have shown that even in countries where institutions support women's position of senior leadership, they were extremely unrepresented in news media (Gill, 2007, p. 153). Qualitative research has found that online newspapers emphasize women's appearance to the detriment of other aspects (Ross, 2009). In Baxter's study, the focus on physical features at the expense of women's professional careers is clearly visible in the discursive construction of female politicians compared to their male counterparts (Baxter, 2018, p. 11). Within this framework, news discourse identification is not neutral, rather it tells a lot about how newspapers represent collectively recognized constructs in terms of news content and its impact on public opinion (Baxter, 2018, p. 11).

Gibbons's (2022, p. 113) analysis revealed similar evidence of a qualitative bias in newspaper coverage of men versus women candidates. Specifically, newspapers paid more attention to women leaders' personal traits, such as age or personality, and devoted less coverage to outlining women candidates' stances on public policy issues such as education, healthcare, and taxes. The coverage of personality traits is functional to the success of a political campaign, as stereotypical masculine aspects tend to be associated with leadership skills. Kanter's role traps (1993) strongly influenced the analysis of women leaders' representation in British newspapers. For instance, in Baxter's study (2018), the scholar analysed a number of headlines from the British tabloid *Daily Mail* and argued that the former Prime Minister Theresa May was often victim of gender stereotypes that depicted her as an 'iron maiden' or 'battle-axe' (2018, p. 38). These outdated prejudices persist across Western culture within the collective imagination, as they are evoked by online newspapers to register female news subjects as unusual, surprising and threatening (Baxter, 2018, p. 32). Following this theoretical background, news media's increasing attempt to adjust and control the way women leaders are perceived encourages the employment of gendered roles that should have long been restricted to social history.

1.4.1 News coverage of female political leaders: The British Case

In recent times, female leaders had many opportunities to increase their presence in the British Parliament and reach a higher gender equality. However, despite their prestigious positions in many political parties, British female leaders' representation is still undervalued and often attracts negative media attention (Insenga, 2014, p. 184). In the past, female British politicians have widely experienced sexism from their male counterparts, their public and news media (Williams, 2021, p. 400). Historical tendencies of gender stereotypes in British political domain can be traced to the UK's first woman Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (Williams, 2021, p. 400). Accordingly, after her election, Margaret Thatcher frequently drew the attention of news media, where she was 'depicted' as different or exceptional and often marginalized in contrast to her male colleagues (Williams, 2021, p. 399). Besides being parodied as 'too feminine', she was described by newspapers as a masculine figure through stereotypes of toughness, ambition and brutality to give her reputation either a positive or negative inflection (Golder, 2020, p. 10). Throughout her premiership, she also earned the famous nickname 'The Iron Lady' from the Soviet newspaper *Red Star*, which ironically summarized the combination between her male and female features (Golder, 2020, p. 13). This famous metaphor celebrated the leader's 'masculine' strength and resistance as a major political figure since she gave a significant contribution to Britain's economic policies and re-established the nation as a world power (Edwards et al., 2017, p. 89). In view of this, Margaret Thatcher's portrayal may seem nuanced in terms of gender bias. However, media's parodies about her combined masculine and feminine features to subtly highlight the importance of masculine traits for political office and reiterate traditional gender role stereotypes (Meeks, 2012, p. 181).

After Margaret Thatcher, the UK experienced a sharp increase in newspapers' parliamentary construction of women leaders since the number of female figures in the House of Commons continued to grow following the 1997 election (Lovenduski & Norris, 2003, p. 84). According to the statistics, until 1997, women had never formed more than 10% of all MPs, and until the late 1980s the percentage had always been below 5%. The proportion of female candidates rose to 18% after the 1997 General Election and in 2005 it reached 20% for the first time (Buchanan, 2024, p. 10). In 2016, Theresa May won the Conservative leadership challenge and became the UK's second female Prime Minister (Williams, 2021, p. 399). Nevertheless, despite the increase of female figures in political roles since Thatcher's

government, their presence in parliament had not yet become the norm. Therefore, Theresa May and other British female leaders continued to experience gendered media treatment, (Baxter, 2018, p. 2) from both right leaning broadsheets like the *Daily Telegraph* and *Daily Mail* and left-leaning newspapers like the *Guardian*.

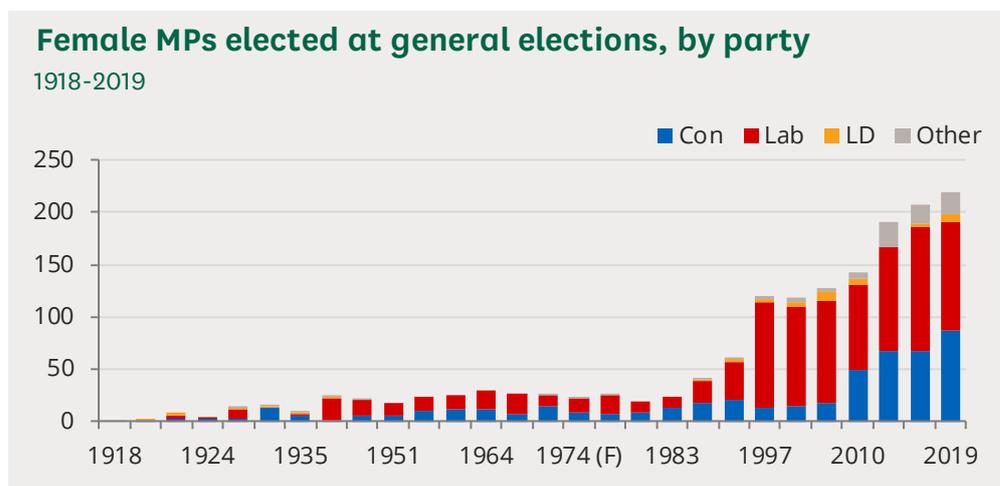
After Margaret Thatcher's government, the UK witnessed an increase in essentialised and negative media coverage of women leaders. The scholar Langer (2007, p. 380) argued that this phenomenon widely expanded in the 1990s when political leaders' images and private lives became the center of attention of many news media. The increased media visibility of both male and female prime ministers and a higher focus on their personal and leadership traits deeply changed journalistic ethics. As a consequence, shifting boundaries between public and private life became a standard in both modern societies and political reportage (Langer, 2007, pp. 384-385). However, if on the one hand this 'human' turn on politicians' features and personal sphere simplified coverage and made it more appealing to readers, on the other hand, it deeply affected female leaders' reputation since they were still considered as 'atypical' in male political domains (Williams, 2021, p. 401). Within this framework, the most significant example is the British former Prime Minister Theresa May, who, throughout her government, experienced a deeply gendered reception for her role of 'headmistress' tasked with delivering Brexit. Further analysis on the political leader and media bias was carried out by Harmer and Southern (2019, p. 106), who examined Theresa May's media gendered construction during the 2017 UK general election. Specifically, the scholars noticed news articles' recurrent emphasis on the leader's private life and appearance, including her fashion choices, which became one of the most popular topics in Theresa May's media constructions (Williams, 2021, p. 1). For instance, an article from *The Sun* titled 'Kitten heels must live up to her word and put her foot down on immigration now' (The Sun, 2016) focuses on the leader's heels. These shoes eventually became a symbol of Theresa May's political involvement since they were commonly mentioned in news articles to refer to the leader's policies in order to undermine her authority and political claim (Williams, 2021, p. 1). This headline from *The Sun* is both linguistically and stylistically interesting since the journalist employs rhetorical devices to construct the Prime Minister. In this framework, 'kitten heels' are a metonymy employed to refer to Theresa May, the expression 'put her foot down' is a metaphor used to allude to her political authority and the use of alliteration of the sound 't' makes the news title more remarkable.

Another recurrent topic in the evaluation of Theresa May's government was her supposed incapacity to 'get Brexit done' due to her gender traits. This theme gradually became the

focus of attention of many newspapers after the leader failed to pass her Brexit deal and resigned in May 2019 (Weidhase, 2024, p. 464). In particular, the day she retired outside Number 10 Downing Street, much media coverage highlighted her unexpected emotional reaction and her tears to reinforce the idea that women are too emotive and thus too unreliable to be political leaders (Yates, 2019, p. 6). This image of weakness was further emphasized in the physical description of the leader’s body, which was described as ‘uncontrolled’ to stress her inadequacy to lead and to reinforce the male leadership norm (Weidhase, 2024, p. 471). Serving the role of Prime Minister, Theresa May received a disproportionate amount of gendered construction by much online newspapers compared to other British female parliamentarians who appeared in fewer stories (Insenga, 2014, p. 186). However, politicians’ visibility and media emphasis on female leaders’ personal traits could also provide them with opportunities to raise wider political issues and create a deeper connection with their public (O’Neill et al., 2016, p. 302). This gradually inspired a growing proportion of women to pursue the political career and consequently achieve important leadership positions. Accordingly, following Theresa May’s government, the number of female candidates at UK general elections rose to 33.8%, which was the highest number on record (Buchanan, 2024, p. 12).

Figure 1.1

The number of women elected at general elections since 1918, by party from Rallings and Thrasher, British Electoral Facts 1832-2006, 2012; House of Commons Library Briefing Papers (10/36) General Election 2010; (7186) General Election 2015; (7979) General Election 2017; (8749) General Election 2019.



In 2022, after Boris Johnson's resignation, Lizz Truss became Britain's third female Prime Minister. Although there is still a relative lack of research that investigates her media construction in terms of gender stereotypes due to her brief premiership, the leader did not escape news media attention and criticism for her appearance and supposed lack of professional skills like many other female politicians. Nowadays, there are 226 female MPs in the House of Commons and 238 female members in the House of Lords meaning that 32% of all UK parliamentarians are women (Buchanan, 2024, p. 5). Nevertheless, the main reason why female leaders continue to face obstacles is gender discrimination and prejudice, which is still perpetuated by British news media as a communicative strategy to establish traditional gender stereotypes of leadership to the detriment of both aspiring and established women's careers.

II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 News as a multimodal phenomenon

News texts play a major part in the creation of public discourses and narratives which act as predominant channels for the interpretation of social reality (Conboy, 2007, p. 5). They help people access information about current issues and events, but they may not provide an impartial coverage since reporters and editors' perspectives are embedded in their content choices (Riggs, 2024, p. 162). In this perspective, the interplay between text and images in online news articles plays a crucial role in the analysis of news values (Cheema et al., 2023, p. 2). News values have been widely studied as the guiding principles that determine the newsworthiness of an event recorded as news (Caple & Bednarek, 2016, p. 436). Therefore, the final aim of news values analysis is to investigate the reasons why a specific event has been chosen for publication. Such decisional process not only involves salient features of news stories, but also external factors that affect news writing profession, such as the impact of promoters or journalists' daily deadlines (Caple & Bednarek, 2016, p. 436). Consistent with Bednarek and Caple's (2014, p. 137) research, 'news values can be seen as discursively constructed, and newsworthiness becomes a quality of texts. News values are thus defined

as the ‘newsworthy’ aspects of actors, happenings and issues as...constructed through discourse’. In this view, only through careful analysis of texts it is possible to determine what news values are stressed, unusual or missing. Specifically, one way to investigate how semiotic systems construct news values and interact with other multimodal resources is through multimodal analysis (Bednarek & Caple, 2014, p. 140). According to Van Leeuwen ‘the term multimodality designates the phenomenon that discourse is almost always multimodal’ (2015, p. 447). In this context, multimodal implies that different semiotic resources, such as language, image and audio, are intertwined in visually mediated spaces. Therefore, as a field of study, multimodality investigates the common features and distinctions between these modes and the way they combine (Van Leeuwen, 2015, p. 447) to create meaning (Martikainen & Sakki, 2021, p. 393).

In the field of journalism, news texts can be interpreted as the product of different multimodal resources, namely text, image, colour, font and layout (Kress, 2012, p. 39) which integrate to construct meanings and interaction with the audience (O’Halloran, 2009, p. 382). Accordingly, news articles’ coherence presupposes a semiotic relationship between linguistic and visual components of the text to enable a deeper understanding of the journalist’s intentions and style (Kilby & Lennon, 2021, p. 2). The multimodal scholars Kress and Van Leeuwen brought to the surface major theoretical and analytical approaches to visual analysis, multimodality and social semiotics. Specifically, they made a distinction between the information written on the top and what is placed at the bottom of the discourse. In particular, the information on the top immediately catches the readers’ attention and brings a specific ideological orientation, while the information placed at the bottom is commonly about daily matters which give substance to initial ideological claims (Kilby & Lennon, 2021, p. 6). Within the area of online journalism, considerations about spatial arrangement apply to all components of a text, both verbal and visual ones. This means that the space occupied by the news text is one element within the overall space and is considered in relation to other components. In the great majority of media, news content is shaped through the constant interaction between written and visual content (Kilby & Lennon, 2021, p. 6). In this framework, according to some scholars, texts and images usually support or intensify each other, highlighting a specific news value by means of ‘semiotic aggregation’ (Riggs, 2024, p. 164; Martikainen & Sakki, 2021, p. 393). Conversely, as Liu, O’Halloran (2009) and Royce (2007) theorized, semantically different multimodal modes may also recontextualize or alter each other expanding their meaning (Martikainen & Sakki, 2021, p. 393).

