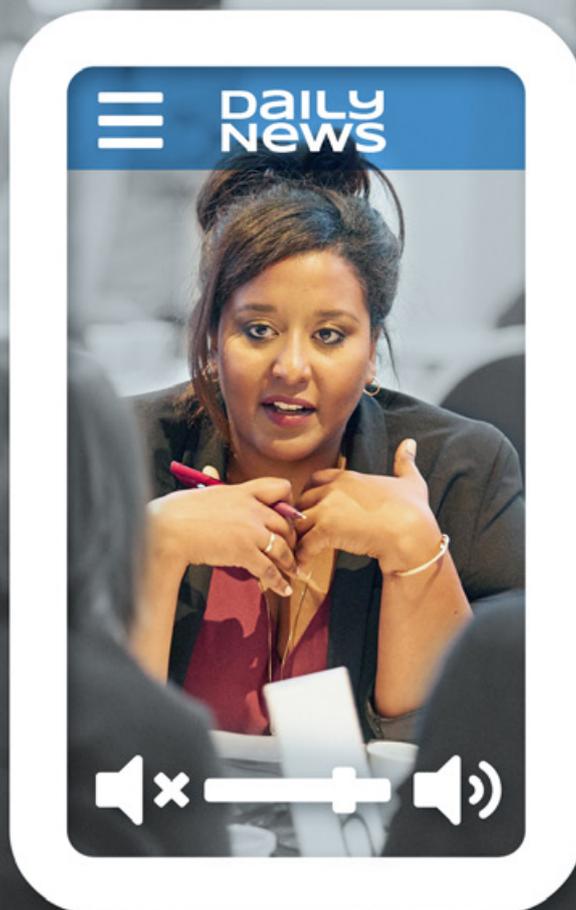


#2

Amplifying Women's Voices



IMPRINT

TRENDS IN NEWSROOMS 2020
#2: AMPLIFYING WOMEN'S VOICES

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In between editing and the production of this Trends in Newsrooms report, Covid-19 happened.

At the time of writing, the disease is rampaging its way across the world, leaving societies scarred and priorities upended. The news business too. It's too early to determine the extent of the disruption, but sitting in isolation, in the midst of the crisis, it feels overwhelming.

Up until Covid-19, that is early 2020, great strides had been made in putting gender issues as a top priority for news organisations. A string of admirable newsrooms had put in place projects to ensure women journalists were not only being heard in the daily news meetings, but were taking up roles to ensure a balanced editorial executive team. And on the news pages, there was a determined effort to see more women experts quoted, more balance in photos and generally a more reflective news product. The simple act of measuring women and men who appear on news pages had become a part of the news production processes. This is what this report is about.

Post Covid-19, these processes are at risk. Not so much in the pioneering newsrooms which have the capacity to entrench them as part of standard operating practice, but in the already-marginal operations where the loss of advertising from the printed newspaper during the Covid-19 crisis, will push them closer to economic meltdown. Inevitable downsizing and survival strategies could well threaten to knock down the issue of gender on the list of newsroom priorities.

So it is going to take the collective strength and determination of all good women (and men) in the news business to ensure that the good work is not undone. The act of bringing gender balance to the newspapers and to the teams who contribute to them, must continue. For the benefit of us all.

And for those continuing their transformation, we hope this report will be an invaluable pointer to the kind of change that can happen, without extra resources, using simple measurement tools and driven by a commitment to make a difference.

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Key takeaways from Trends in Newsrooms #2

Change initiatives are sprouting up

Forward-thinking news organisations have embraced programmes to increase representivity and gender balance in their content and in their newsrooms. They have done so because it is the right thing to do. AND it makes business sense. Some are featured in this report. But their initiatives are overshadowed by the scale of the imbalance worldwide.

Women are still much less represented than men

Despite making up more than 50 percent of the world's total population, women are, on average, seen, heard, and read in the media only 25 percent of the time. They are significantly underrepresented in top management positions in newsrooms, and receive fewer bylines than men.

Increasing gender balance isn't just a moral imperative

There is reason to believe that gender balance makes business sense. Case studies from news organisations are showing the value of increased loyalty and deeper engagement when people relate to the content and feel represented in stories.

How gender parity in the newsroom impacts content production

Gender parity in the newsroom is an important factor when it comes to creating content that is gender balanced. Having women commission, write, and create content alongside men, across all categories and topics, can introduce an automatic gender lens. Improving gender balance at the executive level, thus giving women equal opportunity to influence the news agenda, will likely create more diverse and inclusive products.

Why news organisations need to elevate women's voices

The media, as a prism through which society sees itself, has the potential to shape what we think about, what we believe, and what we do. That is why decisions taken in the newsroom around gender are of importance, not just for the news product and its reputation, but for society at large.

A responsibility to promote gender equality

If newsrooms fail to reflect women as equals, both in their own working space and in the content they produce, they will be perpetuating stereotypes and reinforcing gender inequality. This applies not just to women, but to trans people, sexuality, race, class, religion and ethnicity.

We know that in most news media, women are much less likely to be featured as subjects of a story or quoted as experts compared to men. While they represent more than half of the world's population, they are, on average, seen, heard and read in the media only 25% of the time.

