Graphic processes in 3D character design

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Abstract: *3D design involves creating three-dimensional objects using specialized software. These objects can then be used in a variety of media, such as films, video games, animations and advertising. This paper aims to show the relevance of 3D character design in scientific research by reviewing the literature and highlighting the specific steps in and features of the 3D character design process. A series of best practices in 3D graphic design are also described and the whole creative process is exemplified through the creation of two characters: Astronaut and Rayming.*

1. Introduction

3D graphic characters or 3D characters are three-dimensional models of people, animals or fantasy creatures. Usually, 3D graphic characters are designed to be animated. According to Kunkhet et al.

(2019), a "3D character is created from static polygonal surfaces. In general, a polygonal surface can be moved by moving its components: vertices, edges and faces. The rigging technique groups these components together and moves them simultaneously to any desired position". Animation is the process of creating movement and change of states in a series of static images or objects. This movement can be created through various techniques such as 2D animation, 3D animation, stop-motion or computer animation.

3D graphic characters can be used in different areas such as films, animations and video games to add an element of realism and to make the story more engaging and easier to follow. They can also be used in advertising to promote different products or services and to attract the attention of the public.

2. Research methods and methodology

This paper aims to show the relevance of 3D character design in scientific research by reviewing the literature and highlighting the specific steps in and features of the 3D character design process. I used the literature review method, relying on different means of data collection, as well as on a selection and identification procedure.

In this paper, I will answer the following research questions:

Q1 - Is 3D character design relevant in the context of scientific research?

Q2 - Which are the specific steps/details in making a 3D (animated) character?

Q3 - Which are the best practices in a creative 3D (animated) character design process?

To answer research questions Q1 and Q2, I conducted an analysis of the scientific works corresponding to the chosen field, following the steps described in the subsections Data collection methods, Selection procedure and Identification.

Data collection methods

The following data collection method was chosen:

Search field: "3d character modelling"

Databases: IEEE Xplore, Science Direct, Scholar Google

https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/, https://www.sciencedirect.com/,

https://scholar.google.com/

Publication date: 2015 - 2023

Sort by: Relevance

Language: English

Selection procedure

At this specific stage in the process, I examined the titles, keywords and abstracts of the articles. I briefly reviewed the full-text articles while using the inclusion and exclusion criteria in Table 1.

Table 1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Articles from scientific conferences and journals Work relevant to 3D graphics Work relevant to 3D character design Work including keywords for 3D characters or 3D graphics Work including 3D character screenshots	Work irrelevant to 3D graphics Work not including keywords for 3D characters or 3D graphics Work not including processes that violate the principles of 3D character creation

Identification

For each digital library, I have got different results: 302 articles for IEEE Xplore, 169 for Science Direct, and 268 for Scholar Google (my search was limited to the first 20 pages). The total number was 739. I

used Zotero as my personal research assistant, which helped me collect and organize the articles, and eliminate duplicates. As a result, 583 articles remained. After selecting the title, keywords, abstract, inclusion and exclusion criteria, I got 20 articles. The next steps were to read these articles in detail, to select the ones from which I could extract data, and to analyse them in order to answer the research questions Q1 and Q2. I have additionally included three scholarly web articles from blogs specific to the field of graphics.

For the research question Q3, which concerns good practices in 3D character creation, I have considered the information gathered from the analysis of scientific works, as well as from my own experience in creating 3D objects and 3D character modelling through influences from specialized forums and YouTube tutorials.

Each individual character is used for different purposes: one is made for a short animation, while the other is made for integration into different digital materials. Both characters are similar in process with minor exceptions.

The methods used for modelling are categorized as polygonal modelling and digital sculpting, followed by UV mapping, texturing with the processes needed to achieve it, optimization using certain techniques, rigging, animation and rendering. As for software, I mainly used Blender, but also Substance Painter and Character Creator 4.

3. Relevance

In the literature, 3D graphic design has many implications in culture, entertainment, video games, animation and so on. Following the analysis of the workflow for modelling a 3D character, using a 3D K-Pop dance animation as a case study, one can observe the procedural process of 3D character creation as well as of animation creation, which is limited because "different activities and features require different character modelling and configuration. The number of segments is kept to a minimum" (Kunkhet et al., 2019).

For film and animation, 3D offers limitless possibilities in the creative process, the limit being the human mind and one's experience in using 3D graphics. At the same time, 3D animation offers diverse benefits, from the ability to create complex 3D models that can be detailed in ways that would be impossible in the real world, to the flexibility of creating, using and reusing 3D characters. One example in terms of animation is the short film made with 3D CGI and live action by Augustina Ina, Fauziah and Utami Maulina. This computer-generated imagery (CGI) process is used in the global film industry. According to the authors, "the director chooses to use 3D CGI instead of real objects in order to optimize costs and create a scene that is currently impossible to achieve in reality" (Agustina et al., 2017).

Another well-known branch of graphics, whose end product is consumed daily in almost every part of the world, is video game design, which involves the creation of 3D objects as well as of 3D characters. Games are an incredible component of the digital age, from competitive games to single player, educational computer games or integrated VR or AR. All these games require advanced coding and 3D skills, as well as making optimized 3D components to work well when completing the game as a creative process. Parab Aaryan et al. (2022) developed a video game with the theme of Mahabharata, designed for operating systems such as Windows, in which a "player can learn about Indian mythology and respond to the game's difficulties while playing the shooter game".

Obviously, there are still areas and fields where the creation of 3D objects and characters is useful, but the research involvement to develop the processes of using 3D graphics is also useful, giving designers the opportunity to create complex and efficient models that fit the field of use at the highest level, using methods and techniques discovered and developed. A case in point is Ismail et al. (2015), who describe "a technique for deforming different motion styles, from normal mode to strong mode and even exaggeration, by deforming

specific positions in the motions of 3D characters introduced into the computer animation system".

4. Stages and particularities

The first step in 3D character creation is to develop a concept or an idea for the character. The inspiration for the character's design and story can come from pure imagination or from references from several sources of inspiration (images). Finally, a sketch is made that can act as an incipient model of the character in 2D graphics to be translated into 3D. An example is the work of Aubrey Galindez, who made 3 digitally illustrated characters in some scenes. The author used different games such as Bayonetta, Soul Caliber and League of Legends as references. She explains that, when creating a character, she aims for some kind of indication, words or aesthetic that she wants the character to embody (Aubrey, 2022).