Drawing upon previous studies on multimodal analysis, Bednarek and Caple (2017) broadened their research focusing on the impact of language and image in the news. They offered fundamental insights into ‘how news media package events as ‘news’ (Cheema et al., 2023, p. 4) by examining both linguistic and visual devices seen as vehicles of specific news values (Dahl & Fløttum, 2017, p. 124). From this discursive perspective, Bednarek and Caple classified eleven news values present in both language and images, including Aesthetic Appeal, Consonance, Eliteness, Impact, Negativity, Personalisation, Positivity, Proximity, Superlativeness, Timeliness and Novelty (Dahl & Fløttum, 2017, p. 125). Concerning Aesthetic Appeal, which is an exclusively visual news value, it refers to the captivating aspects of an occurrence or subject; Consonance instead applies to the conventional aspects of an issue, namely ‘adherence to expectations’ (Caple & Bednarek, 2016, p. 439) and visually refers to depictions ‘that fit with stereotypical imagery’ (Caple et al., 2020, p. 10); Eliteness refers to the higher rank of people, institutions or countries involved in a specific situation. As for the image composition, this news value shows widely recognized people, people in uniform or official regalia, and/or with ‘the specialist equipment associated with elite professions (Bednarek & Caple, 2016, p. 448); Impact alludes to the growing significance of an episode as concerns its consequences and visually shows ‘the after effects or emotions caused by events’ (Caple et al., 2020, p. 11); Negativity refers to the undesirable aspects of an event and in pictures this news value shows ‘negative events, emotions and their effects, including via movement/blurring’ (Caple et al., 2020, pp. 11-13); Personalisation is ‘the personal or human face of an event or issue, including eyewitness reports’ (Caple & Bednarek, 2016, p. 439) and from a visual point of view this news value involves ‘ordinary individuals’ (Caple et al., 2020, p. 13); Positivity refers to the positive and favourable aspects of an issue and visually shows people experiencing positive emotions (Caple & Bednarek, 2016, p. 439; Riggs, 2024, p. 168); Proximity alludes to the physical or geographical closeness of an occurrence to readers and from a visual point of view, this news value involves ‘well-known or iconic landmarks’ or ‘cultural symbols’ (Caple et al., 2020, pp. 14-15); Superlativeness is ‘the large scope or scale of an event or issue’ (Caple & Bednarek, 2016, p. 439) and visually adopts a ‘very wide angle to emphasize size/space contrasts and movement/blurring’ (Caple et al., 2020, p. 15); Timeliness refers to the ‘relevance of an event or issue in terms of time: recent, ongoing, about to happen or seasonal’ (Bednarek & Caple, 2016, p. 439); lastly, Novelty deals with surprising aspects of an occurrence. Overall, these categories strongly influence news content and how it is reported since they can be associated to specific verbal and visual semiotic components.

However, there is no unique correspondence between them since the emphasis is on the communicative function built upon these multimodal resources (Caple & Bednarek, 2016, p. 439). Given that each mode has specific communicative purposes (Luca, 2020, p. 75), a multimodal approach to news analysis takes into account the way in which visual and verbal systems interact to share ideas, values and identities (Jones, 2014, p. 6) within a common semiotic ground (Kilby & Lennon, 2021, p. 6; Riggs, 2024, p. 164).

2.1.1 Imagery in online news

Visual semiotic resources have long been marginalized in media and journalism studies, being considered as secondary to textual message. Yet they are constantly employed by journalists in news articles to enhance truthfulness, newsworthiness, and visual attractiveness of reported events (Caple & Bednarek, 2016, p. 445). With the influence of digitalization, news discourse became a ‘visually enriched product’ (Harcup & O’Neill, 2016, p. 1474) easily accessible from a variety of social media platforms. As a consequence, news images gained significant importance not only because they are considered as a reliable visual proof of the information written in the article, but also because they capture the readers’ attention, creating an engagement with the story (Banks, 2012, p. 296). The power of photographic imagery relies on its ability to work upon two layers contemporarily, namely denotation and connotation. The denotative meaning, which Barthes (1977) defines as the ‘analogue self’, refers to the literal meaning of a message, while the connotative meaning deals with its cultural or emotional association. So, whilst images may simply appear to provide news visual evidence, they do not portray an ‘objective reality’, but they are instead powerful communicative tools able to transmit ideological messages about a given issue or event (Banks, 2012, p. 296). As a result, within the area of journalism, images and page design, just like textual content, are subject to newsworthiness standards. This means that

the choice of visual material is strongly influenced by the relevance and significance of news topics (Banks, 2012, p. 296).

Text and image relations have been widely explored by Barthes (1977) to analyse visual and verbal representation from a multimodal perspective. Specifically, in his works he introduced three different relations to show the importance of the interplay between texts and images (Cheema et al., 2023, p. 3). These relations are anchorage, illustration and relay. Indeed, 'anchorage' applies to texts which support images guiding the reader in the interpretation of the picture. In doing so, the text restricts the polysemic meaning of the image into a single one. Concerning 'illustration', it supports textual content reconstructing part of the written information in a pictorial form. Lastly, 'relay' applies where texts and images have an 'equal relationship such as complementarity or interdependence' (Cheema et al., 2023, p. 3). These three concepts can be applied also to news texts and accompanying images in the 'meaning-making process' to enhance newsworthiness.

Going back to Bednarek and Caple's (2016, pp. 446-447) discursive approach, the scholars proposed two different ways to analyse how photographic imagery discursively builds news values. On the one hand, 'the contextualization of the image participants' (Bednarek & Caple, 2012, p. 105), considers what is described in the picture from a denotative level, including subjects' activities and circumstances. On the other hand, technical considerations refer to how the picture has been constructed through both composition and technical aspects of the image capture (Bednarek & Caple, 2016, p. 443).

Some scholars of multimodal discourse analysis draw particular attention to the study of composition (Alonso Belmonte & Porto, 2020, p. 61). This concept does not involve only the topic selection and the image placement on a website page but also camera settings and its different perspectives (Riggs, 2024, p. 164). These technical considerations, which include angle, lightning, focal length, and colors dramatically affect the 'collective visual perception' (Bednarek & Caple, 2016, p. 446) of an image and contribute to the construction of the news value (p. 446). Accordingly, throughout news photo's selection, images are analysed, edited and constructed not only to encourage negative or positive judgments in the viewer of the image (Bednarek & Caple, 2012, p. 105) but also to conform to newspapers' aesthetic directions and ideology. All these editorial processes eventually emphasize most news values, in particular Aesthetic Appeal and Superlativeness. According to Aesthetic Appeal, a visually appealing image can define the newsworthiness of an event (Bednarek & Caple, 2012, p. 105), while Superlativeness concerns the emotive impact of the image. In other words, even if pictures may appear to speak for themselves, they are never neutral but

always highly coded, since they work together with news texts to enhance the understanding of news content and elicit specific emotional responses from the audience (O'Neill, 2012, p. 11). Accordingly, the contribution that visual semiotic resources make to the construction of news articles is particularly relevant. In this framework, the combination between images and textual devices not only creates a multimodal message (Alonso Belmonte & Porto, 2020, p. 62), but also provides insights into how newspapers build widely different stories starting from everyday matters (Caple & Bednarek, 2016, p. 451).

2.2 The impact of newspaper headlines

Newspaper headlines play a crucial role in the construction of news values (Infantidou, 2023, p. 19) since they guide potential readers' interpretation of the following text (Riggs, 2024, p. 165) and motivate them to read it till the end. Accordingly, given their position of prominence, headlines, together with leads and initial pictures, are defined as 'primary semantic framing devices' useful to comprehend and evaluate news texts (Molek-Kozakowska, 2013, p. 185; Di Scacco & Muddiman, 2019, p. 2). Drawing from previous linguistic research, headlines are mostly examined as separate units of text which are correlated to the entire article, yet distinguishable from it (Dykstra, 2019, p. 90). Because of space constraints, they have peculiar linguistic characteristics which they share with the lead, advertising slogans and other types of block language (Culpeper et al., 2018, p. 444). Nevertheless, headlines work independently from the news text since they should satisfy the audience's quick needs for information (Caple & Bednarek, 2012, p. 100).

As various scholars have pointed out, headlines serve three main different functions. Indeed, they have an informative function since they provide a first insight and summary of the news story. They serve an interpersonal function in terms of influencing the audience's attention and early impressions. Lastly, news headlines have a framing function as they suggest the interpretation readers should adopt according to the journalists' stylistic choices (Riggs, 2021, p. 354). Thus, despite their brevity, headlines' multifunctionality relies on their ability to summarize, attract and frame since they generally reach a broader audience than the text which follows (Riggs, 2021, p. 354).

Conventionally, headlines are written in larger characters compared to the news content they accompany, and their relative dimension and position on the front page suggests the news topic's relevance (Culpeper et al., 2018, p. 444). Bednarek and Caple's research (2012, p. 100) on headlines subgenre, also called 'headline', brings to the surface how headlines' visual and linguistic features can be easily related to their multiple functions. From an aesthetic point of view, headlines should be visually appealing and typographically attractive in terms of font and layout. From a linguistic point of view, they should include powerful and evaluative words to enhance newsworthiness, while premodifications, nominalizations, and present tense should be employed to encourage timeliness (Bednarek & Caple, 2012, p. 100). In this context, the term premodification refers to 'the use of adjectives, nouns or verbs which precede a word and determine the meaning of a phrase' (Nordquist, 2019). As for nominalizations, they indicate 'the process of formation of nouns from a clause or a verb' (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, 2024). In addition to these linguistic elements, headlines often exploit a range of stylistic and rhetorical devices to intrigue readers. These include alliterations, rhymes, metaphors, proverbs and others foregrounding techniques (Bednarek & Caple, 2012, p. 100).

While all these linguistic devices are intended to involve and, to some extent inform larger audiences, it is also possible for some headlines to be considered as ambiguous and misleading (Culpeper et al., 2018, p. 444). Accordingly, even though news titles usually combine specific stylistic and linguistic features, some scholars claimed that they serve two different functions according to their salient characteristics. In particular, they fulfill a semantic function in summarizing news content to facilitate readers' comprehension, whereas the pragmatic function is exemplified by the use of stylistic devices to attract the readers' attention and curiosity (Dor, 2003, p. 698). In this view, semantic headlines should be able to answer the five journalistic questions which summarize news content, namely who, what, where, when and why. On the contrary, pragmatic headlines often include

stylistic elements such as metaphors, adverbs, quotations and questions to attract target readers (Lee, 2023, p. 896). The predominance of one type of headline over the other may be used to set criteria for the evaluation of news headlines. Accordingly, semantic headlines are often adopted by quality press since they are viewed as more authentic, communicative and straight (Lee, 2022, p. 893) in contrast to popular press and tabloids, which use pragmatic communication to enhance sensationalism as a strategy to gain a larger public (Molek-Kozakowska, 2013, p. 174). Within journalism studies, sensationalism is considered as a discursive strategy employed to make news sound more relevant and appealing, and thus enhance newsworthiness (Molek-Kozakowska, 2013, p. 177). However, media's frequent use of pragmatic headlines may support news misrepresentation since readers are encouraged to focus on what is more captivating rather than to what is more relevant. Consequently, sensationalism is viewed to negatively affect the newspaper's reputation since it apparently reduces the quality of news content in favor of eye-catching topics (Lee, 2023, p. 893).

Going back to headlines' communicative effects, according to previous pragmatic studies on journalism discourse, relevance is a key concept in the analysis of their functions and overall impact. Consistent with these findings, headlines serve as relevance optimizers for readers (Dor, 2003, p. 705; Finkbeiner, 2020, p. 147) since according to Dor's theory:

As a short and simple text, a headline optimizes the relevance of the story by minimizing processing effort while making sure that a sufficient amount of contextual effects are deducible within the most appropriate context possible (Dor, 2003, p. 759).

Drawing from the Relevance theory (Wilson & Cartson, 2019), as autonomous texts, headlines are more likely to catch the readers' attention and curiosity when the word choice is meaningful and supports a better understanding of the news content despite their usual vagueness and conciseness (Infantidou, 2023, p. 18). Accordingly, conventions such as brevity and timeliness are used to maximize the value of every word and enhance effectiveness. Following Chovanec's (2014, p. 242) analysis on headlines' stylistic features, as far as timeliness is concerned, a non-chronological title creates a shared context of reading with the audience and produces a more 'personal, authentic and conversational' headline which can expand over time and space (Infantidou, 2023, p. 20). In his research, Finkbeiner

(2020, p. 149) explained the impact of headlines as relevance optimizers through the use of wh-headlines and click baits. As suggested by the scholar, wh-headlines usually anticipate the topic of the story to provoke the readers' curiosity. Similarly, click baits headlines grab the audience's attention to persuade online users to access the full text of an article and learn more about it (Pengnate, 2021, p. 3). In both cases, if the readers successfully read part of the text which follows, a headline fulfills one of its main tasks, that is 'to act as a mediator between the audience need for information and the newspaper's offer to provide it' (Infantidou, 2023, p. 23).

Nowadays, systematic analysis of headlines in the digital context focuses more on their stylistic features as evidence of effectiveness and newsworthiness (Dykstra, 2019, p. 91). This again demonstrates that headlines' functions and properties are more explicitly ideological rather than objective, therefore it is important to examine how these devices work to make their content meaningful (Riggs, 2021, p. 356) and enhance news' salience. Within this framework, Discourse Analysis (DA) of newspaper headlines further investigates lexical or rhetorical features since these linguistic devices, as well as imagery, shed a light on how newspapers construct and represent news subjects or events (Baxter, 2018, p. 34).

2.2.1 Stance and stance taking

All newspaper articles usually include an embedded viewpoint that is typically compressed or made significant in their headlines, where journalist's stance is thus mirrored and may affect the audience's decision to read the whole text or not (Juez, 2017, p. 81). So far, characteristics, and functions of stance taking, as well as its application, have been thoroughly investigated by both media and discourse studies. When it comes to news headlines, stance markers represent one of the main concerns for both publishers and readers to investigate evaluative meanings and news values. Since headlines are powerful framing devices which highlight opinions and stances of news report, the analysis of stance taking is thus relevant to evaluate the journalists' consequent representation of subjects or events.