News organisations need to acknowledge this inequity and take steps to redress it. Case studies in this report show how simple it is to correct. An analysis of the representation of men and women in the content they produce – from bylines of reporters, to people quoted or photographed, and the pool of outside columnists – will show if an imbalance exists and indicate if action is needed.

The business impact of gender balance

Promoting gender equality and diversity isn't just a moral imperative. It also makes sense from a business perspective.

Amid declining ad revenues, many news organisations are moving towards subscription and membership-based business models. When relying on reader revenue as a main income stream, making a deliberate effort to create inclusive and diverse products that better reflect one's target audiences can have a positive impact on a company's bottom line.



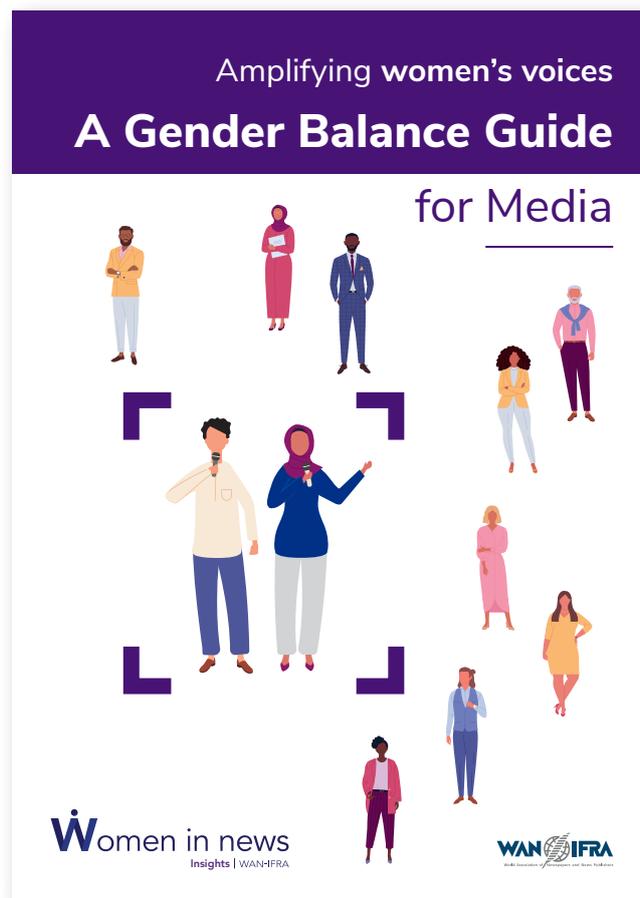
Case studies from news organisations are showing the value of increased loyalty and deeper engagement when people relate to the content and feel represented in stories. Norwegian media company Amedia conducted a wide-ranging analysis of its content, which revealed that better representation of women and younger people in stories seemed to correlate with higher readership among those same demographics. Meanwhile, the Financial Times launched a newsletter aimed at women, which achieved higher open rates on average than the publication's other newsletters.

Pushing for greater diversity

This report is, in part, based on the soon-to-be published Gender Balance Handbook, an in-depth resource produced by WAN-IFRA's pioneering Women in News programme.

It features additional detailed case studies from organisations that successfully implemented change to improve the representation of women in their content, as well as a large array of practical suggestions and examples of organisational strategies news outlets can follow in order to achieve the same outcome.

That said, diversity goes beyond gender and to truly reflect the society they serve, news organisations need to pay attention to other groups like ethnic minorities, people with a disability, and members of the LGBTQI+ community who are underrepresented in the media, and face similar stereotypical coverage. Alongside the Gender Balance Handbook, Women in News will distribute a companion guide at this year's World News Media Congress in Zaragoza, Spain, which focuses on LGBTQI+ sensitive language and inclusion to aid news organisations in better representing and reporting on these groups.



Coming soon.

Other organisations are also pursuing initiatives to drive greater diversity in the news industry. This year, the BBC is launching a pilot focused on increasing the representation of people with a disability, and people from Black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) communities in its content, using a methodology adapted from the 50:50 Project, its successful gender representation initiative.