The second step in the creation of a 3D character is the actual modelling of the character. For example, Kovanen (2015) argues that "3D character modelling is mainly based on polygonal modelling methods. The other, less popular method is NURBS (Non-Uniform Rational B-Splines) modelling". The first method is more common in 3D character modelling, being more optimal to use, texture and animate, because it does not break on deformation, while the second method is more common in manufacturing and engineering, being formed from curves (Kovanen, 2015).

The third step is known as UV mapping, which is a complicated process depending on the complexity of the 3D object. UV refers to two-dimensional coordinates. This step "is the process of mapping the polygons of a 3D model onto a two-dimensional surface so that it can be textured" (Terävä, 2017). Thus, a two-dimensional UV map is made from each polygon of the 3D model. When colour or different textures are applied to an area on the UV map, the polygons that align with the UV coordinates inherit the texture or the corresponding colour, being later found in the 3D space. In a much more simplified way, the UV

mapping process is "model unwrapping, by taking the surface and placing it in UV space" (Kovanen, 2015). Settling refers to the fact that the object can be positioned in pieces using the seam process to achieve good distortion.

The fourth step is optimization - a process in which attempts are made to minimize the computing power requirements of hardware components. This optimization process is particularly necessary in the gaming industry and beyond. Considering that a scene has several objects displayed simultaneously and rendering is done in real time, it is necessary that the objects look good visually, but also include little polygonal information. The way "to have a model that is low in polygon count (low-poly) and looks like it has a lot of surface detail is to cheat" (Kovanen, 2015).

The fifth step is texturing. 3D texturing refers to the process of adding visual details to the surface of a 3D model to create a more complex and realistic image, with the information being projected two-dimensionally onto the UV map. These details can include textures, colours, patterns and other visual information, which are applied to the 3D model to enhance its appearance and realism. Even though texturing can be done directly in Blender, which has functions to add colours and materials, textures can be added in any 2D art or specialized texturing program, such as Substance Painter. As Heikkilä (2017) argues, "some games need realistic textures made from real photos, while others need stylized hand-painted textures".

The sixth step concerns the most important process in terms of character animation and posing. In general, the polygonal modelling process allows the movement of components: edges, faces and vertices. Rigging "groups these components together and moves them simultaneously to any desired position" (Kunkhet et al., 2019).

The seventh step is animation - a process that uses all the previous steps to bring the 3D character to life. Agustina et al. (2017) describe animation as the process in which one makes "an object move or change shape over time, and it can be animated in a variety of ways".

The animation process comes incipiently with a script outlining the key moments of the animation. 3D character animation methods are diverse, but Keyframe Animation, Motion Capture, and Simulation Animation are among the most popular.

The last step is rendering. 3D rendering is the process of transforming a 3D model into a 2D image or video clip. This process involves calculating all the light properties, object colour and environment of the 3D scene so that realistic looking images are created. According to Larson and Semwal (2016), "rendering involves taking every aspect of the model (geometry, textures and lighting) and using these to calculate the final image". Rendering time is directly proportional to the computational components and the totality of properties included in the rendered scene. Thus, rendering, especially rendering an animation, is a game of patience, time being the greatest asset in this circumstance.

5.   Good practices

In this section, I will use all the knowledge gained and combine it with my experience with 3D objects to create two 3D characters to be used for two different purposes, namely, animation and integration into digital materials. As explained above, the steps to be followed in the creation of a 3D character are complex and diverse, ranging from concept development, modelling and UV mapping, to optimization, texturing, rigging, animation and finally, rendering. Moreover, post-processing aims at enhancing various visual aspects and adding special effects.

5.1. Concept

For the first 3D character, I decided to make an astronaut, which would then be animated. This astronaut is somehow atypical, but follows, to some extent, the traditional elements of an astronaut, such as the helmet, the equipment, the backpack and the tubes (cf. Figure 1). In terms of animation, I decided to keep it simple: a short scene in a

cave, where the astronaut walks forward with a helper next to him emitting light.

For the second 3D character, I wanted to make something more interesting, which could be integrated into different digital materials, but which would also have my artistic signature. As a result, Rayming comes from a future world, and is depicted in a Cyberpunk style (cf. Figure 2). In addition to clothing and helmet, I also built a weapon for him to use in certain stances specific to a fighting style.

Figure 2. Astronaut Moodboard

Figure 1. Rayming Moodboard

5.2. Modelling

To model the characters, I used a basic body made in Character Creator. Then I relied on polygonal modelling (the process of

influencing the faces, edges and tips of a primitive shape) to gradually create the specific elements of the characters, from the helmet to the shoes. To streamline the process, I used modifiers, such as the mirroring modifier, which allows the geometry on an axis to be translated based on the origin point of the model. In addition, the solidifying modifier was used to add thickness to clothing and equipment, while the hi-res modifier was used to bring more influence on the character details based on digital sculpting.
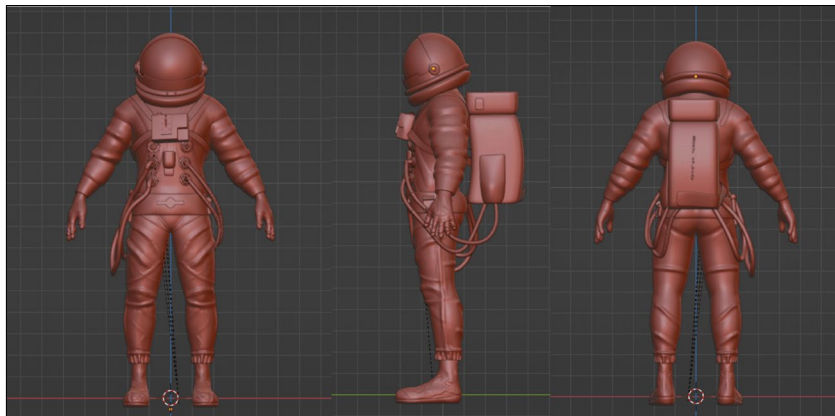

Figure 3. Astronaut Modeled
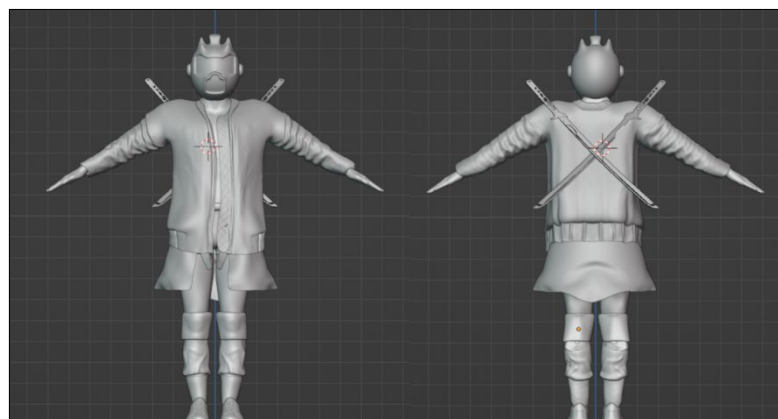
Figure 4. Rayming Modeled

5.3. UV mapping/Optimization/Textures

UV mapping is the transposition of three-dimensional information into two-dimensional information to generate different textures. The transition from 3D to 2D is achieved by stitching. To get an overview of how the 2D texture will look on the 3D character, a UV grid node can be made. Based on the live mapping function, stitches can be made in real time. Individually made shapes are called islands and are placed in a UV map. An important step after stitching is to straighten the islands and arrange them in the map so that texture density is as high as possible.