The concept of stance has been widely investigated in sociolinguistics and media research as it combines a large number of studies on how sentences' meanings are communicated and how speakers or writers address their public (Barton & Lee, 2013, p. 87). According to the scholars Barton and Lee (2013, p. 87) stance 'refers to the position people take in relation to oneself, to what is said and to other people or objects'. When expressing a stance statement, three main components are involved, namely the 'stance taker', the topic discussed and the linguistic resources through which the stance is expressed (Barton & Lee, 2013, p. 87). Within this framework, the concepts of stance and stance taking are considered as complementary by both linguistic and journalism studies since they can be used to detect specific analytic tools employed by journalists to create biased constructions (Kiesling, 2022, p. 409). Specifically, stance and stance taking are strongly related to the concepts of evaluation and appraisal. In the domain of news discourse analysis, appraisal refers to the semantic features used to negotiate meanings and evaluations among interlocutors (Quin & Zhang, 2020, p. 102). As for evaluation, it has been defined as:

A dynamical subsystem of language, permeating all linguistic levels and involving the expression of the speaker's or writer's attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions that s/he is talking about, which entails relational work including the (possible and prototypically expected and subsequent) response of the hearer or (potential) audience. This relational work is generally related to the speaker's and/or hearer's personal, group, or cultural set of values (Juez & Thompson, 2014, p. 13).

Within news headlines' analysis, appraisal and evaluation can take various linguistic and grammatical forms in the use of modal verbs, evaluative adjectives and adverbs (Baxter, 2018, p. 35). The scholars Shi and Wei (2022, p. 43) based their research on Biber et al.'s (1999) classification of stance markers to analyse stance taking devices in English and Chinese news headlines. According to different semantic meanings, stances are categorized in epistemic, style and attitudinal stance. Indeed, epistemic stance determines the certainty, possibility and authenticity of contents, and includes three other sub-categories, namely certainty, hedging and evidentiality. Stance markers of certainty emphasize the 'degree of commitment' in the proposition or viewpoint and enhance authoritativeness. Hedging refers to the avoidance of clear stances while evidentiality highlights the relationships between the text and its original source of information. Furthermore, style stance refers to the evaluation of the speaker on the style of a proposition, while attitudinal stance alludes to speakers' attitudes or judgments (Shi & Wei, 2022, p. 43). Overall, whether these stances are embedded or evoked in news headlines, these will not be attributed to the reporter's personal beliefs or ideas, but to the newspaper he/she is writing for. Sometimes, headlines just pose questions which may be interpreted as the editors' choice to let the public draw their own evaluative conclusions. However, more frequently these questions already suggest value judgment and may engender in the public a specific reaction or evaluation towards news content (Juez, 2017, p. 84). Though recent years have seen a development in this field of study, research focused more on newspapers' discourse features and analysis to the detriment of stance and stance-taking markers (Shi & Wei, 2022, p. 41). Therefore, further analysis on this topic should be conducted to shed some insights into news headlines' different functions and their influence on the audience's perception and judgment of news texts.

2.2.2 Reported speech

Within news headlines analysis, one of the most powerful devices used to establish newspapers' point of view and persuade the audience is reported speech (Urbanová, 2012, p. 114). According to the scholar Taboada, (2024, p. 2) reported speech is a constant feature of news stories and consists of 'phrases, most commonly full sentences, that are reported as either direct speech, that is written between quotation marks, or as indirect speech'. In particular, journalists use free direct or direct speech to show the subject's point of view and thus convey authenticity to the story. Conversely indirect speech, also known as reported speech or narration, may reflect the reporter's perspective on news content (Urbanová, 2012, p. 115) having important consequences on readers' judgment and response to it. Drawing from Bednarek's study, reported speech serves different narrative functions to increase engagement and credibility (Bednarek, 2016, p. 35). These include criticism, blame, emotion, intertextuality and other argumentative devices to enhance newsworthiness (Taobada, 2024, p. 4). Specifically, since news headlines reflect and summarize journalists' choices to make a newsworthy story, reported speech analysis may have a great potential to detect media biased representations (Lazaridou et al., 2017, p. 943). Accordingly, opposed to selection, framing or coverage bias, which describe how news are reported and which aspects are taken into account, quotes can reveal unconscious bias in the way news subjects are presented (Taobada, 2024, p. 5). According to Baxter (2018, p. 35) reported speech, whether is expressed directly or indirectly, may influence news subject's evaluation since it can be used to convey a given (mis)representation. For instance, in online news, quotations are mostly used to refer to political leaders, especially female ones, to focus on their characteristics or private life. In this case, reported speech is used as an evaluative technique to influence public opinion and voters (Olsson, 2017, p. 100). The large body of research on newspapers' reported speech demonstrates that its presence in headlines is a relevant resource for the development of mass media language and stereotypes (Terentieva et al., 2020, p. 9). In this perspective, the analysis of the functional and semantic potential of reported speech is of crucial importance to further explore the powerful impact of newspapers headlines.

2.2.3 Naming strategies in news headlines

Since headlines typically represent the first approach to news articles, journalists' use of lexical and syntactic patterns must be functional for the reader to understand and evaluate the entire story (Riggs, 2021, p. 354). Within this framework, the combination of these linguistic strategies may lead to different interpretations of news subjects or events and even attribute them a different degree of relevance (Jančaříková, 2009, p. 41).

One way headlines communicate with their audience and construct news content is through the use of linguistic features such as naming and labelling (Shostak & Gillespie, 2014, p. 277). These strategies apply to the lexis used to name news subjects, commonly in the form of nouns, proper nouns, and pronouns (Baxter, 2018, p. 35). The use of naming patterns eventually shows that reporters' choice of certain linguistic features is significant. Specifically, it suggests that the way in which events or subjects are reported is never neutral but always filtered by the journalist's intentions (Shostak & Gillespie, 2014, p. 278). Scholarly work on naming strategies points that names not only 'designate its reference', but also 'express its sense'. Within this framework, naming patterns can be seen as powerful ideological devices since different names for a subject denote different ways of understanding it (Simpson et al., 2018). In this context, these strategies provide a solid basis not only for reasoning on the content of the news text itself, but also for unveiling newspapers' hidden messages (Simpson et al., 2018). One of the predominant ways journalists use naming strategies in headlines is by categorizing people into specific social groups. This involves the use of classification, which refers to the lexis used to classify cultural or professional identities to which news subjects seem to belong (Baxter, 2018, p. 35). Accordingly, an analysis of naming patterns and classification can reveal that much media discourse is constructed around traditional stereotypes (Simpson et al., 2018). In this context, the use of explicit denominations to refer to news subjects may provoke in turn a shift in their common media representations and influence social judgments of others (Calabrese & Mistiaen, 2017, p. 212).

Drawing from Jančaříková's (2009, p. 41) analysis of naming strategies in newspaper discourse, the scholar originally claimed that although reporters' choices depend on a number of factors, the most used categories to identify news subjects in headlines are personal names, age, nationality and profession. In this specific case, classification may converge with the use of naming strategies. However, within these categories, the journalist

may also include references to gender, physical aspect, religion or race to convey either a positive, negative or neutral stance of the subject reported. In addition to that, another reference strategy used by journalists is identification by name. In this context, complete names are employed to identify a subject when discussed for the first time. Indeed, first names, which can also be perceived as disrespectful, suggest familiarity or evoke empathy towards participants. Lastly, surnames may be used to convey either neutral or negative judgement of the news subject described (Jančaříková, 2009, p. 42). This strategy is an important feature in the analysis of the supposedly ideological nature of today's media patterns (Simpson et al., 2018). In this perspective, by labelling men and women in specific ways, dominant stereotypes are still extensively used and continue to shape people's perspectives and attitudes. In particular, naming strategies are widely employed to convey gendered representation of women in male-dominated institutions, such as politics (Baxter, 2018, p. 39). Drawing from a headline of *The Guardian* titled 'What makes the Tories think that anyone must be better than Mrs May?' (The Guardian, 2019), the Prime Minister Theresa May is addressed as 'Mrs May' through the use of labelling strategies as a way to undermine her political authority. These strategies rarely apply to male British politicians, for instance the former Prime Minister David Cameron has often been mentioned using his title to emphasize the importance of his political office (Baxter, 2018, p. 39). Within news media discourse, although journalists seem to employ naming processes to make headlines more memorable, their usage conveys an ideological meaning (Shostak & Gillespie, 2014, p. 278) which reflects individuals, institutions or groups' attitudes at a given time (Machin, 2013). Given that language is a system of options from which readers and writers choose according to specific social values (Simpson et al., 2018), the identification of naming and referential strategies in newspaper discourse is particularly relevant to understand our views of the world and the society we live in.

2.2.4 The power of metaphors

Out of many linguistic strategies used to compress meaning in newspaper headlines, metaphors have been widely investigated for their structure and capacity to frame issues, engender different feelings and for their role in grabbing the audience's attention. In general terms, a metaphor is 'a stylistic device that consists in presenting one entity by associating it with the qualities of a different entity mainly to impress recipients' (Molek-Kozakowska, 2014, p. 153). The idea that metaphors are not simply decorative devices has been developed by the cognitive linguists Lakoff and Johnson (1980) according to whom metaphors are deliberately and intentionally persuasive in all (con)texts. Within a cognitivist approach, the different notions of a metaphorical construction are known as the 'topic' or 'target domain' and 'vehicle' or 'source domain' (Arrese & Vara-Miguel, 2016, p. 134). Specifically, the target domain is the topic or issue described through the metaphor while the source domain refers to the concept that readers draw upon in order to produce a metaphorical construction (Simpson et al., 2018). In this context, 'the target domain is defined and understood through the transfer of a set of ascribed characteristics normally associated with the source domain' (Petersson & Kainz, 2017, p. 44). This will be functional for receivers to understand the target concept in terms of the source (Riggs, 2024, p. 29) through a process of mapping between the two elements (Abdel-Raheem, 2023, p. 973).

Going back to newspapers' analysis, since a large part of metaphor investigation aims at revealing ideologies and persuasive messages, examining metaphorical language can be crucial to understand newspapers' view on events (Krennmayr, 2015, p. 531). Specifically, when located in headlines, some metaphors are used by journalists to reflect newspapers' ideologies and shape receivers' perception on news content. However, given their powerful framing nature, their choice is also functional to simplify issues, dehumanize individuals, polarize social groups and minorities or de/legitimize economic and political solutions (Molek-Kozakowska, 2014, p. 168). As a consequence, metaphors' functions can produce ideological cognitive effects, including stereotyping or discriminatory attitudes (Molek-Kozakowska, 2014, p. 168). Within this framework, it is important to consider both allowances and constraints on metaphor use since the reader may interpret the meaning of the words according to his background knowledge, and this may eventually alter the journalist's initial message (Molek-Kozakowska, 2014, p. 154). Therefore, the result of this process is a negotiation between the writer's initial intention and the reader's ultimate understanding of the metaphor.

Drawing from previous research, scholars distinguished between two different types of metaphor in newspaper headlines, namely novel and conventionalized metaphors (Boeynaems et al., 2017, p. 2862). When a metaphor is novel, people have to compare different concepts to find out what they have in common and uncover the hidden meaning of the metaphorical construction (Boeynaems et al., 2017, p. 2862). Novel metaphors can thus influence viewers' responses to a specific message since they increase the text's attractiveness and imaginativeness through the use of creative language which produces new and meaningful associations (Hartung et al., 2020, p. 1). In contrast to this category, a metaphor becomes conventionalized when a concept is often used symbolically to the point that people get acquainted with its figurative meaning (Boeynaems et al., 2017, p. 2862). In the language of the news, conventionalized metaphors activate background knowledge representations and are often used by reporters for their relevance and familiarity with the audience. In this perspective, conventionalized metaphors represent a clear example of meaning-compression tools since through their fixed assumptions, they condense the main aspects of news content, most of which is built on the basis of 'known' facts rather than 'new' ideas (Molek-Kozakowska, 2014, p. 155).

More in general, given that media texts are powerful cultural vehicles which discursively reveal ideologies held by the dominant culture, analysing metaphors in news headlines becomes relevant to deconstruct news texts and bring to the surface underlying notions which may have far-reaching consequences for the readers' viewpoints (Gerrits et al., 2017, p. 1090).

2.2.5 Alliteration in online news

The role of stylistic features in the reception of news texts has attracted more and more attention within the last years (Guliyeva, 2021, p. 3001). In this framework, the rhetorical device of alliteration becomes of great relevance since it plays a crucial part in drawing the reader's attention on specific words and phrases to increase their engagement on news content. In more general terms, alliteration can be defined as 'the occurrence of the same letter or sound at the beginning of adjacent or closely connected words, especially when employed for stylistic effect' (OED Online; Riggs, 2024, p. 166). Moreover, the rhythm and musicality provided by the repetition of the same sounds emphasizes the information to make it more remarkable and appealing for readers. Within the field of journalism, alliteration is mainly employed in news headlines to shape a first impression on news events, increase the audience's emotional impact and make news titles more memorable. Drawing from Molek-Kozakovska's study (2013) on British tabloids, alliteration is 'one of contrived textual devices fitted into headlines to increase the attractiveness of the article' (p. 192). In this framework, alliteration's musical sound accentuates the words in which is incorporated, meaning that, it will put the focus on headlines' news summary to make it stand out (Riggs, 2021, p. 356). In particular, the rhyming quality of the rhetorical device facilitates the audience's reading efforts of the news story due to the recurrence of certain letters. Within this context, alliteration not only enhances news headlines' aesthetic appeal (Riggs, 2021, p. 356) but also supports their second task, namely catching the audience's curiosity (Riggs, 2021, p. 360). Having said that, the role of alliteration in the analysis of news headlines should not be underestimated not only for its persuasive effect, but also because, as many rhetorical devices, it highlights specific concepts and provides a more interesting and remarkable communication which leaves a powerful and emotive impact on readers.