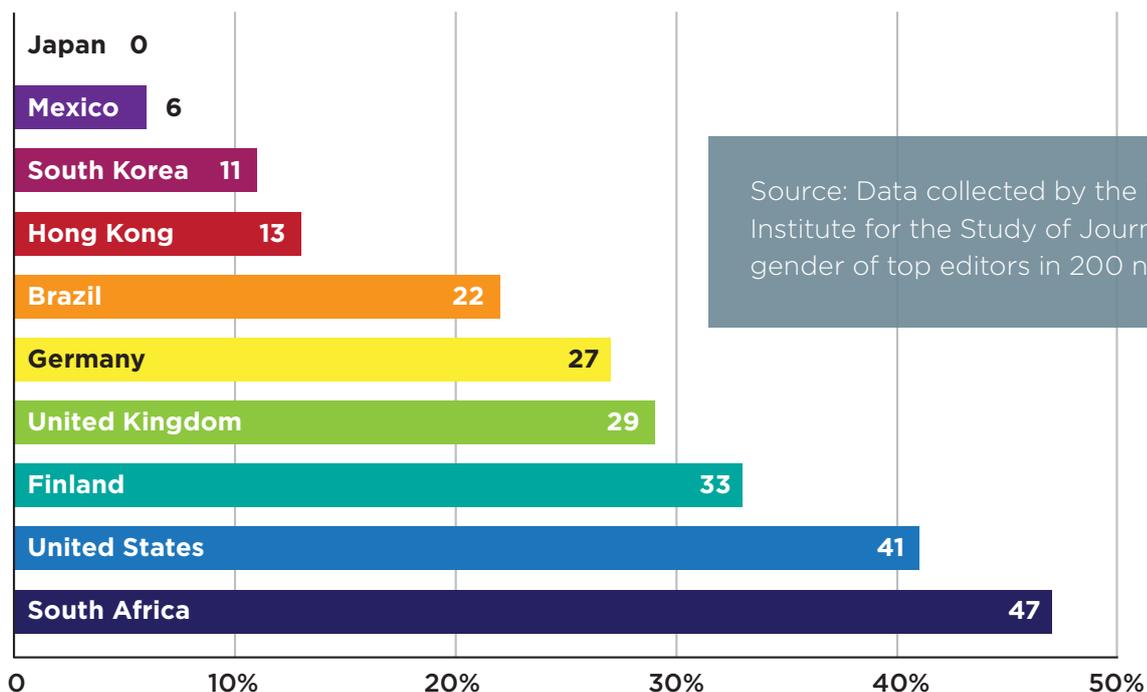


What is stopping your newsroom from achieving balance?

Historically, the people at the helm of newspapers and the industry in general have been men, and the number of women in executive positions is still shockingly low.

A global study in 2018 by Nordicom showed women comprised only 17 percent of top management at the 100 largest international media corporations, and only six percent were acting as CEO¹. A more recent analysis of 200 newsrooms in 10 different markets conducted by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism showed that 23 percent of top editors were women despite the fact that women account for 40 percent of working journalists in those same markets².

Percentage of women top editors in every market



Source: Data collected by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism on the gender of top editors in 200 news outlets.

It seems that a media industry overwhelmingly run by men skews what is perceived as news, and how society views women and other under-represented groups.

At the same time, far fewer women report the news than men. According to a 2019 study of US newsrooms by the Women’s Media Center, only 37 percent of bylines and credits go to women, with men dominating coverage of a wide range of topics, including tech, sports, crime, international, and weather³.

More awareness needed around gender imbalance

This gender gap also has an impact on the representation of women in news content, a problem that isn’t necessarily top of mind for most reporters. While having more women create and commission content can introduce an automatic gender lens, this doesn’t necessarily mean they automatically do a better job at balancing their sources. Adrienne LaFrance, executive editor of *The Atlantic*, analysed the stories she produced in 2013 and 2015 for gender bias, and found that only 25 percent and 22 percent of the people she mentioned were women⁴.

“These numbers are distressing, particularly because my beats cover areas where women are already outnumbered by men – robotics, artificial intelligence, archaeology, astronomy, etc,” she wrote in an article.

“Which means that, by failing to quote or mention very many women, I’m one of the forces actively contributing to a world in which women’s skills and accomplishments are undermined or ignored, and women are excluded.”

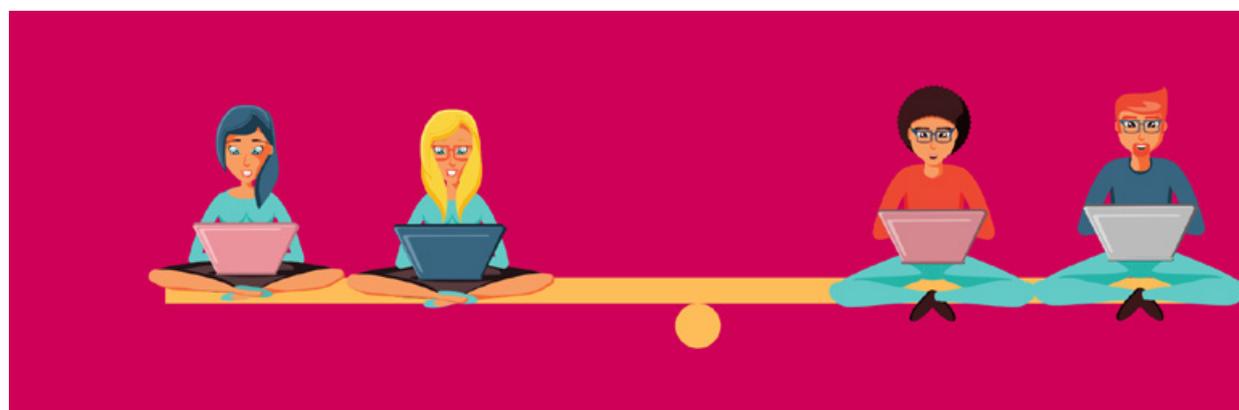
Improving gender balance in content requires a diagnosis of coverage, a willingness to implement change, as well as putting in effort to diversify sources – not necessarily an easy feat when dealing with the pressures of a 24-hour news cycle.

“When I think now, off the top of my head, of some of the experts I routinely turn to – for comments on net neutrality, or artificial intelligence, or natural-language processing, or self-driving cars, or digital preservation – the first person on my to-call list is almost always a man. I need to change that,” LaFrance wrote.