For Astronaut, I used knotted texturing in Blender, while for Rayming, I used Substance Painter, which is a texturing dedicated software and is, therefore, much more effective. I made different textures based on previous mapping, such as normal, colour, emission, gloss, brightness and occlusion maps.

5.4. Rigging/Animation

Figure 5. Astronaut and Rayming Textured

For rigging, I used an addon called Riggify to directly generate a humanoid skeleton. I superimposed it on the character line, resized it and mathematically applied the scale. After that, I rigged the skeleton to match the body and parented the body to the skeleton with automatic weights. Then, I painted by hand the influence of the bones on the body, where still needed. Next, I created special IK bones, which can be conceptualized as controllers for different areas of the body influencing several bones at once. The animation was created through gradual movements with the application of rotation and scale in the animator to generate key frames.

Figure 7. Rig
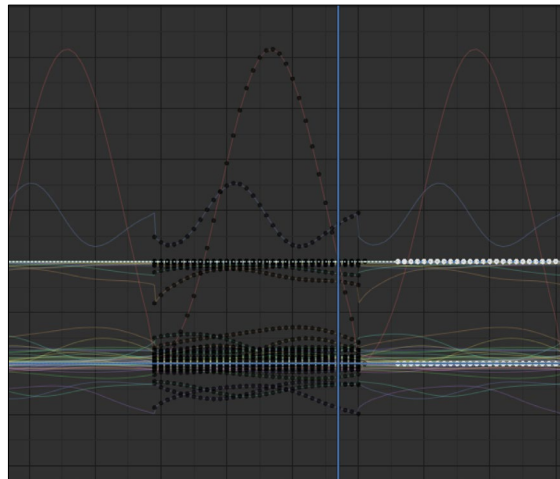
Figure 6. Key Graph

5.5. Rendering

For rendering, I used Cycles, as it can generate more realistic images by complex light calculation, even though it consumes more resources. I also used the colour manager to add contrast. For the animation rendering, I aimed to make a short animation of a few seconds, the fluidity being 30 frames per second with 500 samples. As for Rayming, I used 4k quality resolution and 4098 samples, and integrated it into different media.
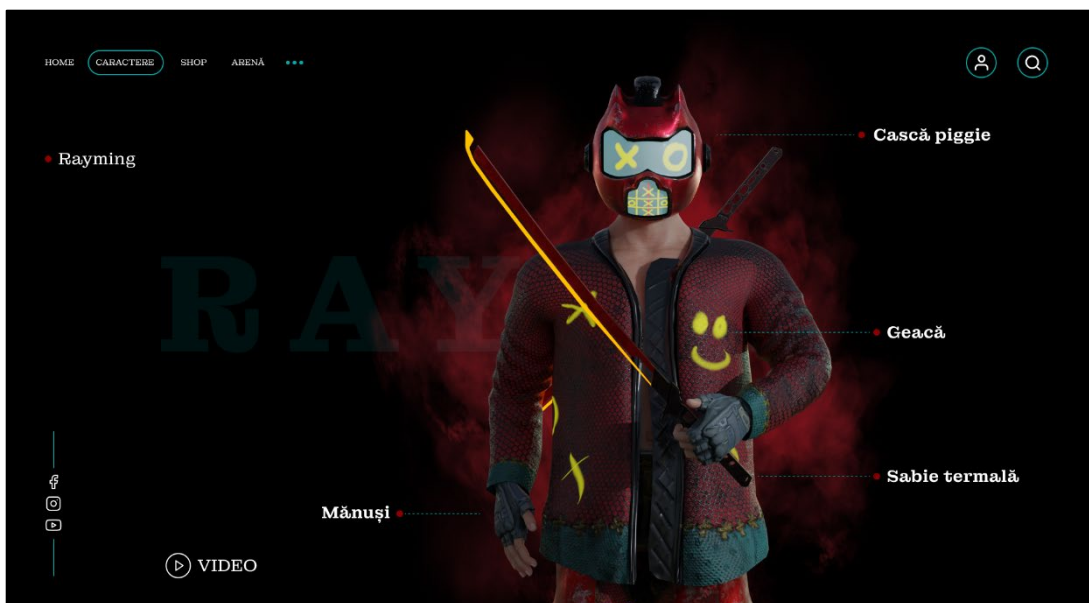

Figure 9. Sample from animation

Figure 8. Rayming on a web page

Finally, here is a table with general best practices that should be
followed at each stage in 3D character design.

Table 2a: Good Practices

Stage	Good Practices
CONCEPT	Documentation Information Outline (if feasible)
MODELLING	Overview of the interface Knowledge of basic commands Naming each component in the collection Clean geometry (quads) Constant application of scale, rotation and location Orientation of faces Using face sets (digital sculpting)
UV MAPPING	Live mapping P - for fixing faces Face straightening (active face tracking) Islanding
OPTIMIZATION	Clean geometry = Possibility to quickly make a low poly High/Low poly overlay with application of scale, rotation and location Use of specialized software High/Low poly overlay with application of scale, rotation and location Use of specialized software

Table 2b: Good Practices

Stage	Good Practices

TEXTURING	Use of specialized software
RIGGING	Using extensions Applying the skeleton scale Bringing the skeleton to the foreground Making bones
ANIMATION/POSE	Relaxation of the frameworks Cyclic repetition
RENDER	Number of samples Using the sound elimination function Using contrast from the Colour Manager GPU rendering (Cycles) PNG rendering (Animation)

6. Conclusion

The present research contributes to deepen the knowledge of 3D character modelling and of the different steps leading to its completion in terms of texture, animation and rendering. It also provides insights into 3D modelling best practices needed to obtain a result that can be integrated into different scenes. The theoretical contribution consists in a literature review, where various sources have been analysed focusing on various methods of using 3D graphics in different fields of application such as culture, film and animation, video games, as well as on the development of 3D graphics by enhancing different functionalities. At the same time, based on the information obtained from the literature, a step-by-step 3D character design process was obtained, which can be summarized as concept development, modelling, UV mapping, optimization, texturing, rigging, animation, and rendering.