III

CORPUS AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the corpus analysed in this study and also introduces the methodology adopted for the multimodal analysis of news headlines.

3.1 The Corpus

The present research consists of a corpus-based study of multimodal news data. The articles examined amounted to a cross section of four British online newspapers, which differ in terms of political affiliation, namely, the right-leaning *Daily Mail* and *Telegraph*, the center-left *Guardian*, and the left-leaning *Mirror*. The news texts selected for this study were published online between 2014 and 2024, a crucial period that witnessed the career progression of many women political leaders in UK who reached important executive roles. Accordingly, in this period Britain saw an increase in the number of female parliamentarians who caught the attention of many British online newspapers which reinforced gendered discourses against women in leadership roles, still considered as almost exclusively of male competence. In this framework, the selection of this corpus may be significant since it shapes readers' opinions of the reported subjects, and it can be a first step for raising awareness on the importance of image and text relations in the construction of female leaders in news

headlines. In light of this, table 3.1 provides details of the size of the corpus and the newspapers' political leanings.

Table 3.1

Number and political affiliation of articles by news brand

Newsbrand	Political affiliation	Number of articles
The Daily Mail	Right, Conservative	9
The Guardian	Center-left	9
The Telegraph	Right, Conservative	6
The Mirror	Left	5

3.2 Limitations

One of the limitations of this multimodal analysis is the small size of the corpus selected which includes news headlines and accompanying images taken from four online British newspapers across the political spectrum. In view of this, despite the sample size of the investigation, the data collected provides valuable results which fulfill the aim of the current research, namely analysing how specific linguistic, stylistic and visual devices contribute to constructing a biased representation of British female leaders.

3.3 Methodology

After an attentive reading of the corpus, this study aims at recognizing recurrent linguistic and stylistic features in news headlines, together with accompanying images. In this framework, the use of a specific word choice, naming strategies, reported speech, alliterations and metaphors may be worthy of attention to understand the ideological viewpoint perpetuated by British online newspapers to construct female leaders. As for linguistic features, naming strategies, namely the lexis used to name news subjects,

commonly in the form of nouns, proper nouns, and pronouns (Baxter, 2018, p. 35), are significant to the present research since they contribute to conveying a gendered stance of female leaders which reduces their claim (Jančaříková, 2009, p. 42). In addition to that, reported speech also has a great potential to detect media biased representations since it can be used to convey a given misrepresentation of female politicians and reinforce the audience's negative perception on them (Baxter, 2018, p. 35). Moving forward with stylistic features, the focus on metaphors is relevant since they can produce ideological cognitive effects, including stereotyping or discriminatory attitudes (Molek-Kozakowska, 2014, p. 168). Lastly alliterations put the emphasis on key elements of the headlines and make them stand out to convey gendered beliefs on female leaders.

Combined with linguistic and stylistic devices, also visual material plays a crucial role within the news construction of female politicians since it may encourage viewers' negative evaluation of news subjects (Bednarek & Caple, 2012, p. 105), thus reinforcing long-established gender stereotypes against women in leadership roles. To investigate the combination between written and visual mode in news headlines, this research followed both Discursive News Values Analysis (DNVA) and Multimodal News Analysis (MNA). Indeed, the multimodal approach to news analysis studies the way in which visual and verbal systems interact to share values, ideas and identities (Kilby & Lennon, 2021, p. 6; Riggs, 2024, p. 164). On top of that, Discursive News Values Analysis examines the reasons why a specific event has been chosen for publication through the study of news values. Within this framework, these approaches are relevant to the present study since the interplay between visual and written mode and the news values emerging from their analysis contribute to the stereotyped construction of British female leaders across the selected news brands.

In this context, drawing from Bednarek and Caple's research (2016) on news values, previously outlined in the theoretical framework, those who are relevant for the corpus are Consonance, which typically refers to gendered assumptions on female leaders such as the general mistrust on their political skills, the feminine interest in fashion or the incongruity between motherhood and leadership careers. This news value is visually exemplified, for instance, through images showing women leaders' outfits or carrying their newborn children to reinforce stereotypical female expectations. Eliteness, can be found in both written and visual content through the presence of female politicians, for example the former Prime Ministers Theresa May and Liz Truss. Negativity is mainly enhanced by negative language, for instance the use of 'failure' and 'disaster' or evaluative adjectives like 'poor' and 'old' to subtly undermine leaders' political authority. As for visual content, instances of this news

value are evoked through images of the former Prime Minister Theresa May's tearful reaction during her resignation speech. Moreover, Impact is typically enhanced by sensationalist language and instances of women leaders' unsuccessful premiership or its negative consequences. As for visual material, it shows examples of female leaders' negative display of emotions caused by events. Positivity here is mainly visual since it shows, for example, leaders experiencing positive feelings. Superlativeness is evoked through the use of intensifiers and remarkable expressions, for example 'crashed the economy' or 'furious war of words' which may reinforce stereotyped constructions against female leaders and their inadequacy to lead. As for visual material, this news value is mainly employed to underline space contrasts and leaders' dynamic poses. Proximity is enhanced through the mention of well-known events, for instance the election exit poll, and visually refers to recognizable symbols like national flags. Finally Aesthetic Appeal, which is an exclusively visual news value, is frequently found in pictures which focus the attention on the leaders' poses, outfits and the colour contrast between the dark background and the illumination on their face to make their expressions stand out.

More in general, the present study extrapolates these specific news values from the analysis of linguistic, stylistic and visual devices in order to investigate recurrent topics and patterns adopted by online newspapers to construct a gendered representation of British female leaders. However, since this specific analysis is conducted from a subjective perspective, it would benefit from further studies to confirm or eventually refute the application of these news values.

IV

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Results and discussion

The next section presents and analyses results linked to key elements of the news headlines examined, namely the recurrent themes of female leaders' emotivity, appearance, fashion choices and a profound distrust against their political skills which emerge from specific lexical choices. Moreover, the role traps of the 'iron lady', 'pet' and 'mother', the stylistic and linguistic features of metaphor, alliteration, naming strategies and reported speech, and the visual material that complements headlines. Overall, the selection of these devices may be useful to detect the way British news headlines depict female political leaders and it also shows how they work to shape viewers' perception on them.

4.1.1 *The Daily Mail*

The right-leaning *Daily Mail* is a British middle-market online newspaper published in London. Like many 'popular' tabloids, the *Daily Mail* adopts a colloquial register and a specific language to convey closeness and stimulate the readers' curiosity. In order to do so, metaphors, alliterations, reported speech and naming strategies are used to attract the

readers' attention and influence their perspective on news subjects or events. Within this framework, the sensationalist approach of the *Daily Mail* provides the background for its conservative views which subtly emerge from the biased representation of British women leaders. For instance, the headline "You liar": Harman in furious war of words with Cameron after he accuses her of calling for tax increases on middle classes' (6th July, 2014) is linguistically and stylistically relevant for the use of reported speech, naming strategies, metaphors, and alliterations. In particular, the alliteration of the sound 'w' and 'c' ('war of words'; 'he accuses her of calling for tax increases on middle classes') is used to emphasize the main theme of the article, namely Harriet Harman's furious reaction to David Cameron's accusation (Negativity). Within this framework, the use of alliteration also increases the salience of the words in which it is found (Riggs, 2021, p. 360). The expression 'war of words' is a metaphor which implies aggressiveness in the leader's response, evoked by the word 'war' and the adjective 'furious' (Superlativeness; Impact). The journalist also employs a naming strategy which identifies both political leaders with their surname. However, since women leaders still struggle to be fully acknowledged as authoritative figures in male-dominated organizations which see men as the standard, the mention of the leaders' political title would have been more appropriate to equal their political authority. On the contrary, the use of the personal pronouns 'he' and 'her' puts the emphasis on the leaders' gender. In addition to that, the journalist's choice to include in the headline a quotation probably pronounced by the female leader against Cameron eventually reinforces a negative judgment towards her through the use of the evaluative adjective 'liar' (Negativity). As for the main themes of the headline, the topic of emotivity is evoked by the expression 'furious war of words' which, associated to the offensive comment that Harman addresses to her male colleague draws the attention to the leader's lack of emotional control and supposed inability to cope with criticism. (Negativity). This topic is frequently employed by journalists to construct women as unsuitable for leadership roles which require self-judgment and resoluteness. The expression 'furious war of words' also evokes the stereotype of the 'iron maiden' which connotes an aggressive and virilised woman. In the collective imaginary, the word 'war' is conventionally associated to the sphere of violence and the male domain, therefore the journalist's expression may convey a gendered depiction of the leader as a bad-tempered woman having masculine attributes (Consonance).

Another headline from the *Daily Mail* about the British female leader Harriet Harman is titled 'Poor old Hattie! She goes to all that effort and no one pays any attention: Quentin

Letts sees Labour's leading lady flout the rules with her feminist T-shirt' (30th October, 2014). This title provides another instance of the use of linguistic and stylistic features to convey a stereotyped representation on women in politics which is scornful and delegitimizes them. Specifically, the alliteration of the sound 'l' in the phrase 'Labour's leading lady flout the rules' turns the headline into a doggerel which seems to mock the leader in order to reduce her political claim. As for linguistic features, 'Poor old Hattie' and 'Labour's leading lady' are naming strategies used to address the leader without mentioning her political title (Eliteness). In the first one the nickname 'Hattie' is employed to reduce the distance between the readers and the news subject since it conveys familiarity. Within this framework, the use of the evaluative adjectives 'poor' and 'old' may underline the leader's inadequacy to lead (Negativity) since they humiliate her, subtly implying she is too old to occupy an executive role. The second expression is also strategically used to undermine the leader's political power through the use of the word 'lady'. This title, which is exclusively applied to women, stresses the attention on the leader's femininity to reiterate the biased message that gender traits play a crucial role in the political field (Consonance). More in general, linguistic and stylistic features seem to depict the British leader as Kanter's 'pet' role trap. According to the scholar, the 'pet' may be viewed as naïve and powerless, namely not capable of asserting herself in the political domain (Baxter, 2018, p. 31). Within news media's construction of female British leaders, images also play an important role not only because they are a visual proof of the written information but also because they work with texts to intensify deeply rooted gender stereotypes. Figure 4.1 shows the former Labour's deputy leader Harriet Harman sitting next to the previous Secretary of State Edward Samuel Miliband in the British Parliament.

Figure 4.1

Labour's deputy leader Harriet Harman wore the t-shirt as she sat next to Ed Miliband on the frontbench



As for the image composition, an element which stands out in the picture is the leader's feminist t-shirt that says 'This is what a feminist looks like'. Therefore, the image close-up of the two leaders may seem an intentional choice to make a visual comparison between the two (Personalisation). On the left-side, the male leader, who wears a suit and tie, has a serious expression, while on the right-side, the female leader Harriet Harman wears a feminist t-shirt and has a joyful look (Positivity). The focus on the leaders' contrasting attitudes and appearance may reiterate a negative image of Harriet Harman as a funny and less qualified leader. Within this framework, the text-image relation seems to reinforce a gendered depiction of the female politician as someone who needs the attention of the parliamentarians to assert her political power.

The British tabloid *Daily Mail* has published numerous articles on the British leader Theresa May, even before she became Prime Minister. For instance, the headline 'Now THAT'S a power dress! Theresa May, 59, takes to the Conservative party conference podium in 1,395£ dress by Victoria Beckham's favourite designer' (7th October, 2015) puts the focus on the leader's fashion choices. In this headline the journalist employs the stylistic feature of

alliteration of the sound 'c' ('Conservative party conference') to draw the attention to the place where Theresa May chose to wear the expensive dress. The leader's dress is also included in the metaphorical expression 'power dress' which alludes to a particular fashion style people choose in order to establish their authority in a professional environment (Consonance). Within this framework, the use of this metaphor reinforces the idea that women's skills are not sufficient to assert their political authority (Consonance). As for linguistic features, the journalist also employs naming strategies which identify the leader by her name and age instead of mentioning her political title. Concerning the main themes, this headline puts the focus on the leader's 'appearance', one of the most frequently used topics in the gendered constructions of women in politics. Drawing from gender and leadership studies on the representation of women based on their appearance, this theme does not apply equally to male leaders' stories, which focus instead on their professional skills and capabilities (Santoniccolo et al., 2023, p. 4). On the contrary, news media insistence on women's looks shifts the general attention from their experience in the political field to a more superficial topic which may undervalue their professional achievements. As for visual content, figure 4.2 portrays the former British leader Theresa May as she arrives at the Conservative party conference in October 2015 wearing an expensive dress by Roland Mouret (Eliteness).

Figure 4.2

Theresa May arrived at the Conservative party conference in a striking £1,395 Roland Mouret dress on Tuesday



The picture shows a full figure of the leader to make her outfit stand out (Aesthetic Appeal). In this framework, the mention of the leader's age combined with the visual material may suggest that Theresa May is too old to wear such scanty dress. Therefore, the interplay between the written and visual modes may reinforce a stereotypical attitude towards women leaders, who unlike their male colleagues become a target for gossip due to their stylistic choices (Consonance).