The impact of bias

At the same time, reporters need to examine their own inherent biases, and be conscious of how these might influence who they choose to interview or what stories they decide to cover. In-group bias, the tendency to favour people we perceive to be members of our own group, based on characteristics such as race, gender, class or socioeconomic status, may well play a role in that selection process, as well as impact other aspects of decision-making in newsrooms, such as promotions or story assignments.

Of course, reporters don’t always have full control over who they feature in their stories. But when the opportunity to diversify sources does present itself, they should make use of it in order to enrich their coverage with more varied viewpoints and experiences, and, in doing so, help create a society in which women are equally valued.



How to improve gender balance in content

There are a multitude of approaches news organisations can deploy to work towards improving gender balance in content, many of which are flexible, simple, and cost-effective.

Are you gender stereotyping when writing copy? Apply these simple rules to test:

Reversibility: when writing about a woman, ask yourself if you would depict a man in the same way. If the answer is no, you are gender stereotyping.

Parallelism: treat women and men the same in titles, descriptions, and attributes. Highlighting or omitting a specific attribute of a man, but not doing the same for a woman, is, again, an example of gender stereotyping. A classic case is referring to a male holder of a doctoral degree as Dr, but not affording a woman the same honorific.

Use gender fair language

It's not just the stories we read in the media that influence how we think about the world. How things are described plays an important role too.

Use appropriate language when talking about women and men. Portray them in the same way to reduce gender stereotyping and sexism. In practice, this means using language that includes all genders, sexualities, and identities, and treating women and men the same when writing about them.

Track your sources

Using automated tools, news organisations can easily measure gender balance without significantly increasing staff workload. Measuring contributors and sources can also be done manually. Albeit somewhat more time-consuming and better suited for small-scale analyses, keeping track of the number of women and men sources using an excel spreadsheet is a simple and readily available alternative to automated or bespoke tools. Once you have collected data on gender and created a benchmark for your team or organisation, you can start using it in a proactive manner to try and increase diversity in your content.

Make women more prominent and diversify your sources

In your reporting, ensure women feature as main or prominent characters. This doesn't mean they have to be the subject of the story, they can be significant commentators, experts or narrators. The profile of outside commentators or experts who appear on the opinion pages also sets the tone for the publication, so be sure to check whether there is not an equally qualified woman to offer an opinion on a set subject. If so, engage her.

Tracking tools and methods

WIN Gender Tracker⁵

Women in News has created a free beta tool to keep track of gender balance in content. The WIN Gender Tracker is available as an app which allows users to analyse how gender balanced their reporting is and track this over time. The media app is for organisations to track gender balance in their online content over time.

Gender Equality Tracker⁶

The Gender Equality Tracker monitors the representation of men and women in content across several news organisations in a specific country. The software reads newly published articles and counts how many times it finds men's or women's names or pronouns.

Informed Opinions⁷

Similar to the Gender Equality Tracker, Informed Opinions' Gender Gap Tracker publicly ranks Canadian news outlets based on the ratio of women to men sources quoted in online coverage. It asks readers to contact the respective outlets to encourage them to pay more attention to gender balance.

GenderMeme⁸

GenderMeme is an open-source tool which can conduct large scale analyses of gender balance in content using natural language processing. It can also be used by organisations that want to build their own tools.

HerHeadline

HerHeadline is a Chrome extension to highlight sexist language in sports media. The extension picks up gender-biased words and phrases and explains why they are problematic. HerHeadline is a UNESCO initiative developed with the support of Cambridge University Press.

BBC 50:50 Project⁹

The BBC 50:50 Project is based on a voluntary self-monitoring system designed to fit into existing workflows. Participating teams independently monitor the number of women and men contributors, and act on that data with the goal of achieving a 50:50 split. In addition to the more than 550 BBC teams currently taking part, more than 50 external organisations have signed up to deploy the methodology.

Expert databases and sourcebooks

SheSource, USA, International

The Women's Room, UK

Informed Opinions, Canada

500 Women Scientists,
International

According to Her, Zimbabwe

Reflect Reality, USA, International

QuoteThisWoman, South Africa

To assist reporters in diversifying expert sources, it can be helpful to create a database of women experts that can be accessed by the entire newsroom. Organisations such as the BBC or Bloomberg have done this with great success, with the BBC putting a call out on social media, and asking colleagues for the expert women they knew.

Alternatively, you can make use of databases in your country or issue area put together by other organisations.

Gender balance in bylines and in newsroom leadership

Ensure that you have parity in your newsroom, with women commissioning, writing and creating your content alongside men, on all categories of content, including politics, sports, and business. This can introduce an automatic gender lens.

The same applies to newsroom leadership positions. If you improve gender balance at the executive level, and give women equal opportunity to influence your organisation's news agenda, you'll likely create more diverse and inclusive products.

An initiative called NewsMavens put this to the test and explored how the news agenda changes when women make all editorial decisions. Women journalists from across Europe were invited to contribute the top stories of the day to a common platform. They found that the articles women curators deemed most important often differed from what would normally feature on the front page of a mainstream publication. They included stories focused on marginalised groups, or the impact of big politics and business on the lives of regular people. Chances are that the stories women editors in your organisation care about will resonate with your women audience.



Quote This Woman+

In South Africa, less than 20% of sources quoted in the news are women: our online database of woman+ experts is working to change that.