The practical contribution of this paper lies in the whole process of designing a 3D character from concept to rendering, using Blender, Substance Painter and Character Creator, and in the inclusion of best practices in each step.

The research presented in this paper has also led to the answers to the research questions presented in the introduction:

Q1 - Is 3D character design relevant in the context of scientific research?

3D character design is relevant in the context of scientific research due to the discussions about and implications of 3D characters in different fields and scientific research.

Q2 - Which are the specific steps/details in creating a 3D (animated) character?

The specific steps for creating a 3D (animated) character are concept development, modelling, UV mapping, optimization, texturing, rigging, animation, and rendering, which can be compressed into 3 main stages: pre-production, production and post-production.

Q3 - Which are the best practices in a creative 3D (animated) character design process?

For each stage, there are different methods that can be included in the concept of best practice. For the character concept, emphasis can be put on documentation from different environments (real/virtual) and 2D sketching of the desired model. For modelling, it is important to know the interface and basic commands, and to name each object individually so that there is no confusion. It is equally important to work clean, by creating four-peaked faces as much as possible, especially by applying scale, rotation and location of the object. For UV mapping, the model itself must be considered, with the fastest orientation process being live mapping with a UV grid node. As for optimization and texturing, consideration should be given to polygonally clean work to make low polygon material much easier to achieve, and to the use of specialized software to streamline the process. For rigging and animation, one should consider the extensions

offered by Blender to streamline skeleton generation. Finally, for rendering, the number of samples, as well as the contrast of the result and rendering mode with the pluses and minuses of each rendering engine must be considered.

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Social Media Promotion Methods

Larisa-Corina Sima

The aim of this paper is to highlight that social media is not only a communication tool used for fun, but also an important part of business marketing strategies. It can be argued that social media is a new marketing strategy tool used to assess company performance. This paper focuses on a case study of a travel company's social media presence in terms of the number of likes and followers, content quality, customer interaction and language use. The qualitative method is used to assess how the company interacts with its customers online and how it uses social media as a strategic marketing tool. Social media plays an important role in everyday life and in every industry, both personally and professionally. Most of the time it influences our daily choices without us even realizing it.

When it comes to travel choices and reviews when choosing a vacation destination, social media has proved to be our top choice (Antoni & Bulican, 2019). In this case, the tourism industry also helps in making easy decisions for travellers through the information available on various social media platforms. This paper provides a conceptual framework of how social networks play a crucial role in establishing individual preferences and choices during travel decision-making, as well as of the importance of trusting influencers and the recommendations they make. It can be argued that social media has provided a great foundation for brand building and recognition, and that social media plays a key role in driving travellers' decisions.

1. Introduction

The tourism industry is dynamic and still evolving, and the effective promotion of travel offers is becoming increasingly important in an intensely competitive environment. In the digital age, social media hosts a powerful platform and exerts influence to promote brands and attract the attention of prospective customers. Thus, this paper explores social media promotion methods, focusing on the case study of a travel agency called Travel Planner.

This paper aims to analyse the social media promotion strategies and tactics used in Travel Planner's projects, in an attempt to better understand how social media promotion works in the tourism industry. The analysis of the company's social media promotion strategies, impact and results has provided valuable insights and practical recommendations for other tourism agencies that want to optimize their social media presence and to attract and retain a target audience in the digital environment.

2.   Research method

Qualitative research:

In this study, I used a *qualitative research method* to gain a deep and detailed understanding of social media promotion. The qualitative research method focuses on exploring and understanding phenomena and perspectives in depth, allowing me to reveal aspects and nuances that other research methods cannot capture.

The qualitative method allowed me to analyse in detail the strategies, tactics, and experiences of the marketing agency responsible for promoting Travel Planner. In turn, this has led to a better understanding of the motives, perceptions and factors behind their decisions and actions in social media promotion. I was thus able to explore their decision-making processes, their creative approaches and the strategies they implemented to attract and engage the travel agency's target audience.

Interview:

In addition to the qualitative research method, I also relied on an *interview* with the marketing agency to gain direct insights and relevant information from experts in the field. This interview provided an opportunity to explore in detail the strategies, tactics, and results of the social media promotion campaigns for Travel Planner. I gained valuable insights into the process of planning, implementing, and evaluating promotion campaigns, as well as into the challenges and opportunities encountered in this area.

Using the qualitative research method and the interview with the marketing agency, I managed to analyse how social media promotion can influence the tourism industry and its impact on the travel agency Travel Planner.

This approach allowed me to develop practical recommendations and suggestions for optimizing social media promotion strategies for other travel agencies interested in improving their presence and results in the digital environment.

Through this *combination of qualitative research and the interview* with a marketing agency, I can hopefully bring a significant contribution to the understanding of social media promotion methods in the tourism industry and to the identification of the most effective practices in this field.

3. Results

One of the main goals of the travel agency Travel Planner is to expand its online presence and establish a strong influence on social networks. To achieve the goal of reaching 150,000 followers by the end of 2023, Travel Planner implemented two key strategies: influencer strategy and content strategy.

Strategy 1: Influencer strategy

The agency recognized the power of influencers in the social media landscape and sought to leverage their social media influence to expand reach and attract a wider audience. They carefully identified and collaborated with well-known influencers who were highly regarded online. Influencers such as Mihai Morar, Ruxandra Luca, Adrian Enache, Andreea Bănică, Lavinia Pârva, Laura Cosoi, Adela Popescu, Barbara Isasi (Mandinga), Miruna Ioani (*Și blondele gândesc*), Mihai Bobonete and Pavel Bartoș were among those chosen for their significant impact and relevance to the target audience.

Strategy 2: Content Strategy

In addition to collaborations with influencers, Travel Planner implemented a content strategy focused on addressing the concerns and needs of potential tourists. Travellers often face various challenges and uncertainties when choosing a vacation destination, and the agency developed a plan to help potential tourists in this direction. About 200 articles were created to provide informative and useful resources to help tourists make useful decisions about their travels, especially to Bulgaria. These articles covered a wide range of topics, including top destinations, travel tips, accommodation recommendations, local cuisine, transport options and cultural information. By addressing potential concerns and providing valuable information, the agency aimed to position itself as a trusted resource for travel-related questions, thereby attracting more potential tourists and establishing credibility within the travel community.