Another major example of the *Daily Mail* gendered representation of the British leader Theresa May is the headline 'Bloodbath as May axes Cameron loyalists: Gove, Morgan, Letwin and Whittingdale are sacked from Cabinet as PM hands plum posts to her allies – but Hunt and Leadson avoid the chop' (14th July, 2016). Here, the use of the stylistic device of alliteration of the sound 'b', 'l', and 'p' ('**B**loodbath'; '**pl**um **p**osts to her **all**ies') enhances the musicality of the headline but also draws the attention to the leader's political decisions. In this context, the word 'bloodbath' is a relevant lexical choice which opens the headline

summarizing Theresa May's actions of dismissing and appointing ministers (Baxter, 2018, p. 40). This word is a metaphorical expression which provides the headline with a background of violence (Negativity; Superlativeness; Impact). Additionally, it also connotes May as an aggressive leader, a label which opposes her to traditional female qualities of mildness and empathy (Consonance). In this framework, also the verb 'axes' reinforces the image of brutality associated to the leader's political decisions. Therefore, the headline seems to draw a clear parallelism between battlefield actions and Theresa May's policies. Overall, the title briefly emphasizes the stereotype of the 'battle-axe' or 'iron maiden' since the leader is characterized as an 'unnaturally virilised woman' (Baxter, 2018, p. 26). The battle-axe reflects the stereotypical image of the leader as someone who has agentic masculine attributes instead of female communal ones. In this case, the journalist's meaningful word choice seems to construct a parody of the leader, who is attributed exaggerated male traits of violence and strength which eventually distort readers' perception on her. This negative connotation is rarely employed in news headlines on male leaders' government, since they already have those attributes considered adequate to lead in the political domain.

Moving forward with the analysis of news headlines and accompanying images taken from the *Daily Mail*, another significant example of the biased representation of the former Prime Minister Theresa May is the headline 'Diligent Theresa May failed to solve UK's Brexit puzzle' (7th June, 2019). As for stylistic devices, the journalist uses the metaphor 'failed to solve UK's Brexit puzzle' to refer to the leader's inability to get Brexit done (Negativity) even though she did not contribute to its failure. This novel metaphor also associates Theresa May's political actions to a game in which she was defeated. As for linguistic features, the use of the naming strategy which identifies the former Prime Minister by her name enhances familiarity thus reducing her authority as a political leader. Compared to the previous headline, which subtly criticized Theresa May's decisions and turned her into a virilised aggressive politician, here the leader's feminine traits of cautiousness and moderation are exemplified by the evaluative adjective 'diligent'. However, the combination between the latter adjective and the verb 'failed to solve' contributes to providing a negative representation of the female leader as someone who is hardworking but not successful since she may lack leadership prototypical traits (Consonance).

After Theresa May resigned in May 2019, much news media focused on her display of emotions at Downing Street 10 during her farewell speech. Within this framework, the *Daily Mail* offers a clear instance of Theresa May's reaction in the headline "It's been a journey': Theresa May breaks down in tears AGAIN behind closed doors minutes after resigning as she is applauded by staff and thanks 'her rock' husband Philip' (10th July, 2019). From a linguistic point of view, the reporter uses naming strategies which omit Theresa May's political title and calls her by her name, even during one of the most touching moments of her premiership. In this framework, the journalist uses the reported speech and mentions the leader's words both directly and indirectly as a strategy to catch the readers' attention. In particular, Theresa May's quote 'it's been a journey' is an extract from her farewell speech, which has been used as a metaphor to convey the message that the leader's premiership has been a long difficult process. The negatively charged expression 'breaks down in tears' evokes a recurrent theme in the analysis of British female leaders' media construction, namely emotivity (Negativity). This theme is likely to appear in political news since, according to leadership studies, there is a strong relationship between the capacity to control the emotional display and politicians' credibility (Consonance). In this framework, although Theresa May's moving reaction was met with sympathy by her audience at Downing Street, media focus on her emotional response may have led readers to judge her as lacking strength of character. Among the images chosen to accompany this headline, figure 4.3 is particularly significant since it shows the Prime Minister Theresa May during her farewell speech outside Number 10 Downing Street.

Figure 4.3

Mrs May was overcome by tears as she spoke of her pride at having been PM, even though she admitted to having failed to deliver Brexit



The image is a close-up of the leader which portrays her emotional reaction while she is publicly announcing her resignation (Impact). In particular, Theresa May's scrunched face reveals her expression lines as she is on the verge of tears (Negativity). Relative to the image composition, the contrast between the dark background and the soft illumination on her face further reinforces her tearful and frowned expression (Aesthetic Appeal, Superlativeness). In contrast to the headline, in which the expression 'behind closed doors' alludes to a private moment of the leader's emotional response to her resignation, the picture instead shows her emotional display before the crowd during her speech. Despite this opposition, the headline's focus on Theresa May's tearful reaction combines with the picture to emphasize the image of the leader as a 'weak' and 'emotionally fragile' woman (Consonance) in order to reduce her political credibility.

Another example of gendered mediation of British political leaders in the *Daily Mail* is provided by the headline 'Meet the Babies of the House! New mothers Stella Creasy and Kemi Badenoch are formally sworn in as MPs with their tiny daughters strapped to them' (18th

December, 2019). As for stylistic devices, here the metaphorical expression ‘Meet the Babies of the House’ is a play of words used to catch the readers’ attention and curiosity but also puts the focus on the British leaders’ daughters. Here the term ‘house’ doesn’t stand for the domestic sphere but refers to the House of Commons where the leaders brought their newborn children (Novelty). Within this framework, the metaphor is eventually reinforced by the use of the term ‘mothers’ through a naming strategy which identifies Stella Creasy and Kemi Badenoch as mothers instead of politicians. The theme of motherhood evoked by the words ‘babies’, ‘mothers’ and ‘tiny daughters’ constructs a gendered mediation on women politicians since the focus on their role of mothers gives relevance to their private and domestic life resulting in the marginalization of their professional careers as members of the parliament (Consonance). The headline’s accompanying images, namely figure 4.4 and 4.5 show the two British leaders Stella Creasy and Kemi Badenoch with their newborn children in the British Parliament.

Figure 4.4

Stella Creasy, the Labour MP for Walthamstow, was sworn in yesterday while carrying her newborn daughter Hettie



Figure 4.5

Kemi Badenoch, the Tory MP for Saffron Walden, was also sworn in while holding her newborn daughter



The first image is a close up of the leader Stella Creasy who holds her daughter in a baby carrier while she is talking to another member of the Parliament. The second picture shows the leader Kemi Badenoch carrying her daughter while she is signing a document. These images, like the leaders themselves, bring together their private life and professions, and may cause mixed emotions in news viewers who are not accustomed to see politicians bringing their babies in Parliament (Novelty). The interplay between these images and the headline may attract the viewers' attention through a strategic word choice and the visual evidence of the leaders' daughters in Parliament. More in general, both visual and written material shows Stella Creasy and Kemi Badenoch's private and public sphere to draw the attention to their motherhood rather than on professional careers and this choice, drawing from Kanter's role traps, may eventually reinforce a stereotyped construction on female leaders (Consonance).

Going back to Theresa May's media constructions, another headline from the *Daily Mail* which focuses on the leader's fashion choices also after her resignation is 'Theresa May shuns her usual striking heels as she steps out in Trendy Converse trainers at Tory conference' (2nd October, 2023). In the headline, the use of the stylistic strategy of alliteration of the sound 's' ('shuns her usual striking heels as she steps'), 't' and 'r' ('out in **T**rendy **C**onverse **t**rainers at

Tory conference’) conveys musicality and puts the focus on the leader’s unusual trainers, which replaced the iconic heels she usually wore to participate to political events. As for linguistic features, the use of the evaluative adjectives ‘striking’ and ‘trendy’ further reinforces the emphasis on the leader’s shoes (Superlativeness). Moreover, the reporter also employs a naming strategy which omits Theresa May’s political title and calls her by her name to undermine her authority and reduce the distance between her and the audience. Although naming strategies also apply to male leaders, their use on women has an even more negative impact since female leaders still struggle to achieve equality in the political field. Within this headline, the theme of ‘appearance’ is evoked by the focus on the leader’s shoes. This is a recurrent topic in the gendered mediation of Theresa May since the politician’s heels became a symbol for her political involvement. The association between women and fashion reiterates a gender stereotype which shifts the attention from female politicians’ capacities to their external aspect. As a result, women leaders seem to be more scrutinized for their appearance rather than for their political achievements. As for visual material, figure 4.6 shows the former Prime Minister Theresa May wearing a pair of Converse as she is walking between engagements at the Tory conference.

Figure 4.6

Theresa May was pictured wearing a pair of Converse trainers as she walked between engagements at the gathering in Manchester



The focus on Theresa May's figure makes her outfit more noticeable to attract the readers' attention (Aesthetic Appeal). Accordingly, the leader's colorful blouse and the elegant suit in contrast with her Converse trainers made her appear as an unconventional leader in a formal political context. Within this framework, the interplay between visual and written content again puts the focus on the leader's appearance rather than focusing on her professional role and the reasons why she is attending the Tory conference. This emphasis may reduce the leader's political authority since it stereotypically associates women with their external look and fashion choices (Consonance).

One last example from the *Daily Mail* which offers a gendered mediation of British leaders' emotivity is the news headline 'Irritated Liz Truss storms off stage as 'I crashed the economy' banner featuring a lettuce was unfurled behind her as she promoted her book' (14th August, 2024). The stylistic device of alliteration of the sound 'st' ('storms off stage') and 'c' ('crashed

the economy’) draws the attention to the key element of the headline, namely the leader’s emotional reaction caused by the inscription which appeared behind her. The expression ‘I crashed the economy’ is a metaphor which refers to the negative impact the leader’s premiership had on British economy (Superlativeness, Negativity, Impact). Within this framework, the banner’s inscription reinforces a negative view on the leader’s government and undermines her authority. Another relevant linguistic feature is the naming strategy, a recurrent element in gendered constructions on women leaders. Here the journalist’s choice to call the leader by her name without any acknowledgment of her former political title may anonymise her figure. In addition to that, the use of the evaluative adjective ‘irritated’ also contributes to giving a gendered representation of Liz Truss since it portrays her as ‘too emotional’ and not able to cope with negative feedback (Negativity). This adjective, together with the verb ‘storms off stage’ enhances the topic of emotivity. Indeed, this theme is frequently adopted by online newspapers to construct a misleading representation of women as unsuitable for leadership positions which are supposed to require toughness and emotional strength. The headline’s accompanying image shows Liz Truss set on the stage where she was promoting her book.

Figure 4.7

Liz Truss stormed off stage last night, after pranksters humiliated her while she was giving a pro-trump speech



The picture 4.7 shows the former Prime Minister Liz Truss set on a stage after prankers humiliated her with the background inscription ‘I crashed the economy’, while she was giving a pro-Trump speech. The image shows her full figure illuminated by a spotlight and puts the attention on her appearance and display of emotions. Indeed, the leader has a rigid pose and a serious expression which conveys a defensive attitude. More in general, the visual and written material highlights Liz Truss’s emotional response to the prank she was victim of and seems to reinforce a stereotyped depiction of the leader as overdramatic and not able to take criticism and disappointments constructively.

4.1.2 *The Guardian*

Moving forward with the analysis of news headlines, the current research examines a corpus of titles and accompanying images taken from the left-leaning newspaper *The Guardian*. Compared to the right-leaning *Daily Mail*, this newspaper adopts a different approach to the representation of news subjects and events since it aligns with liberal and progressive viewpoints. Nevertheless, the results of the present research illustrate that, regardless of political affiliation, these British news brands adopt similar rhetorical, linguistic and visual devices to convey a stereotyped representation of British women in leadership roles.

A first example of *The Guardian*’s news construction of British leaders is provided by the headline ‘Theresa May’s first pledge as PM was for a ‘one-nation Britain’. Can she deliver?’ (16th July, 2016). Given the newspaper’s centre-left leaning and progressive viewpoint, it might be presumed that its headlines would not support Theresa May’s political conservative view, but they would have conveyed a more positive representation of her as Britain’s second woman Prime Minister. However, even though the journalist’s use of linguistic and stylistic devices reveals a slightly different depiction of the leader compared to the *Daily Mail*, there are still traces of conventional gender stereotypes. As for stylistic devices, the use of the alliteration of the sound ‘p’ (**p**ledge as **PM**) and ‘n’ (**one-nation Britain**) draws the attention to the leader’s first political undertaking as Prime Minister. In this view, *The Guardian* gives Theresa May the prominent position of a leading character since it puts the focus on her initial

expectations and ambitions in order to deliver Brexit (Eliteness). Within this framework, a significant difference between the *Daily Mail* and *The Guardian* is that while the conservative newspaper mainly focused on the former Prime Minister's appearance and fashion choices, here the focus is more on her political involvement. Despite this, the journalist's use of the rhetorical question 'Can she deliver?' seems to challenge her leadership capabilities to lead the Brexit campaign in a moment of national crisis. This eventually reinforces a gender stereotype against leaders as less skilled and competent than men in political roles (Consonance). However, *The Guardian* does not reveal a clear position towards Theresa May, since her potential as a leader is questioned but not ignored. As for visual content, figure 4.8 shows Theresa May and her husband Philip entering the Prime Minister's new office in 10 Downing Street.

Figure 4.8

Theresa May and husband Philip walk into 10 Downing Street



In the picture, the leader and her husband are cheered by the crowd outside the gate and look joyful in their elegant suits. The visually appealing photo has been taken from inside the house to show their entrance in the hall welcomed by the staff (Aesthetic Appeal). The focus on the leader's emotional display shows her gratification for her new role tasked with leading the Brexit campaign. In particular, Theresa May and her husband's smiling expressions enhance

the news value of Positivity and Impact. Compared to the conservative newspaper the *Daily Mail*, which employed close-up images to emphasize the appearance or emotional reaction of the leader, here *The Guardian* adopts a wide-angle perspective which shows Theresa May's first entrance into her office. Within this framework, if the right-wing newspaper focused the attention on specific details to encourage a biased representation of the leader, *The Guardian* visual material does not influence the viewers' perception of Theresa May. The absence of specific stereotypes and the newspaper's choice to show the leader in front of her husband in the image contrasts with the headline's gendered representation and thus creates a more balanced representation of the leader, which is in line with *The Guardian*'s liberal perspective.