Why the + after Woman? Because our database is open to any expert in any field from any part of our society who identifies their voice with the project's values and aims.

If you believe you belong on our database, then you probably do – so join us now.

[JOIN NOW](#)

Quote This Woman aims to get women's voices heard in more prominently in South Africa's mainstream media.



Tracking gender balance

When the FT defined the size of its women audience for the first time in 2016, it found that it was relatively small and disengaged.

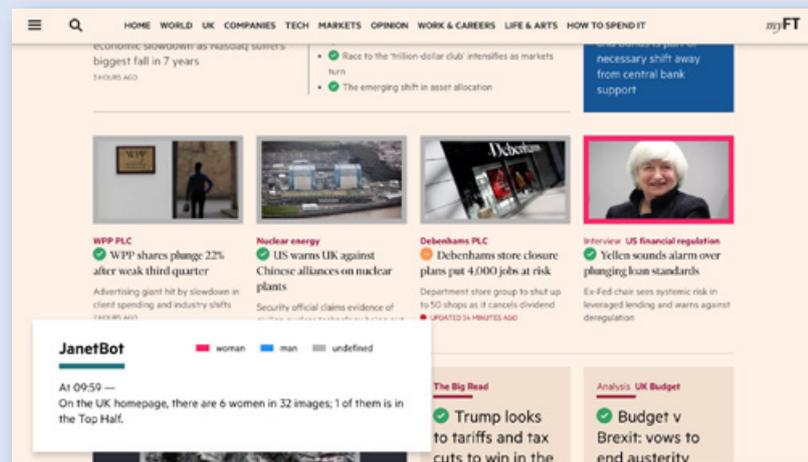
Viewed as both a concern and a business opportunity, this realisation brought about several projects aimed at changing women subscribers' perception of the brand, increasing women engagement and driving internal cultural change.

Gender balance in pictures

One of these projects is the JanetBot, a machine learning tool that uses facial analysis software to identify the gender of people in images used by the FT. It shares gender classifications with editors via coloured on-screen flags and gender balance data via a Slack channel.

Within the organisation, the bot's goal is to raise awareness of gender imbalance in home page pictures and encourage journalists to increase the number of images featuring women. It also serves as a tool to boost engagement among their women audience – FT analysis shows that women are more likely than men to click on stories illustrated with pictures of women.

The FT has learned several lessons from launching the JanetBot. For starters, those who will be using the product need to be involved in the design process from the start. Once it has been developed, ironing out features that users find unhelpful can be hard and that hasn't been possible with the JanetBot due to limited resources.



As a result, the bot's purpose has now shifted towards raising awareness of gender balance among newsroom staff rather than data collection, reminding journalists to consider the gender balance of pictures early in the life of a story.

Automatic and manual approaches to tracking

The FT has also been experimenting with bots to track the number of women and men contributors featured in stories to help journalists achieve a more balanced split. The bot She Said He Said, launched in 2018, keeps track of the gender balance in sources by counting men's and women's pronouns and names, sharing data automatically with FT teams.

However, encouraging them to look at this data and take action has proved challenging. This has led the FT to explore a manual approach to tracking and improving gender balance instead, having signed up to the BBC's 50:50 project last year. Although the experiment is still in its early stages, the 50:50 methodology seems to raise awareness of imbalances and engage colleagues more effectively than the automated approaches.



Nina Goswami, BBC Creative Diversity Lead and journalist

Nina Goswami, BBC Creative Diversity Lead and journalist, has been one of the driving forces behind the corporation's groundbreaking 50:50 Project, an initiative aimed at boosting the number of women contributors in content.

“I am a true believer in ‘you can be what you see’ ”

Have you had success in influencing your organisation or team in promoting gender equality? How?

My biggest success to date has been as one of the leads of the 50:50 Project. 50:50 has become the biggest collective action on increasing women's representation in BBC content that there's ever been.

I'm proud to say it has, and continues to have, a substantial impact on the BBC. More than 550 BBC teams – several thousand content-makers – are part of 50:50 from across News, Sport, Entertainment, Factual and Music.

Those joining our voluntary initiative continue to increase – in and outside the BBC. We have over 50 organisations outside the BBC also using the 50:50 methodology on their content, including the FT, Voice of America and ABC Australia.

So what is the 50:50 Project? We use self-monitored data to create change. Our teams count the men and women on their content and aim to reach 50% women contributors over a month. Then, they actively use the data to inform editorial decisions and identify areas that need change.

What I love about 50:50 is that it is a grassroots initiative born in our London newsroom started by Outside Source presenter Ros Atkins in 2017. From one man, and word of mouth, it grew organically until the BBC's Director-General Tony Hall heard about us.

Lord Hall set a 12-month challenge to see how many other teams could sign up and could reach 50% women contributors by April 2019. We saw the number of teams signing up to 50:50 grow exponentially. By April 2019, 74% of teams – that had been in monitoring data for 12 months or more – reached 50% women contributors in April. That's compared to just 27% when they started.

This April, we'll be reporting on how the last 12-months have gone and whether the BBC has been able to continue increasing female representation. So watch this space.

What projects are you engaged with?

50:50 is expanding to include other diversities and I am leading this work. In March, we will be piloting adapted versions of the 50:50 methodology for disability and ethnicity.