To achieve their goal to sell 15,000 vacations through social media campaigns in 2022, Travel Planner implemented segmentation strategies and focused on differentiation in their communication approach, as follows.

Segmentation strategy:

The marketing agency promoting Travel Planner recognized the importance of tailoring their promotional efforts to specific customer segments. To this end, they performed a thorough segmentation by

hotel category. The hotels listed on the agency's website were divided into comfort categories, including premium, superior, comfort, standard and low-cost options. This segmentation allowed the agency to create personalized promotions based on target customer profiles and budgets.

By understanding the preferences and needs of each segment, the agency could develop targeted communication strategies. They acknowledged that the communication approach should vary for each customer and category, leading to a global motto and strategy called "Holiday for All". This approach aimed to ensure that every client, regardless of budget or preferences, would find suitable holiday options and feel valued by the agency.

Differentiation strategy:

In addition to segmentation, the travel agency identified the need to differentiate itself from the competition and shift the attention of potential buyers from price to quality. To achieve this, the marketing agency team created a list of unique selling points and differentiators, which were then integrated into the agency's communication strategy to emphasize the value they offered beyond the price.

By highlighting their differentiators, such as exceptional customer service, exclusive amenities, curated experiences or personalized recommendations, the agency aimed to capture the attention of potential buyers and convey the message that their offers meant superior quality and went beyond just price considerations.

In the Travel Planner case study, one of the key goals for 2022 and 2023 was to increase the number of likes on their Facebook page. For 2022, the agency set out to reach 100,000 likes, while for 2023 the goal was raised to 150,000. At the moment (i.e. July 2023), the agency is very close to reaching its goal, with 147,000 likes.

After careful market analysis, the agency realized that this goal could not be achieved through organic posts alone, regardless of how they were done. Additional support from influencers and paid campaigns

was needed. At the same time, the agency realized the importance of a clear plan for the organic social media channel. To define this plan, the agency had to consider several important aspects. They decided that the ideal number of posts per day would be 4 in season (May-September) and 2 out of season. As for the content, they established that it should consist of 40% offers, 40% value content, 10% testimonials and 10% influencers and other relevant topics.

In addition to the goal of increasing the number of likes, other important aspects related to social media promotion were analysed in the Travel Planner case study.

1.   Remarkable results: Following the implemented strategies, the agency got more than 7600 likes and more than 560 comments on the posts promoted on social media. These numbers reflect the audience's engagement and interest in the content provided by Travel Planner.

2.   Allocation of budget: To promote certain posts, their performance in terms of reach was considered. Posts that had a reach of more than 5000 people were selected to be turned into paid advertisements. The budget allocated for these ads was decided by the specialists responsible for their creation. They also considered setting ads on Bidding Conversions, with a conversion cost below 30 lei per purchase, in order to maximize the efficiency and results of the campaigns.

3.   Collaboration with influencers: The travel agency allocated a budget for influencer campaigns. In the summer of 2022, a budget of 100,000 euro was allocated, and for the year 2023, 120,000 euro. Collaboration with influencers was particularly preferred in the form of a barter, where Travel Planner offered a free vacation to the influencer in exchange for promoting the destination. In some cases, influencers also received financial compensation, but such details were confidential.

4.   Promotion of locations and valuable content: An important strategy adopted by the Travel Planner agency was to promote locations and relevant content, especially by creating informative blog

articles and sharing them on social media channels. In the summer of 2022, more than 100 informative articles about holidays in Bulgaria were written, and by the end of the year, the number of articles had reached almost 200. These articles strengthened Travel Planner's position as Romania's number 1 source of information about holidays in Bulgaria. In the year 2023, the articles were updated with the latest news and articles for other destinations such as Greece and Turkey were   also   written.

Here is an excerpt from a Facebook post:

Picture 1. An informative article in a Facebook post (Travel Planner

Facebook page)

Travel Planner's paid campaign strategy was structured on three levels, considering the different stages of the digital marketing funnel: top of funnel (TOFU), middle of funnel (MOFU) and bottom of funnel (BOFU).

At the TOFU level, campaigns were developed that targeted cold audiences, i.e. people who were not directly familiar with the brand or product. The aim of these campaigns was to attract users' attention and bring them in contact with Travel Planner. Through these campaigns, valuable content was promoted, providing relevant information about destinations, travel tips and other interesting aspects related to tourism.

At the MOFU level, campaigns targeted warm audiences, i.e. people who had already shown some interest in the brand and had previously interacted with it. The goal was to keep these audiences engaged and convert them into potential customers. These campaigns included special offers, promotions and personalized content to drive purchase intent and strengthen the relationship with the audience.

At the BOFU level, campaigns focused on very warm audiences, i.e. people who were already close to completing a purchase. These campaigns had as their main objective the conversion and completion of a transaction. Personalized messages, special offers and push messages were used to drive purchases and convert leads into actual customers.

By structuring campaigns on these three levels, Travel Planner managed to reach diverse audiences and to provide them with relevant messages and content based on their level of interest and stage in the purchase process. This strategy helped increase the effectiveness of paid campaigns and achieve the desired results in terms of promotion and sales.

TOFU audiences were subjected to a process of testing different campaigns with the aim of attracting and capturing their interest. Depending on the hotel category, customized campaigns were created to address the various preferences and needs of potential customers.

Hotel categories considered in the campaigns include:

1.   Premium + Superior: Luxury and high-quality hotels that offer exclusive services and facilities.

2.   Comfort: Hotels with comfortable and attractive services and facilities for common people.

3.	Standard + Low-cost: Hotels with affordable prices and standard services for those looking for a more economical option.

4.	Resorts: Promotion of various holiday resorts in Bulgaria such as Albena, Golden Sands, Obzor, Sunny Beach and Nessebar.

5.	Groups: Hotels that are ideal for groups of travellers, such as hotels with an aquapark.

6.	On the beach: Hotels located near the beach, offering easy and convenient access to the surrounding sand and sea.

7.	Family: Family-friendly hotels with facilities and activities for children and parents.

8.	Ultra all-inclusive: Hotels that offer luxury all-inclusive packages with all services and amenities included.

9.	Adults only: Hotels exclusively for adults, offering a relaxing and intimate experience.

Also, specific campaigns were implemented to promote offers and promotions, such as last-minute and early booking, to stimulate bookings at the right times.