The Guardian offers an instance of 'tokenization' of women in leadership roles in the headline 'Theresa May in battle for survival as Tories sharpen knives' (1st October, 2017). Here, the journalist employs two different metaphorical expressions which evoke the sphere of violence, namely 'battle for survival' and 'sharpen knives' (Negativity). The first one refers to the leader's effort to withstand the critical attacks of her opposers even though the headline does not intimate her success, while the second one alludes to her adversaries' counterreaction. As for linguistic features, the naming strategy of 'identification by name' may be used to undermine the leader's authority since her political title of Prime Minister is not mentioned. More in general, the expressions 'battle', 'survival' and 'sharpen knives' evoke the sphere of war which is generally associated to men rather than women. In particular, when applied to women leaders, these male attributes may connote the stereotype of the 'iron maiden' or 'battle axe'. This stereotype constructs an aggressive and almost frightening image of female leaders whose attitude may in turn lead to violent reactions against them (Baxter, 2018, p. 26). However, in this headline, *The Guardian*'s construction of the Tories seems even more frightening and violent than Theresa May's one, since the leader enters the battle only to defend herself. Although both *The Guardian* and the *Daily Mail* adopt lexical choices which evoke the sphere of violence in the depiction of Theresa May, the conservative newspaper employs a more provocative language to describe the Prime Minister's aggressive actions towards her opponent. On the contrary, the progressive news brand refers to the sphere of violence depicting the leader as someone who just reacts against her opponents' plans to damage her authority. As for visual material, the headline's accompanying image shows the former Prime Minister Theresa May arriving at the Midland hotel in Manchester for the Conservative party conference.

Figure 4.9

Theresa May arriving at the Midland hotel in Manchester for the Conservative party conference. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images



The picture shows Theresa May's figure in motion and focuses the attention on her serious expression which nevertheless reveals a faint smile (Aesthetic Appeal, Eliteness). Her dynamic pose conveys her combative attitude which echoes the headline's expression 'in battle for survival'. Within this framework, also her expression is open to multiple interpretations; it might further reinforce the leader's combativeness and willingness to act to assert her power. In this view, the combination between the headline and its image seems to emphasize Theresa May's supposed role of fighter in the political field. Therefore, here written and visual material may work together to construct a biased representation of the leader as someone who possesses supposed male attributes of toughness and firmness which are still considered as necessary to succeed in leadership positions (Consonance).

The gendered topic of appearance also emerges in the headlines of the more liberal newspaper *The Guardian*, which offers a different perspective from the *Daily Mail's* sensationalist approach. The headline 'Ditch high heels to promote equality at work, Theresa May told' (13th September, 2016) is stylistically and linguistically significant for the use of alliteration and naming strategies. Indeed, the alliteration of the sound 'h' ('high heels') and 't' ('to promote equality at work, Theresa May told') conveys musicality and draws the attention to the key

elements of the headline. As for linguistic features, the journalist's use of the naming strategy to identify the Prime Minister by her name may reduce the leader's political claim and enhance familiarity. Compared to the conservative and sensationalist *Daily Mail*, which employed linguistic strategies to draw attention to the leader's fashion choices during political events, here *The Guardian* makes reference to the leader's heels in order to put the focus on a more relevant issue, namely equality at work. So, despite their different political leanings, both newspapers show a similar pattern since whether the emphasis is on Theresa May's outfit or on her political actions, the topic of appearance always emerges in relation to the leader's gender (Consonance). As for visual content, figure 4.10 is particularly relevant within the gendered news construction of Theresa May since it shows the leader's iconic leopard printed heels with a focus on her lower body.

Figure 4.10

Theresa May is well known for wearing kitten-heeled shoes. Photograph: Jonathan Brady/PA



Given the newspaper's centre-left leaning and progressive viewpoint, it might be presumed that its visual material would not be provocative towards female leaders. However, the picture focus on Theresa May's legs and heels shows that, the more liberal *The Guardian* seems to share the *Daily Mail*'s sensationalist tendencies. Accordingly, compared to the *Daily Mail*

visual content which showed the leader's full figure to draw the attention to her outfit, here *The Guardian* employs an even more provocative shot of Theresa May's legs to emphasize her eccentric shoes (Aesthetic Appeal). Within this framework, the liberal newspaper written and visual modes combine to reinforce a stereotypical image of female leaders connected to their outward appearance and personal style instead of entirely focusing on their political involvement (Consonance).

Another headline from *The Guardian* which provides a gendered construction of the leader Theresa May during her premiership is 'Theresa May says she shed a 'little tear' over election exit poll' (13th July, 2017). Here, the stylistic device of alliteration of the sound 'sh' (**she shed**) and the phrase "little tear' over election exit poll' provide rhythm and create a connection between the core elements of the headline which focuses on Theresa May's emotional reaction. As for linguistic features, also in this case the journalist employs a naming strategy which omits the leader's political title to undermine her authority and increase familiarity. In addition to that, the use of the leader's quotation 'little tear' evokes the topic of emotivity since it puts the focus on Theresa May's emotional display during the election exit poll (Impact, Proximity). In contrast to the right-leaning *Daily Mail*, which tends to employ a sensationalist word choice, like the expression 'Theresa May breaks down in tears', here, *The Guardian* opts for linguistic strategies which avoid exaggeration and bias since the newspaper uses the reported speech and quotes Theresa May herself. Notwithstanding this, both news brands' mention of the leader's tears may reduce her political claim and subtly imply that women lack sufficient amount of emotional toughness to exercise power in a political context (Consonance).

Opposed to the previous headline which focused on Theresa May's emotional side, the news title 'As Tory MPs plot May's downfall, her last allies battle for her survival' (24th March, 2019) offers another instance of the political battle between Theresa May and the Tories through a specific word choice. In the headline, the use of the alliteration of the sound 'l' ('down**fall**, her last **all**ies battle for her survival') emphasizes the key topics of the article and enhances the news title's musical effect, providing it with a pressing rhythm. As for rhetorical devices, the metaphorical negative expression 'downfall', which usually refers to an individual's failure and loss of power, here is used in relation to the Tories' massive attack to undermine Theresa May's government (Negativity). The journalist also uses the linguistic strategy of naming which identifies the leader by her surname and leaves out her role as Prime

Minister to reduce her claim. As for the themes, the words ‘plot’, ‘downfall’, ‘allies’, ‘battle’ and ‘survival’ evoke the sphere of violence and war, traditionally associated to men (Superlativeness). Within this framework, the headline seems to depict Theresa May as a vulnerable leader who is struggling with her last allies to secure her role as head of the British government. As a result, the leader’s news construction may reinforce a stereotypical view on women, who unlike their male colleagues, are seen as too weak and defenseless to succeed in leadership positions (Consonance). As for visual content, the headline’s accompanying image shows the former Prime Minister Theresa May on a car leaving the Commons after MPs voted to ask the EU for a delay to Brexit.

Figure 4.11

Theresa May leaving the Commons after MPs voted to ask the EU for a delay to Brexit.

Photograph: Dan Kitwood/Getty Images



The picture is a close-up shot of Theresa May’s pale face while leaving the House of Commons by car. In particular, the leader’s half-closed eyes and mouth suggest her tiredness after she attended the political meeting (Impact). Within this framework, the choice of this particular image may reinforce a negative view of Theresa May as an exhausted leader who lacks the energy to hold on to her political power. Overall, the picture may interact with the headline to depict the politician as a fragile woman who doesn’t fit the stereotypical

attributes which are considered as necessary in leadership positions, and thus undermine her political role and image.

Another headline from *The Guardian* which offers a similar instance of tokenization towards a different British politician is titled 'Is Jo Swinson's election campaign punching below its weight?' (29th November, 2019). Here, the use of the stylistic device of alliteration of the sound 'n' ('Swinson's election campaign punching') enhances musicality but also puts the focus on the subject of the headline, namely the former leader of the Liberal Democrats Joanne Kate Swinson and her political campaign. Moving forward with the analysis, the use of the metaphorical expression 'punching below its weight', which conventionally alludes to a bad performance in the sport of boxing, here is used to question the leader's political project. As for linguistic features, the journalist uses a naming strategy which identifies the leader by her name and intentionally omits her political role in order to reduce her authority and convey familiarity. Moving forward with the themes, the expression 'punching below its weight' plays a significant role since it sets the tone of the headline creating a connection between the female leader's campaign and a boxing match. Within this framework, the parallelism between Jo Swinson's political actions and a traditionally male context seems to subtly highlight the importance of masculine traits for political office and eventually reiterates a gender stereotype against female leaders (Meeks, 2012, p.181). As for visual content, figure 4.12 shows the former leader of the Liberal Democrats Joanne Kate Swinson on a campaign visit to the Total Boxer gym in north London.

Figure 4.12

Jo Swinson on a campaign visit to the Total Boxer gym in north London.

Photograph: Neil Hall/EPA



The picture is a close up shot of the leader who is smiling while wearing yellow boxing gloves, whereas on the background a group of paparazzi is taking pictures of her (Aesthetic Appeal). The image focus recalls the headline's metaphorical expression 'punching below its weight' which associates Jo Swinson's political campaign to a boxing match. This relationship here is reinforced by the leader's defensive posture which evokes boxers' combative attitude (Consonance). In this framework, visual and written materials combine to create a humorous situation which metaphorically places the leader at the center of a boxing match. However, since the headline seems to question the efficacy of Jo Swinson's campaign, the interplay between the two modes may further undermine the leader's political authority.

Similarly to the *Daily Mail* also the liberal newspaper *The Guardian* employs the theme of motherhood to reinforce a stereotyped representation of British female political leaders. A stylistically and linguistically relevant example is the headline 'MP who delayed birth of son accuses Tories over proxy vote delay' (21st January, 2019). Here the stylistic device of alliteration of the sound 's' ('son accuses Tories) gives rhythm to the headline. As for linguistic features, the journalist uses a naming strategy which omits the Labour politician's name

through the use of the acronym ‘MP’ and identifies her as an anonymous member of the Parliament. This strategy overshadows the leader’s identity to draw more attention to the issue of maternity. In addition to that, the repetition of the verb ‘delay’ which first refers to the leader’s pregnancy and then to her vote in Parliament (Superlativeness) may be a significant choice since it bridges the leader’s private and public life. However, the headline’s focus on the leader’s delayed childbirth and her accusation against the Tories seem to suggest an incompatibility between the politician’s role of mother and her professional status. Within this framework, the choice of the negatively charged verb ‘accuses’ enhances the news value of Negativity. Overall, the combination between these stylistic and linguistic strategies may undermine pregnant leaders’ authority and draw the attention on their impossibility to fulfill their political roles. The headline’s accompanying image shows a close up of the Labour politician Tulip Siddiq.

Figure 4.13

Tulip Siddiq postponed a caesarean section in order to vote in the Commons last week

Photograph: Yui Mok/PA



The shot puts the focus on Tulip Siddiq’s bothered expression while she is probably discussing Tories’ proxy vote delay in the Commons (Aesthetic Appeal). Unlike the headline, which refers to the leader using the anonymous acronym ‘MP’, the photo finally gives her an identity without putting the focus on her role of mother. From this viewpoint, also in this headline, *The*

Guardian's visual material seems to provide a more neutral depiction of British leaders in line with its progressive tendencies. This pattern contrasts with the right-leaning *Daily Mail* which employed a strategic image of the leaders Stella Creasy and Kemi Badenoch carrying their newborn children in Parliament to further attract the viewers' attention on their motherhood.

Moving back to Theresa May's premiership, another headline from *The Guardian* which employs meaningful stylistic and linguistic choices to shape readers' judgments of the leader's political involvement is 'MPs must seize control of the Brexit calamity. Mrs May has already lost it' (24th March, 2019). As for stylistic features, the use of the alliteration of the sound 't' and 'l' ('Brexit calamity'; 'already lost') draws attention to the Brexit campaign and May's political involvement but also enhances the headline's musicality. Another meaningful stylistic device is the use of the metaphorical expression 'Brexit calamity' (Impact). The figurative meaning of this novel metaphor is conveyed through the juxtaposition between the word calamity, which usually refers to an inevitable natural catastrophe, and the term Brexit, that is the result of intentional political decisions. This metaphor, together with the headline's focus on Theresa May's lack of control over Brexit may denote her as an incompetent leader and reinforce a negative stereotype on female politicians. Moving forward to linguistic features, the journalist's use of the naming strategy which identifies the leader as 'Mrs May' puts the focus on her gender instead of recognizing her major role as Prime Minister (Consonance). Within news construction of politicians, the label 'Mr' is rarely employed to refer to male leaders, who are usually addressed using both their names or political titles. These divergent tendencies show that deeply-rooted gender stereotypes still pervade male-dominated fields to the detriment of women leaders who are often undervalued. As for visual material, the headline's accompanying image shows the profile of the former Prime Minister Theresa May over a background of national flags (Proximity).

Figure 4.14

*The consensus in her party is that Theresa May has reached the twilight of her premiership.
Photograph: Emmanuel Dunand/AFP/Getty Images*



In the picture Theresa May keeps her eyes down as she walks in the direction parallel to the photographer (Aesthetic Appeal). Within this framework, the leader's posture and low profile may suggest her disappointment over the general management of the Brexit campaign and Britain's consequent political instability. In this view, both visual and written materials seem to emphasize Theresa May's fragile grip on power and thus reinforce her gendered construction as politically fragile. Media emphasis on Theresa May's lack of control over the Brexit campaign is a recurrent theme in the news analysis of the leader's government. This biased representation eventually strengthens a stereotypical depiction of female leaders which undermines their capabilities and potentials as political figures.