Like with gender, during the first month participating teams will monitor their current figures to create a benchmark for their team. The following month, they will start using their data in a proactive way to try and improve the diversity in their content.



Throughout the pilot we will be testing, reviewing and adapting the methodology until we get it right – just as we did for gender. It's important not to just jump in as diversifying representation on content is too important to get wrong.

I'll be sharing more details about the pilot at this year's World News Media Congress in Zaragoza, Spain.

It's also important to remember that 50:50 gender continues as there's still a lot more to do when it comes to reaching 50% women representation on media content.

What is your proudest achievement?

I'm going to sound like a broken record! Of course, what we've achieved so far with 50:50 is one of my proudest achievements. It has been heartening to be recognised for our work with the project now a multi-awarding winning one.

Our accolades include Diversity Team of the Year 2019 at European Diversity Awards and receiving the Impact Award 2019 at the Global Equality and Diversity Awards.

Away from diversity, I'm really proud of helping to shape how BBC News reports on climate change. My work on this led to BBC News – for the first time – in September 2018 communicating concrete advice on how we should report on climate change. We launched face-to-face training and to date more than 1,000 journalists have taken the course.

At the end of 2020, Glasgow will be holding COP26 – major United Nations climate change summit – and I'm confident that we have done the groundwork at the BBC to report impartially and accurately in the run up to the event and beyond.

What is your 2020 resolution?

By the end of 2020, I want to be able to say that we've made on-air representation at the BBC and across the media substantially more diverse. Ok, it's not a small resolution but I feel like we're on the crest of a wave and with a little coaxing in the right direction we can really do it.

It's why I'm so happy to join the newly-formed creative diversity team at the BBC, which is headed up by presenter, broadcaster and diversity champion June Sarpong.

As June, the BBC's Creative Diversity Director, said in a Huffington Post article recently: "Diversity is not a 'nice to have' but an essential part of the BBC's agenda and positive action is already underway with urgency."

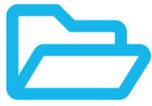
So I'm confident my 'work' resolution can be fulfilled. On the personal front, it's the same resolution as last year... drink less coffee!

Is there a woman news leader that you most admire?

Questions like this always make me think of how I ended up in journalism in the first place. We were sitting round my mum and dad's kitchen table talking about my brother going to university. He's 11 years older than me, so I must have been around 7 years old at the time.

In the background was the BBC Six o'clock News and Moira Stuart was the newsreader. She was the first African-Caribbean female newsreader to appear on British television. In a moment of silence my dad turned to me and said "I can see you doing that one day" pointing at the television. That was it – I wanted to be a journalist and Moira Stuart was my role model. She continues to be the woman news leader I most admire.

Ok, I didn't end up as a newsreader but if it was not for her visibility on screen I would not have even considered journalism as an option for me. I am a true believer in 'you can be what you see'.



The business impact of gender balance

Norway is widely perceived as progressive and egalitarian, but even so, gender imbalance in content is a reality – that’s what media company Amedia found after investigating its own output.

The publisher also discovered evidence to support their belief that better gender representation makes business sense.

Making the business case for gender balance

After analysing stories from 19 newspapers published across a 21-month period, they found that publications which featured more stories containing women sources had higher readership among women. This interesting correlation was identified as part of a wide-ranging investigation into gender balance across 660,000 stories from 64 newspapers published over the same 21-month window – a massive endeavour, made possible through data science and automatic classification.

Using natural language processing techniques, Amedia was able to automate the process of identifying and counting the number of women and men mentioned in its content. They first identified so-called entities referenced in stories, such as people, businesses or organisations, in order to be able to differentiate between, say, a business with “Nina” in its name, and an actual person named “Nina”.

The second step involved matching recognised names with Statistics Norway’s public database of men’s and women’s names. With this data in place in their centralised data repository, they were able to run analyses towards all aspects of data.

An average of 34 percent women

They found that across the 660,000 stories, on average, only 34 percent of names mentioned belonged to women. Further analysis also revealed significant variation across the brand.

Looking at the individual newspapers, they found that the content of smaller publications tended to be more gender balanced than larger, regional ones. For instance, the top performer had a 42 percent share of women’s names.

The differences in gender balance became even more apparent when they mapped gender across different story topics. In “Education”, which encompassed some 30,000 stories, 47 percent of all names belonged to women, compared to only 21 percent for the 37,000 stories under the topic “Disasters, emergencies and accidents”. The category dubbed “Society”, which covers topics such as communities, families, and welfare, was the only one in which women’s names were in the clear majority. These differences in gender representation may well be a result of authority figures skewing towards being women or men in different sectors. However, they could also stem from journalists’ own gender biases influencing who they choose to interview.

Future plans include offering all of Amedia’s journalists and editors running data on gender imbalance. Some editorial teams already use a specially developed dashboard, which informs them about the gender gap in readership in real-time.



Emily Ramshaw, CEO and co-founder of The 19th

Emily Ramshaw, one of the USA's most rated editorial leaders, left her role at a respected newspaper to start up a new news organisation for women focused on American politics.

“Our storytelling aims to empathise with the lived experiences of American women”

You left The Texas Tribune to start The 19th. Why?