The outcome has been remarkable, validating the campaigns' effectiveness and impact in attracting interest and generating leads or sales. The success of these campaigns is highlighted in the concrete results below:

Picture 2. Travel Planner promotion campaign
results

The interview I had with Marian Cristinescu, executive director at Marketos – the marketing agency in charge of promoting Travel Planner, was designed to explore the strategies, tactics and results of social media promotion, considering the peculiarities of the tourism industry and the specifics of the travel agency.

During the interview, I asked a series of questions regarding the goals and strategies of the marketing agency in promoting Travel Planner in the digital environment. We covered topics such as the social media platforms used, adapting the message and content, integrating collaborations with influencers and partners, as well as measuring the success of social media promotion campaigns.

We also explored the marketer's perspective on user trust in social media reviews versus personal recommendations. I wanted to understand how the travel agency Travel Planner manages and capitalizes on this dynamic within its promotional strategies.

Through this interview, I aimed to gain firsthand insights from a social media promotion expert, so as to better understand the processes and decisions behind Travel Planner's promotion campaigns. Marian's recommendations and answers helped me assess the impact of social media promotion in the tourism industry and formulate practical recommendations to improve promotion in the digital environment.

Q1. A brief introduction, who is the man behind Marketos?

CM: My name is Cristinescu Marian and I have been active in marketing for over 14 years. I started with SEO and over time I have also learned Facebook Ads, now Meta ads, Google Ads, Email Marketing, Conversion Rate Optimization.

I've built and participated in very complex campaigns with budgets of hundreds of thousands euros per month.

Due to my vast experience and interaction with over 250 clients over time, I think I am a very good strategist, which allows me to develop innovative campaigns, customized according to the needs of each client. We have results that exceed any expectations, with a Return on Ad Spend of 300x.

Q2. What are the agency's main goals in promoting Travel Planner on social media?

CM: The main goal is to drive conversions. Secondary goals include interaction with as many people as possible, as well as continuous cost optimization.

Q3. What social media promotion strategies and tactics do you use to attract and engage Travel Planner's target audience?

CM: Our tactics are more about customer experience. This brings a huge advantage in promotion, because in addition to the standard offers, we also bring differentiators that shift the focus from price to experience.

Q4. How do you identify the right social media platforms for travel agency promotion and how do you tailor your message and content accordingly?

CM: The most powerful way to make decisions is to understand your customers and their needs. Marketos has a dedicated team to create advanced customer profiles.

Our experts specialize in conducting in-depth customer, competitor and market research to help companies identify opportunities for differentiation and growth. With a deep understanding of the audience and competitors, more informed decisions will be made, and our team will be able to build customer-centric campaigns.

Q5. How do you ensure that the messages and content promoted on social media reflect the values and identity of the Travel Planner brand?

CM: There is a Brand Book and a communication strategy. The messages observe the established tone of voice, contain business differentiators and carefully thought-out keywords.

Q6. What types of content do you create and share on social media to inspire and inform potential travellers?

CM: All types of content. From content to sell, to content to inform, both in standard format, text and video.

Q7. How do you measure and assess the success of the social media promotion campaigns for Travel Planner? What metrics and performance indicators do you use?

CM: The main two performance indicators are the number of orders and the purchase cost. They are measured at platform level (cross conversions are not taken into account), and the fact that platforms can sometimes report the same orders (their percentage is below 5%, but it happens).

Q8. What are the biggest challenges in promoting a travel agency on social media and how do you overcome them?

CM: The biggest challenges are due to prices. As all prices have increased, including for packages, people comment a lot that the prices are 20-40% higher than last year. This has a negative impact on campaigns. We try to respond to most comments, but if they become very aggressive, we do respond but we hide them (Meta option to hide comments and show them only to people who wrote them).

Q9. How do you integrate collaborations with influencers and partners into the social media promotion strategy for Travel Planner?

CM: When promoting the agency, all influencers have a series of tasks that they must comply with (for example, link to the site, tag the agency, create certain types of content). All their posts are shared with us. We boost organically as much as possible; we cannot promote shared posts because the platform does not allow this, but we use print screens with influencers and what they say about us to create content that we use in future campaigns.

Q10. How do you manage customer feedback and interaction on social media platforms to maintain a positive image of the travel agency?

CM: I answered in Q8. The feedback is generally very positive. Travel Planner is the travel agency with the most positive reviews among the agencies in Romania, with over 28,500 real reviews.

Q11. How do you use emerging technologies and trends in social media promotion to stay ahead of the competition and stay relevant to Travel Planner's target audience?

CM: We use the latest technologies, including AI now, for both content and design. We also have competitive scanning software and data analysis that highlight all kinds of opportunities. It is a very big

advantage that we can afford such programs, because for each client we use analysis platforms with business accounts (that is, we can analyse multiple accounts/businesses), which would cost a client a monthly subscription of thousands euro.

Q12. In your opinion, within the travel industry, which do you think people trust more: the reviews they read on social media or personal recommendations? How do you think this perception influences the promotion strategies and reputation of Travel Planner?

CM: Personal recommendations will always beat any review. But of course, reviews matter anyway; in many posts people ask in the comments if anyone has travelled with Travel Planner before, what their opinion is, etc. Thanks to the community and the fact that the agency is well-known on the market, I almost always receive answers from other clients, which is a huge advantage.

4. Conclusion

This section covers the most important conclusions of the study, starting from the assumptions in the introduction of the paper, my personal opinion regarding the results of the study, as well as the potential future research directions related to the topic addressed.

It can be concluded that social media promotion is essential to the success and growth of the travel agency Travel Planner. The effective use of social media platforms allows the agency to increase its visibility, strengthen its brand, communicate directly with clients and promote its offers in an engaging way. By analysing results and constantly adapting strategies, Travel Planner can take advantage of social media promotion to achieve their business goals and differentiate themselves in a competitive environment.

Research Method: The importance of Social Media Promotion - Travel Planner Case Study. To examine in detail the importance of social media promotion for the travel agency Travel Planner, I opted for a qualitative research method. This approach has allowed me to gain a thorough understanding of the experiences, perceptions and strategies used by the agency in its social media promotion. Another important part of this research consisted in an interview with a marketing agency specialized in social media promotion, responsible for the promotion of Travel Planner.

The qualitative research method provides an appropriate framework to explore the topic of social media promotion in a detailed and contextual way. This approach allows researchers to gain in-depth insights into the experiences and perspectives of those involved in travel agency promotion. Interviews can provide direct opinions and relevant information from promotion experts who work in a similar context to Travel Planner.

The interview with the marketing agency specialized in social media promotion has brought multiple advantages to my case study. It has provided an inside look at the specific social media promotion strategies, tactics and experiences of the travel agency Travel Planner. It has also allowed me to explore their results, challenges and perspectives on social media promotion in the tourism industry.

