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# *The Role of Portraying Businesswomen in Communication. Case Study: Perceptions in the Romanian Business Environment*

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**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.

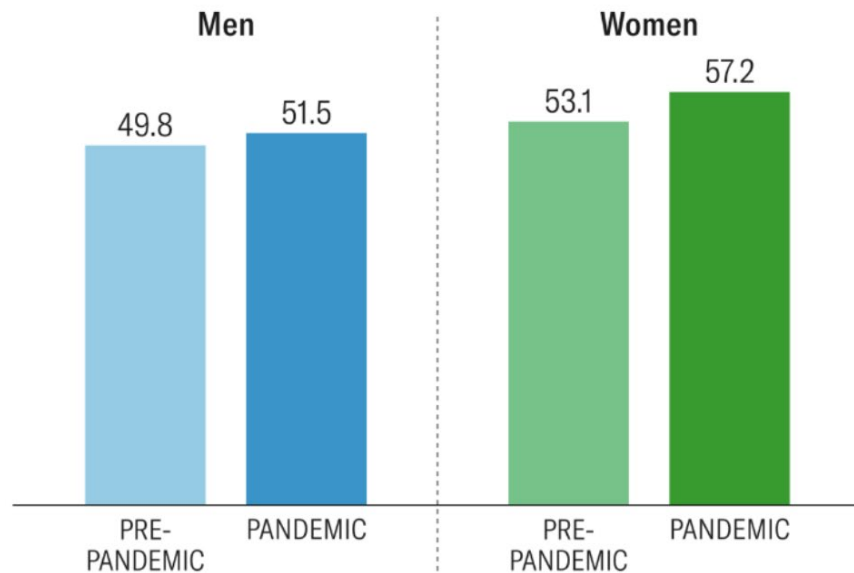
However, these periods, which have remained imprinted in the collective mentality, have led to a distribution of roles in the society based on gender criteria. Men were engaged in physical activities due to their physical build and naturally greater stamina, while women were responsible for household 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



Source: Zenger Folkman, 2020



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**

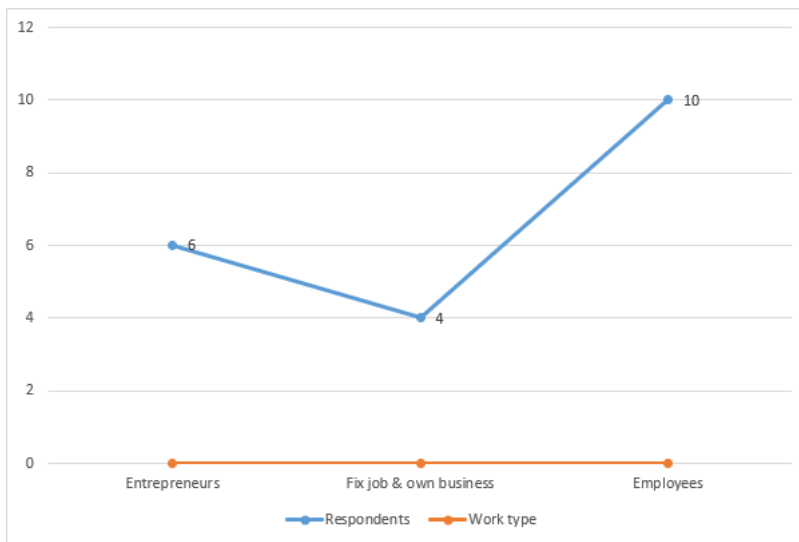
The case study focuses on the community of businesswomen in Romania and aims to gather information and perspectives from them through interviews. The choice of this category is based on the importance of their development and contribution to a closer image to European standards of respecting citizens'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