In short, because the one thing I care about more than Texas, politics and policy is women, politics and policy. And while American women are more engaged than ever in the political process, and vote at higher rates than men, they remain far underrepresented at all levels of government, and in the nation's executive ranks. They're also underrepresented in newsroom leadership, which influences how the news is covered, whose stories are told and whose voices are elevated.

What kind of response have you had to your launch?

The early response to our soft-launch has been extraordinary. Within the first 48 hours we'd raised almost \$100,000 in small-dollar donations (many of them in \$19 increments).

The first stop on our national listening tour sold out in a couple of hours. And we had thousands of subscriptions to our email newsletter. All of this before we even wrote a single story! It's a testament to the fact that there's a hunger out there, for nuanced news and for community.

In what ways is how your organisation is driving and promoting gender equality?

We're focused on giving women – particularly those underserved by and under-reflected in American media – the fact-based, nonpartisan news, data, tools and community they need to pursue equal footing across the nation's power structures. We will empathise with women in America and elevate their voices; we have a vested interest in exploring how women's life experiences shape their political stances and voting decisions.

Do women relate to politics differently? How?

Absolutely – starting with the fact that for women, “electability” is still a question. And they're underrepresented in all levels of American government. There are so many issues that more directly affect women's lives – from disparities in pay to access to health care. Our storytelling aims to empathise with the lived experiences of American women.



“We’re focused on giving women – particularly those underserved by and under-reflected in American media – the fact-based, nonpartisan news, data, tools and community they need to pursue equal footing across the nation’s power structures. ”

Emily Ramshaw, CEO and co-founder of The 19th

Will you manage your team of women differently from normal news organizations? How/Why?

First of all, we won’t just hire women – we’ll hire the best possible person for the job, regardless of gender or gender identity. What we will do is provide the kind of benefits and lifestyle that allow our employees (yes, many of them women) to advance in their careers *and* manage their personal lives. This includes six months of paid parental leave, four months of paid caregiver leave and the flexibility to work where and when works for you.

**What is your aim for 2020?
And your personal resolution?**

Women in America aren’t monolithic, and they’re the majority of the American electorate. We aim to cover them as the considerable and formidable voting bloc that they are, not as a special interest group. We hope to elevate the caliber of 2020 political reporting by injecting more voices and more nuance into the coverage.

Is there a woman news leader that you most admire?

My mother, Mary Leonard Ramshaw, a longtime Washington correspondent and newsroom editor. She raised two daughters *and* ran a newsroom, bounced around on campaign trails, covered the White House. She was pulled in so many directions and always managed to be “mom” first. She’s a legend.



Increasing the visibility of women

With a series of company-wide initiatives, the South China Morning Post is making a concerted effort to boost women's readership and increase the visibility of women across all of its products.

The development and implementation of the initiatives were put in motion following SCMP's 2018 Hackathon, which highlighted the gap between men and women readership, the disparity between women and men sources in stories, and the difficulties in finding expert women sources in various fields.

Including more women experts in content

Building on the findings from the project, the SCMP launched a campaign asking readers, partners, and external contacts to nominate women experts via an online form promoted via direct outreach, social media and newsletters. To date, the SCMP has received nominations for women with expertise as diverse as nanotechnology, economic empowerment, retail, cloud accounting, gender equality and healthcare. The nominated experts are verified by an internal team and made available to the entire newsroom in a searchable database.

With regards to tracking gender balance, the SCMP has taken advice from the BBC's 50:50 Project and uses some of the same metrics and guidelines. Collaborating with other news organisations provided the SCMP with invaluable advice and helped them avoid some of the problems others faced. "I was inspired by the response we got when we reached out to other organisations who are so willing to share their experiences," says Laura Warne, the SCMP's digital editor.



"Everyone can do better in this area. It isn't about competition. It's about improving the media landscape around the world."

Laura Warne, Digital Editor, South China Morning Post



Photo: Priya Thuvassery

Kavita Devi, editor-in-chief of Khabar Lahariya, India

Kavita Devi, the editor-in-chief of an online site targeting readers in rural India, told the Hindustan Times of the immense change the news website has brought, not only in the lives of its journalists, but the people it reaches.

“People wouldn’t think of me as a journalist”

The eldest of six children, Kavita Devi is the editor in chief of Khabar Lahariya, a news website that focuses on rural news in India told from a feminist perspective. Started in 2002, KL employs Dalit, Muslim, adivasi and Other Backward Class¹¹ women as reporters and editors. At one point, the paper had eight editions in five languages, and sold in eight districts of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. However, rising newsprint costs made it difficult to sustain the paper, and KL has reinvented itself as a digital platform, with subscription-based shows.

Devi, who has been associated with KL since its early days, speaks to HT about the immense change KL has brought, not only in the lives of its journalists, but the people it reaches.

Tell us a bit about your childhood.

I was born in a small village called Kunjan Purwa in Chitrakoot district (in Uttar Pradesh state). My parents were farmers, both were illiterate. I would do all the housework, and help in the fields. Going to a school was almost like

a crime for girls. In fact, at that time, there wasn’t even a primary school in my village. No one in my family — my cousins — went to school. The main thing was to get married, so I too was married off at 12. I stayed with my mother, and only went to my in-laws’ home when I was 15. People nowadays get so excited about weddings, but I never knew that. Sometimes I wish I too had felt that excitement.