The qualitative research method, in general, and the interview with the marketing agency, in particular, has added significant value to this study on the importance of social media promotion in the tourism industry. This approach has allowed me to gain a detailed understanding of and relevant information about a travel agency's strategies, tactics and experiences in promoting itself in the digital environment. This information is essential to develop solid conclusions and useful recommendations in my dissertation paper.

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The Role of Portraying Businesswomen in Communication.

Case Study: Perceptions in the Romanian Business Environment

Ramona Chiseliță

Abstract: *The community of business women, in all its complexity, is a current topic which demonstrates that in order to reach the highest level of development, it is necessary to involve all the pawns that make up a modern society: the state, representative institutions and citizens, but in the speed era, the biggest impact after the legislative one is communication. The central theme of this article is represented by the way in which Romanian business women are portrayed in communication and the impact produced by the way in which their image is presented in society through*

communication channels. More precisely, the research proposes an analysis of the perceptions expressed in communication about businesswomen, but also of the perception of businesswomen from various fields of activity in Romania. Through the multidisciplinary approach of the chosen topic, the study can constitute a model or a starting point for more advanced research in the field or related fields. It also provides a panoramic view not only of the situation of businesswomen at the national and international level, but also at the specific level of the universe of the 20 people interviewed, an aspect that offers a contribution to the specialized literature that addresses the subject of businesswomen.

Keywords: *communication; businesswomen; rights; equality; articles, perception*

1. **Introduction**

Human differences have divided society over time into different areas and under different aspects, a reality which is still visible today. Both distinct perceptions of the organization of human life and historical contexts have given rise to directions and concepts that have placed the human being in various situations.

Although the way Romanian society, and not only, appears today may seem like a theater scenario, there was a time when society was organised under a completely different model. Several centuries ago, the main activity for finding the necessary food was hunting. War, famine, families with many children, and the supremacy of the church were just a few aspects that characterised long-gone periods, such as the Middle Ages.
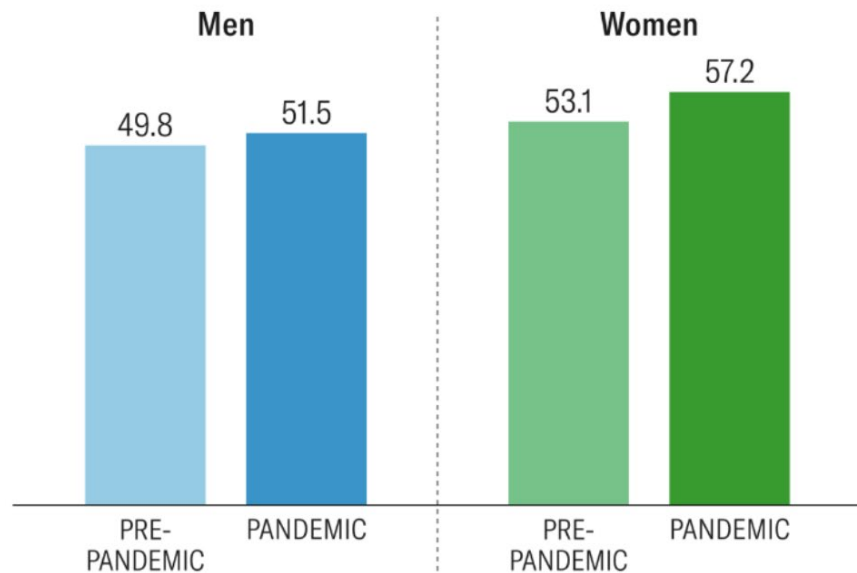
However, these periods, which have remained imprinted in the collective mentality, have led to a distribution of roles in the society based on gender criteria. Men were engaged in physical activities due to their physical build and naturally greater stamina, while women were responsible for household chores and raising children. At that

time, considering the functioning model of society, this distribution seemed to be fair.

These periods did not only leave behind pages of history, but also behaviours and imbalances in this distribution. Even though society has evolved today and tasks such as the ones mentioned above are no longer customary, the only thing that has remained from this equation is the difference between genders in terms of roles and responsibilities. Although today both women and men can equally fulfill the role of provider for the family as well as the caretaker of the house or children, there is still a tendency for an automatic distribution of responsibilities based on gender. Moreover, the difference between men and women in the workforce has become increasingly smaller, with a significant cause being the fact that women often have to choose between a career and their family.

In other words, society's inclination towards a model of organisation where men work and are financially independent, while women take care of household activities and child-rearing, where applicable, is visible. To regulate these preconceptions, there are both legal provisions and societal movements fighting for equal opportunities regardless of gender. However, as it pertains to principles of ethics and morality, monitoring the enforcement of this right is not easy, which is why deviations continue to exist.

Overall leadership effectiveness ratings

| | Men | | | Women | |
| PRE-PANDEMIC | PANDEMIC | | PRE-PANDEMIC | PANDEMIC |

Men: PRE-PANDEMIC 49.8, PANDEMIC 51.5

Women: PRE-PANDEMIC 53.1, PANDEMIC 57.2

Source: Zenger Folkman, 2020

HBR

Historically, women have worked in fields such as teaching, healthcare, and secretarial work, which are considered more suitable for women. Many studies have supported the notion that advertisements frequently depict women in stereotypical roles that are not representative of the variety of roles women play in society. "The earliest studies were inspired by the Women's Movement of the early 1970s," Lindner states, "which consistently found that advertisements primarily confined women to traditional roles as mothers, homemakers, or objects of beauty/sexuality" (Lindner, 2004, p.409).

Despite the challenging context, there is a segment of the female gender that has managed to progress and overcome social inequalities. There are numerous successful women representing the business sphere, either as entrepreneurs or through leadership positions

predominantly held in various companies. How women are framed and perceived in professional roles in society is influenced by the framing and priming of the mass media. Proper and sufficient media representation of women in leadership roles could help change the way society, especially young women, perceive women in the industry, despite the stereotype that men hold positions of power and leadership.

These businesswomen are an active part of society and, consequently, are often subjects of communication, whether in social media, press articles, television, or even case studies and courses. As for public opinion, views regarding this category of women are divided, and gender equality remains a taboo subject within the Romanian society.

2. Research methods

In order to carry out this study, I have chosen an approach that involves the use of documentary analysis and qualitative research methods. Specifically, the most important research method used is qualitative, based on the interview technique, with the aim of deepening the perceptions of businesswomen in Romania regarding the degree of integration they experience and the quality of life as part of this category. Additionally, I have used articles from Romanian and Western press to have a clear perspective on the current context, as well as data provided by non-governmental organizations and accredited public institutions from conducting various studies.