The more recent headline 'Liz Truss says she 'gets it' – but how many more U-turns can she stomach?' (10th October, 2022) also focuses on the challenges and barriers that women face in leadership positions. In particular, as for stylistic devices, the alliteration of the sound 's' ('Truss says she gets it'), 'm' and 'n' ('**many more** U-turns can she stomach') emphasizes the key elements of the headline and enhances its musical effect. Even though *The Guardian* should provide a more gender-neutral representation of British female leaders in line with its

progressive perspectives, here the headline seems to construct a stereotyped depiction of Liz Truss's government. In particular, the use of the naming strategy which identifies the leader by her name and avoids mentioning her role as Prime Minister is a recurrent pattern employed to undermine political leaders' authority and enhance familiarity. Moreover, the leader's direct quotation 'gets it' included in the headline is probably used in an ironic way to put Liz Truss's self-confidence and determination in contrast to the challenges her premiership still has to face. Within this framework, the leader's gendered construction is reinforced by the negatively charged verb 'stomach' which may subtly imply that Liz Truss lacks the toughness seen as necessary for demanding political tasks (Negativity). Overall, the strategies employed and the final question mark seem to cast doubts on the leader's ability to govern, therefore the headline may reinforce a stereotypical view on women as more vulnerable than men, therefore less suitable to serve in leadership positions. As for visual content, the headline's accompanying image, figure 4.15, shows the former Prime Minister Liz Truss at a meeting of the European Political Community in Prague.

Figure 4.15

Liz Truss at a meeting of the European Political Community in Prague, 6 October 2022.

Photograph: Reuters



The close up shot of the leader on a blurred background puts the focus on her smug expression and wandering eye during the meeting of the European Political Community. Given the newspaper's centre-left leaning and progressive viewpoint, it might be presumed that its visual

material would not be provocative towards female leaders. However, the picture emphasis on the leader's lost look during the conference may subtly reinforce a negative perception of Liz Truss as Prime Minister. Within this framework, the combination between the image and the headline may undermine the leader's credibility and reinforce a stereotypical construction which negatively influences viewers' judgment on her premiership (Consonance).

4.1.3 The Telegraph

The Telegraph is a British right-leaning news brand which shares the same political affiliation of the *Daily Mail*. Within the news construction of British female leaders, both newspapers employ a sensationalist language which combined with stylistic strategies and accompanying images may strengthen a gendered view on news subjects.

A meaningful example of *The Telegraph's* sensationalist tendencies is provided by the headline 'Six months on from becoming Prime Minister, Theresa May has firmly established her defiant fashion doctrine' (13th January, 2017). Here the stylistic device of alliteration of the sound 'm' ('**m**onths on from **b**ecoming **P**rime **M**inister'), conveys a musical effect and puts the emphasis on the subject the headline, namely the new Prime Minister Theresa May. Within this framework, the metaphorical expression 'fashion doctrine' is employed to refer to the leader's outfit as a vehicle to establish her political authority. The expression is further reinforced by the highly connoted adjective 'defiant' and adverb 'firmly' which underline the leader's strength of character (Impact). Similarly to the *Daily Mail* and *The Guardian's* general tendencies, also *The Telegraph* mentions the supposedly feminine interest in fashion to shift the focus from the leader's executive role to her physical appearance. This recurrent pattern may undermine Theresa May's political authority since it encourages a negative judgment on female leaders which perpetuates the idea that women's value lies primarily in their physical appearance. As for visual material, the accompanying picture shows the full figure of the former Prime Minister Theresa May heading to the Lord Mayor's banquet.

Figure 4.16

Theresa May at the Lord Mayor's Banquet in November. Credit: Rex



The image shot draws attention to Theresa May's bright red dress and matching heels. (Aesthetic Appeal). Within this framework, the picture is complementary to the written content since it provides visual evidence of the leader's 'defiant fashion doctrine'. Accordingly, the elegant red dress and heels Theresa May wore for the occasion may be considered an audacious stylistic choice since their colour evokes a strong association with power which may denote her as an influential leader. However, despite this connotation, the visual and written emphasis on the leader's clothes and appearance still reinforces the stereotypical association between women and fashion and eventually marginalizes Theresa May's role as politician (Consonance).

Another headline from *The Telegraph* which offers an instance of Theresa May's stereotyped construction is 'How the 'new Iron Lady' crumbled in the face of election disaster and Brexit failure' (19th May, 2019). The article was published at the very end of Theresa May's

premiership but still reiterates a biased depiction of the leader through the use of specific linguistic and stylistic features. As for stylistic devices, the use of the metaphorical expression ‘crumbled in the face of election disaster’ may denote Theresa May as a politically fragile figure and thus reinforce the stereotypical belief that female leaders lack the masculine strength and toughness considered as necessary to lead (Consonance). Within this framework, the negatively charged words ‘disaster’ and ‘failure’ further emphasize this biased depiction drawing the attention to the gradual decline of Theresa May’s Brexit project (Negativity, Impact). As for linguistic features, here the journalist’s use of the naming strategy ‘new Iron Lady’ explicitly denotes Theresa May as an ‘iron maiden’ (Consonance). This label recalls the former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher who gained this nickname due to her strong character and toughness. However, in this case, this title is employed to ironically undermine Theresa May’s leadership which is facing tough times. As for visual content, figure 4.17 shows the former Prime Minister Theresa May from behind after her farewell speech outside Number 10 Downing Street (Proximity).

Figure 4.17

Credit: Yui Mok/PA



The picture wide-angle perspective shows a lectern on the foreground while on the background Theresa May is entering the building in Downing Street. The Prime Minister’s

bright red suit emerges from the dark background and makes her figure stand out (Aesthetic Appeal, Superlativeness). As the previous image, the leader's red outfit may evoke associations with strength and power, however, in this case the picture focuses on Theresa May's departure after she resigned from her political role. Due to this emphasis, the picture seems to combine with the headline to construct Theresa May as an unsuccessful Prime Minister who was not able to fulfill her duties.

Similarly to the conservative newspaper *Daily Mail*, also *The Telegraph* offers an instance of the focus on British female leaders' motherhood. A significant example is the news title 'New mum Jo Swinson might have made history – but for female MPs this was a baby step' (14th September, 2018). Here, the use of the stylistic strategy of alliteration of the sound 'm' ('**mum** Jo Swinson **m**ight have **m**ade') puts the focus on the news subject of the news title and enhances its musical effect. In the headline, the journalist's emphasis on the leader's motherhood is strengthened by the metaphorical expression 'baby step' which refers to female leaders' gradual achievements to find a balance between their role of mothers and their executive professions. Accordingly, this play on words not only refers to Jo Swinson's small progress but also associates her political figure to her newborn baby. In addition to that, the expression 'might have made history' enhances the news value of Impact due to its significant lexis. Moving on with linguistic devices, like the *Daily Mail*, also *The Telegraph* uses a naming strategy to put the focus on Jo Swinson's motherhood and undermine her political authority. Within this framework, the label 'new mum' at the beginning of the headline is used to attract the readers' attention and enhance sensationalism. Overall, the dominant topic of motherhood covers the whole news title evoked by the words 'mum' and 'baby'. This theme eventually reinforces a stereotyped construction on female leaders who still struggle to have more opportunities within the political field (Consonance). As for visual material, figure 4.18 shows the Liberal Democrat deputy leader Jo Swinson with her baby Gabriel in Parliament.

Figure 4.18

Liberal Democrat deputy leader Jo Swinson with her baby Gabriel in the Commons

Credit: PA



The close up shot draws the attention to the leader's smiling expression while she is carrying her newborn in a baby carrier (Positivity). Within this framework, the image and the headline combine to further reinforce the identification of the leader Jo Swinson as a 'new mum'. In addition to that, the choice of this particular image shot may suggest an incongruity between the leader's informal look and the serious setting of the British Parliament on the background. Within this framework, the image focus may connote Jo Swinson with Kanter's role trap of the 'school marm', a stereotype which is commonly applied to female leaders and denotes a woman who often dresses in plain clothes and does not care much about her appearance (Consonance) (Baxter, 2018, p. 29).

Moving forward with the analysis of *The Telegraph* news headlines, another meaningful example of gendered mediation which focuses on the former Prime Minister Theresa May is 'The next leader must repair the damage Mrs May has wreaked on our global standing' (29th May, 2019). As for stylistic features, the alliteration of the sound 'm' ('damage Mrs May') puts the focus on the former Prime Minister's failed political actions which have caused negative consequences to Britain's foreign policy (Impact). In this framework, the leader's

failures are emphasized by the journalist's use of the negatively charged expression 'repair the damage Mrs May has wreaked' (Negativity). This lexical choice may be significant since the use of the verb 'wreak' in relation to Theresa May's leadership is likely to reinforce readers' negative perception of her political involvement. In addition to that, the journalist's use of the naming strategy which identifies the leader as 'Mrs May' draws attention to her gender instead of recognizing her role as Prime Minister (Consonance). This recurrent linguistic strategy which mainly applies to female leaders rather than to male politicians is employed by both *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph* despite their different political affiliations. Overall, the combination of these linguistic and stylistic devices may provide a gendered construction of the leader and damage her public image. Accordingly, these features may encourage a negative perception of Theresa May as a leader who caused serious damage to British economy which now needs a more qualified politician to restore its global stature. As for visual material, the headline's accompanying image shows the former Prime Minister Theresa May over a background of national flags.

Figure 4.19

The Telegraph



The image is a close-up shot of the former Prime Minister Theresa May during a political meeting. The leader wears a blue dress which is matched to the European flag on the background and has a serious look (Aesthetic Appeal, Proximity). In particular, she is

contracting her brows in an expression of displeasure or disapproval probably as a reaction to something that has just happened or previously said. More in general, the image focus on Theresa May's defeated look may combine with the headline to further construct the former Prime Minister as an unqualified leader who now should withdraw and leave office in favor of more capable political candidates. This gendered representation within the news construction of Theresa May is a recurrent pattern which may reinforce a biased perception of female leaders as inadequate to hold executive positions (Consonance).

Another headline from *The Telegraph* which offers an instance of Theresa May's stereotyped representation at the very end of her premiership is 'Theresa May, broken at last: how the steeliest person in politics was reduced to tears' (24th May, 2019). As for stylistic devices, the alliteration of the sound 'l' and 's' ('steeliest person in politics') enhances the musicality of the headline and draws attention to Theresa May's renowned leadership traits of resilience and confidence. Within this framework, the adjective 'steeliest' which metaphorically assigns Theresa May the attributes of the steel, recalls the stereotype of the 'iron lady' since it connotes her as a leader with a strong and determined character. Indeed, the expression 'the steeliest person in politics' is a naming strategy which does not identify Theresa May with her former role of Prime Minister but focuses on the toughness she proved to have during her government (Superlativeness). Despite this connotation, this label is probably used ironically since it sharply contrasts with the first and last part of the headline in which the words 'broken' and 'tears' draw the attention to Theresa May's vulnerability (Impact, Negativity). In this perspective, these terms evoke the theme of emotivity since they put the focus on the leader's tearful reaction and lack of emotional control. Similarly to the conservative *Daily Mail*, also the right-leaning *The Telegraph* adopts this tendency to construct a biased representation of female leaders as lacking sufficient amount of 'emotional toughness' to deliver important political campaigns and successfully guide others (Consonance) (Heilman, 2001, p. 659). As for visual content, the headline's accompanying image shows the former Prime Minister Theresa May crying during her resignation speech.

Figure 4.20

As she announced her resignation, Theresa May broke down and wept Credit: Chris J. Ratcliffe/Bloomberg



The figure 4.20 is a close-up of Theresa May's emotional display during her resignation speech. In particular, the picture draws attention to the leader's frowned expression and her downcast eyes while she is on the verge of crying (Impact, Negativity). As for the image composition, the combination between the blurred background and the sunlight on her face makes Theresa May's figure stand out and further emphasizes her tearful reaction (Aesthetic Appeal). Compared to the sensationalist *Daily Mail*, which employed a closer shot of the leader's emotional display to attract the viewers' attention, here *The Telegraph* partially shares this pattern since it employs an eye-catching photo of Theresa May's tears but without using a zoom-in technique. Overall, the image combines with the headline to emphasize the leader's emotional side and reinforce the stereotypical belief that women are less tough than men and therefore not suitable to lead in executive positions (Consonance).

In more recent times, another news title from *The Telegraph* which provides an example of gendered construction of British female leaders is 'Liz Truss is embarked on a course of sheer madness, taking the Bank of England with her' (29th September, 2022). Here, the phrases 'embarked on a course of sheer' and 'taking the Bank of England' give rhythm to

the headline and enable readers to read it smoothly. Moving forward with the analysis, the metaphorical expression ‘embarked on a course of sheer madness’ is a significant stylistic choice since it may allude to Liz Truss’s unstable political actions and consequently reinforce her perception as an unreliable leader who is going to damage Britain’s economy (Impact, Negativity). Within this framework, the word ‘madness’ is particularly relevant since its association to women eventually strengthens long established stereotypes on female irrationality and lack of emotional control (Consonance) (Brescoll, 2016, p. 418). When applied to female leaders, these assumptions are even more detrimental since they send out messages that women are less reliable than men and therefore not competent enough to guide others in leadership positions (Baxter, 2018, p. 2). Going back to linguistic devices, the journalist uses the naming strategy which identifies the leader with her name and omits her role as Prime Minister to further undermine her authority and enhance familiarity with the readers. More in general, all these linguistic and stylistic devices combine to shape a negative view on Liz Truss which may result in a diminution of people’s trust in her leadership skills.