A qualitative framing analysis of articles from business publications featuring women leaders from various industries was conducted to further investigate the suggested research issues. Business magazines were used as a source for this study as they represent and provide coverage for leaders and professionals in a range of sectors, including the chosen industry in this case, managers.

Although there is a clear distinction between managers and leaders, for the purpose of this study, the terms were used interchangeably to increase the study population and include women from a variety of sectors. Business magazine articles are also a good option as they provide relevant material to support the research questions mentioned regarding female executives.
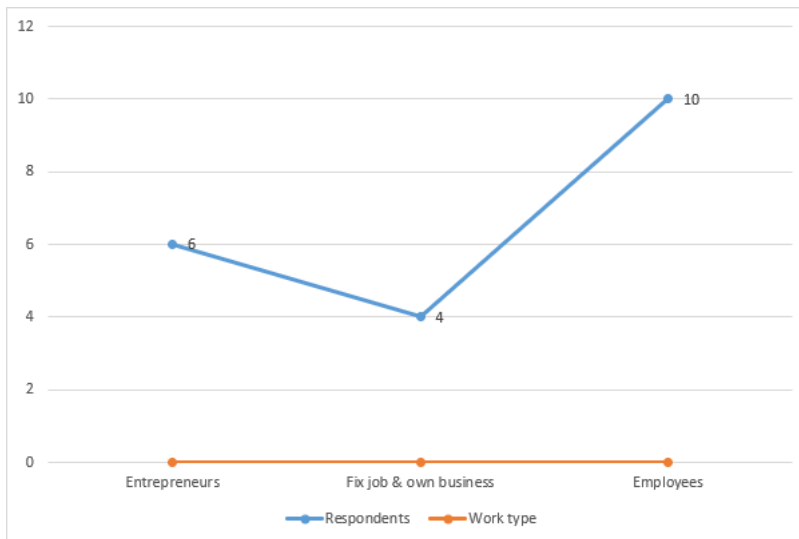
3. Results

The case study focuses on the community of businesswomen in Romania and aims to gather information and perspectives from them through interviews. The choice of this category is based on the importance of their development and contribution to a closer image to European standards of respecting citizens' rights and freedoms and a world based on equity.

Through guided and semi-structured interviews, the study aims to facilitate the understanding of the perspectives of women entrepreneurs and provide a clearer picture of their situation, including their experiences and challenges. Such interviews allow for obtaining direct verbal information and contribute to identifying the relationships between variables and previously formulated hypotheses. In this case study, particular attention is given to the quality of life of women entrepreneurs in Romania, their perception of portrayal in communication materials, and the discrimination they have or have not faced during their career development.

The interviews address several themes related to the category of women entrepreneurs in Romania. A summary of these themes encompasses the central elements of the research:

Categories of women entrepreneurs: As you can see below, out of the 20 respondents, 6 are entrepreneurs, 4 have a fixed job and their own business, and 10 hold management or leadership positions in various companies. This demonstrates the diversity of the women

entrepreneurs' community in Romania and the need to promote equality in this environment.

Sense of belonging to the women entrepreneurs' community: 18 of the respondents consider themselves as active members of this community, while 2 do not consider gender as relevant and focus on results.

Motivation for belonging to the women entrepreneurs' community: The majority of the respondents consider themselves active members, even if they do not identify specific benefits. Some consider that this membership does not harm them and they support this community.

Portrayal in communication of women entrepreneurs: Opinions are divided. 6 respondents consider the portrayal overall positive, while 8 consider it to be not specifically negative but not positive enough. There is passivity regarding the subject.

Discrimination in communication: Half of the respondents stated that they felt discriminated against by the way they were portrayed or observed discriminatory attitudes in materials about other

women entrepreneurs. Examples of discrimination that was mentioned include associating success with the presence of a male figure and insinuating that certain positions are only suitable for men.

Mentions in communication about women entrepreneurs: 4 individuals do not follow the topic, 5 consider that there are enough mentions, and 11 believe there is room for improvement and increasing the number and frequency of such materials. Media coverage would favour the development of the women entrepreneurs' community.

Differences in the portrayal of male and female entrepreneurs: 7 respondents believe that there are differences in the perspective of the approach, and men are more frequently portrayed in the business environment.

Impact of discrimination and lack of equal opportunities: 13 respondents state that they have not felt obstacles due to gender or negative portrayals and have managed to overlook these elements. The general perspective has shifted towards awareness of the importance and difficulties faced by women entrepreneurs

Conclusion

Today, articles, reports and magazines dedicated to women in business are no longer considered unusual, but they are also not a subject that is frequently encountered, despite their importance. The modernisation of the society has created a favourable context for women to rise socially and benefit from the support of institutions that promote human dignity and equal rights. Regarding the promotion of women's rights in business, there are two possible directions: one that supports the creation of a solid legislative framework and greater exposure in the media, and another that opposes these efforts. The standardisation of the standards internationally has facilitated opportunities for portraying women in business in the media, as this category can easily be framed within the context of respecting rights and freedoms.

The research has also explored the ways in which women in business are portrayed in communication to obtain a current and well-founded perspective on how this category is currently presented. The aim of this analysis of communication materials is to highlight the current context and determine whether there is a difference between the theoretically perceived roles of men and women and the manner in which they are reflected in practice in the media.

The persistence of gender inequalities is emphasised in contemporary society, both within companies and in the media, describing that, despite the existence of laws protecting women's rights, there are still economies that do not demand equal pay for equivalent work and even nullify rights acquired through struggle. However, women continue to fight for equality in rights and opportunities worldwide, becoming significant agents of change.

The paper also mentions that mass media, including specialised media, present underrepresentation and misrepresentation of women. This is manifested by the fact that men are discussed more frequently than women in the media, and women are more often portrayed in photographs than quoted as subjects or sources for news. Additionally, women entrepreneurs and female managers receive less attention in the media and are often characterised stereotypically or marginalised.

Despite these issues, the text suggests that more accurate and balanced coverage in the media is feasible and would be beneficial for promoting gender equality. This could involve better gender awareness and increased professionalism in reporting. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of critically evaluating media representations of women, as the media has a significant impact on public agendas, public attention, and perceptions and expectations regarding women entrepreneurs and female managers.

Therefore, the text emphasises the persistence of gender inequalities in women's rights and media representations, highlighting the need for ongoing actions and reforms to promote gender equality and counter stereotypes and discrimination in the society.

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