4.1.4 The Mirror

Lastly, the present analysis investigates a corpus of titles and visual material taken from the left-leaning newspaper the *Mirror*. Although the aforementioned news brand shares the same political affiliation of the liberal *The Guardian* and should adopt more progressive viewpoints in favour of gender equality, the results of the analysis show that also the left-wing *Mirror* employs linguistic, stylistic and visual devices which contribute to reinforcing British female leaders' biased constructions that subtly convey the message that women are less competent than men in leadership roles.

A first evidence of British female leaders' gendered representations is provided by the news headline 'Theresa May: the vicar's daughter in kitten heels who will be our new Prime Minister' (11th July, 2016). Here, the journalist's use of the linguistic strategy of naming may be significant since it identifies Theresa May as the vicar's daughter and puts the focus on her fashion choices. In particular, the journalist mentions the leader's kitten heels to introduce her as the future British Prime Minister. This is a recurrent pattern within the news construction of Theresa May who, throughout her government has drawn much media attention especially for her taste in shoes. Indeed, the leader's kitten heels will become a symbol of her political involvement, being frequently employed in news articles to refer to her policies (Williams, 2021, p. 1). In this specific case, the journalist's choice to draw attention to her stylistic choices rather than to the political achievements which secured her such a prominent role subtly reinforces gender stereotypes on the supposedly feminine interest in fashion (Consonance). These stereotyped assumptions eventually obscure her professional background and may construct Theresa May as a frivolous woman in order to undermine her political authority. As for visual content, among the range of pictures which accompany the headline the most significant one is figure 4.21.

Figure 4.21

They are unmistakable (Image: Rex)



The picture is a close-up shot of Theresa May's iconic kitten heels (Consonance). As for visual composition, the blurred light-blue background emphasizes the vivid colours and the leopard print of the leader's shoes (Aesthetic Appeal). Compared to the liberal *The Guardian* which employed a similar picture of the leader's kitten heels using a more provocative shot of Theresa May's legs, here the *Mirror* adopts a more neutral perspective since it employs a closer shot of the leader's heels to make them stand out. Combined with the headline, the picture further reinforces the association between Theresa May and her interest in fashionable shoes but also contributes to marginalizing the competences she is supposed to possess in order to serve the role of Prime minister.

A second meaningful example of Theresa May's gendered mediation taken from the *Mirror* is 'Theresa May swings the axe on four ministers as she keeps fragile grip on power' (12th June, 2017). Here, the journalist's use of the naming strategy which identifies the leader by her name and omits her role of Prime Minister undermines her political claim and enhances familiarity with the audience. As for stylistic devices, the use of alliteration of the sound 'r' in the phrase 'fragile grip on power' draws attention to Theresa May's unstable government and gradual loss of political control, which is exemplified by the latter figurative expression. In this framework, the leader's inability to secure power is further reinforced by another

metaphorical expression, namely ‘swings the axe on four ministers’ which figuratively describes the leader’s drastic dismissal of her colleagues due to the challenging times she is facing. This stylistic device also reinforces the image of brutality associated to Theresa May’s political decisions. Despite their different political leanings, both the conservative *Daily Mail* and the left-leaning *Mirror* make reference to negatively charged expressions which evoke the background of violence and may connote Theresa May as a decisive and almost aggressive leader (Negativity, Superlativeness, Impact). However, even though the headline’s emphasis on the leader’s resolute actions may depict her as a strong and tough woman, the last part of the headline reiterates the message that the Prime Minister is vulnerable and must regain control of her political campaign.

Moving forward with the analysis, another headline taken from the *Mirror* offers an instance of Theresa May’s tears during her resignation speech and is titled ‘Tories scramble to replace ‘Crying Lady’ Theresa May after teary resignation’ (24th May, 2019). Here, the stylistic device of alliteration of the sound ‘r’ (‘Tories scramble to replace Crying Lady; after teary resignation’) puts the focus on the core elements of the headline and enhances its musicality. As for linguistic devices, the journalist uses a naming strategy which omits Theresa May’s former political role and identifies her as the ‘Crying lady’ (Negativity). The use of this label is linguistically relevant since it recalls the leader’s nickname of ‘iron lady’ but it reverses its meaning since it connotes Theresa May as a weeper and may construct her as a ‘weak politician’. Accordingly, in the first part of the headline, the expression ‘Tories scramble to replace’ seems to emphasize this construction through the party’s urgency to replace Theresa May with a more competent leader. To further reinforce Theresa May’s ‘emotional weakness’, the journalist also employs the adjective ‘teary’ which makes reference to the tears she shed while delivering her speech (Impact). The emphasis on Theresa May’s emotional display during her resignation is a recurrent pattern in both left and right leaning news brands. In particular, the analysis of these headlines suggests that news media focus on female emotivity may encourage long-established stereotypes which make women appear poorly suited for political positions that require the masculine ‘toughness’ (Brescoll, 2016, p. 424) (Consonance). As for visual material, among the images which accompany the headline, the most significant one is figure 4.22.

Figure 4.22

Theresa is tipped to be replaced by Boris Johnson but there are many candidates (Image: SWNS)



The picture shows Theresa May's full figure during her resignation speech outside Number 10 Downing Street (Proximity). The leader stands in front of a lectern and holds some papers as she probably concluded her speech. Despite the image wide-angle perspective allows to have a complete view of that crucial moment, viewers' attention may be drawn to her frowned and tearful expression (Aesthetic Appeal, Negativity). Like the afore mentioned newspapers, the image combines with the headline to emphasize the leader's emotional side and strengthen a negative perception on female leaders as 'too emotional' and therefore not capable to hold major political roles (Consonance).

Another headline which shows an example of British leaders stereotyped representation is 'Liz Truss 'woefully ill-prepared' for winter blackouts after refusing to act over summer' (6th October, 2022). As for stylistic devices, the alliteration of the sound 'll' ('woefully ill prepared') draws attention to the negative feedback Liz Truss received after she failed to prepare her government for British winter crisis. Within this framework, the negatively charged expression 'woefully ill-prepared' may be significant from a linguistic point of

view. Indeed, the adjective ‘woeful’, which is commonly associated to deplorable actions here strongly highlights the leader’s inadequate preparation as a Prime Minister (Negativity). Accordingly, the negative expression reinforces the image of Liz Truss as an unreliable leader who ‘refused to act’ to prevent the coming crisis. To further reduce her political claim, the journalist uses a naming strategy which identifies Liz Truss by her name and omits her role of Prime Minister. Overall, the combination between stylistic and linguistic devices contributes to shaping a negative perception of the leader’s premiership since the headline mainly focuses on her lack of political intuition and will. This emphasis may strengthen deeply rooted stereotypes which still affect women leaders more than their male counterparts (Consonance). As for visual content, the headline’s accompanying image shows a close-up shot of Liz Truss.

Figure 4.23

The new prime minister has had a rough start to life as leader (Image: REUTERS)



The image is a close-up shot of Liz Truss which portrays her profile on a black background (Aesthetic Appeal). The leader has a flustered expression and is shown with her mouth open while she is vehemently speaking to her audience (Superlativeness, Impact). Despite the newspaper’s more progressive views, the *Mirror* employs a provocative shot of the leader’s discomposed expression probably to reinforce the headline’s construction of Liz Truss as a ‘untrustworthy leader’. Within this framework, the image focus may combine with the

headline to undermine the politician's authority by emphasizing the Prime Minister's lack of seriousness early in her political career and consequently perpetuate negative gendered assumptions on female leaders and their capabilities (Consonance).

The last news headline from the *Mirror* shows another instance of the former Prime Minister Liz Truss stereotyped construction and is titled 'Liz Truss shorn of power and pitifully out of her depth in the cavalcade of clowns' (19th October, 2022). Here, the stylistic device of alliteration of the sound 'c' in 'cavalcade of clowns' gives rhythm to the headline, but it also draws attention to the metaphorical expression which refers to Britain's unstable government. In particular, the metaphor draws a parallel between the absurdities of the Prime Minister's administration and a parade of circus performers. In addition to that, Liz Truss's unreliable government is further emphasized by the negatively charged phrases 'shorn of power' and 'pitifully out of her depth'. Accordingly, these expressions strongly evaluate Liz Truss as a powerless leader who does not seem to possess the knowledge, experience or skills to deal with political matters (Negativity). Within this framework, the phrase 'shorn of power' can also be considered as a metaphor which reinforces the leader's loss of political authority. In addition to this, the participle 'shorn' can be interpreted as a denigratory lexical choice since it typically refers to animals' hair and wool. To further undermine Liz Truss's claim, the journalist employs a naming strategy which identifies the leader by her name and omits her role of Prime Minister. News media emphasis on Truss's untrustworthy government is a recurrent pattern employed by both right and left leaning newspapers which may encourage a negative judgment on the leader and her premiership. Within this framework, the combination between linguistic and stylistic devices may reinforce long-established gender stereotypes on women leaders' supposed lack of professional competencies (Consonance). As for visual material, similarly to the previous picture, the headline's accompanying image shows a close-up shot of Liz Truss.

Figure 4.24

Prime Minister Liz Truss is under the cosh (Image: Getty Images)



Figure 4.24 shows a close up shot of Liz Truss on a black background (Aesthetic Appeal). The photo captures the funny expression of the leader who laughs while looking into the camera. This emphasis on Liz Truss's expressions is a recurrent pattern which is widely observed in left-leaning newspapers. Accordingly, these close-up shots which ironically portray the leader in formal settings are probably employed to provide a negative image of Liz Truss and consequently reduce her political authority. In particular, the leader's expression in figure 4.24 combines with the headline to reinforce the audience's general distrust towards the Prime Minister's political skills and thus strengthen the general belief that women are unfit to lead in executive positions (Consonance).

LIMITATIONS

Following the results and findings of the present analysis of online news headlines and visual material, its limitations and challenges should be acknowledged. Specifically, the data selected was limited to a small corpus of headlines and accompanying images taken from four British online news brands across the political spectrum: the right-leaning *Daily Mail*, and *The Telegraph*, the center-left *The Guardian*, and the left-leaning *Mirror*. In view of this, the sample size of the analysis may limit the generalizability of its findings. Within this framework, a challenge posed by the analysis of visual content was the choice of meaningful pictures taken from image galleries included in the articles. The subjective selection of data may represent a significant limitation within the current analysis since it may not correspond to readers' individual perception and interpretation of the photos chosen. Nevertheless, the collected news content provided significant results in line with the aim of the current research, which was to detect how specific linguistic, stylistic and visual devices contribute to conveying a gendered representation of female British leaders in online news articles. On top of that, the methodological approach adopted for this study has been limited to Discursive News Values Analysis (DNVA) and Multimodal News Analysis (MNA). In this context, a major focus on the linguistic devices of naming strategies and reported speech, the stylistic devices of alliteration and metaphor in addition to specific visual content may have restricted the relevance of results and findings for broader contexts. That said, the present research was conducted using professionally approved methods which gave structure and guidance to the analysis of online news headlines and accompanying images.

CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER STUDIES

Having outlined influential theories on traditional stereotypes in the marginalization of women in leadership positions, in addition to a theoretical section with a focus on online news headlines, the aim of this research was to demonstrate how the interplay between news titles' linguistic, stylistic and visual devices contributes to constructing gendered portrayals of British female leaders. In particular, this research examined a corpus of news headlines which amounted to a cross section of four British online newspapers with different political affiliations, namely, the right-leaning *Daily Mail* and *The Telegraph*, the center-left *The Guardian*, and the left-leaning *Mirror*. In this context, the use of a specific word choice, naming strategies, reported speech, alliterations and metaphors in addition to visual content, appeared to be relevant to detect the biased perspective perpetuated by British online news brands to depict women leaders. Moreover, to investigate the combination between the written and visual modes in news headlines, this research followed both Discursive News Values Analysis (DNVA) and Multimodal News Analysis (MNA). Drawing from these two approaches, the results of the current research revealed that the right-leaning newspapers *Daily Mail* and *The Telegraph* adopt similar sensationalist tendencies in order to attract the readers' attention and influence their perspective on British female leaders. On the other hand, the left-leaning *Mirror*, which was expected to adopt a more liberal viewpoint in favour of gender equality, instead provides evidence of biased constructions against female politicians. Compared to the previous news brands, the center-left *The Guardian* seemed to align with its progressive perspectives by offering some instances of a less gendered representation of British female leaders. Notwithstanding this, the findings show that, despite the different political leanings, these British online newspapers employ similar stylistic, linguistic and visual devices to depict a stereotyped construction of British female politicians. Specifically, the analysis reveals that the combination between these features may evoke specific topics related to Kanter's tokens of 'pet', 'mother' and 'iron lady' or convey the recurrent themes of female leaders' emotivity, the emphasis on their physical appearance or fashion choices and a general skepticism against their political skills. These media constructions not only contribute to gendered disinformation narratives (Jankowicz et al., 2021, p. 5) which may discourage women from pursuing leadership professions, but they can also have damaging consequences on those leaders, who despite their professional achievements are still considered not qualified enough to serve such prominent roles.

Overall, on the basis of the results and findings of the present research, several suggestions for further investigation are provided. Accordingly, while this study analysed a small corpus of online news headlines taken from four British online news brands, future research could examine a larger corpus to expand the relevance of the results and findings for broader contexts. Within this framework, given the limitations of the current research, further studies could broaden the analysis of online news headlines' visual material through the investigation of image galleries which can be included in the articles. Moreover, future studies could adopt different methodological approaches with a focus on additional lexical and stylistic choices which could potentially reveal either similar or different patterns within the news construction of British female leaders. In conclusion, it could be useful to conduct a reception study on women politicians' biased representation in online news headlines to further investigate the significant impact that these gendered constructions might have on readers' views and ideologies.

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