I would fetch wood from the nearby jungle. I looked after the cattle in our house, fed them, cleaned them up, collected dung. I washed the dishes, and swept the house. In Bundelkhand, the oldest girl takes care of all the housework. When my father would go to plough the field, I would accompany him. When it was time for harvesting the grain, I would help in that. Carry the grains back home. I never thought about studying.

How did you come to journalism? Wasn’t it an unusual choice for women in rural and small-town India?

A non-government organization that ran a government of India programme launched in 1989 in Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Gujarat, opened a centre in my village to teach girls and women who had not gone to school. I heard about it at the communal tap while filling water and I thought I must go.

But when I told my family members that I wished to go regularly they said, ‘Why? You’re not going to become the DM [district magistrate]’. Nevertheless, I would finish all my work by afternoon and then go to the centre. That’s where I learnt many things, starting with how to write my name, and the village, district and town I lived in.

I got an opportunity to attend a residential camp for the good students. At first, my father flatly refused to let me attend it. I convinced two village girls, Savitri and Khullu, to go to the camp with me, and left when my father was not at home. So, in the evening he came [to the camp], with the girls’ parents. Much drama ensued.

The two girls returned, but I refused to leave. The next day, the NGO workers took me home, spoke to my parents, and convinced them to let me study. I was 13 around this time.

Though I have studied till my Masters now, I have never had a similar experience to the learning I received in those six months. I learnt math, science, social science, biology, feminist thinking – we were taught so much. Even today, I derive my strength from those six months of study.

During my intermediary year, I worked in a brick kiln in Punjab to pay off a debt that I had taken for my husband's surgery. When I returned, I gave my exams and joined Khabar Lahariya, a newspaper that Nirantar, an NGO, had started. This was in 2002. In the beginning, I was both an administrator as well as a journalist. I had no idea what journalism was. We were given basic training – how to write, how to click photos. We never received papers in our home, everyone was illiterate. Even if papers would come to our village, it was the men who would read them, not women. They wouldn't let women read. My in-laws were illiterate too, so no papers there. I read a paper for the first time when I joined the training for Khabar Lahariya.

What sort of pieces do you do now?

We're trying to be an independent media business, so we now sell a subscription for our exclusive reporting on rural youth. I have a show called The Kavita Show, where I share my views and opinions about various issues. I also recently did a story about how the healthy fat grains, which we would eat growing up are fast disappearing from the diets of farmers today. Today, they're mostly growing rice or wheat. The children ask for Chowmein or burger, and so no one grows this anymore. In my locality, where I grew up, they don't grow kakun or kodo anymore. People need to recall how healthy these grains were. What I am not about to do a story about, I talk about it in my show.

Nowadays there is so much violence between communities, between men and women. Compared to when I was growing up, there are so many more instances of women being raped, set on fire, hanging themselves, in the area I live in. I feel that social media has a big role to play in spreading rumours. So many innocent women were beaten up, and some were killed in the recent panic about 'witches' who were kidnapping children. Of course, social media has also helped immensely. It depends on how you use it.

What were the challenges that you faced as a woman journalist?

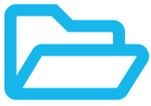
People would not think of me as a journalist – how can women become journalists? That's not their job. They should be home, taking care of children, doing what the man of the house asks them to do. So initially people would chase us out, and not give us information. Being a Dalit and a woman journalist, that was an even greater crime! The officials wouldn't talk to us. We would keep going back to them for comments/quotes. And if they refused, we'd write that they refused. Now, the threats have changed. People troll us online, and make personal comments.

We never backed down. One of the stories we carried was about a woman who was killed by her in-laws, who belonged to the influential Thakur clan. The reporter, an Adivasi woman, was abused and threatened. No other media had written this piece. We did.

Once, I had written a story about how a panchayat [village council] head had not utilised funds to develop a village. After it was published, the pradhan drew his knife at me. I told him, I was not a resident of his village, I had written about what people had said. I had even got the officials to comment. If he wanted to rebut, he should write in our paper. I was very scared, but I dealt with it.

We had to shut down the paper, because it was getting too expensive to publish. At one time, we printed in four languages, including Awadhi and Bhojpuri. We didn't have agents to seek advertising the way that other local papers or channels did. We began to turn to the web. Now we are able to reach out to crores of people. Every village has smartphones, and people sit in groups and watch.

The author is Dhamini Ratnam from the Hindustan Times. This article is republished with permission¹².



Creating engaging content for women

At ARA, a Catalan daily newspaper, three journalists launched *ARA Feminismes*, an initiative aimed at creating and distributing content with a focus on gender perspective.

Wanting to find a broader audience for the gender balanced stories they were already producing, the three journalists behind the idea, Lara Bonilla, Marta Rodríguez, and Thais Gutierrez, started their work in the months leading up to last year's International Women's Day, and timed the launch to coincide with the event.

Now, ARA Feminismes actively distributes its content on ARA's website, a weekly newsletter and via a Twitter and Facebook page with some 3,500 and 7,500 followers respectively.

A bottom-up approach to improving gender balance

The grassroots initiative has garnered support from management and the trio behind it, who are leading the project in an unofficial capacity in addition to their other work, offer advice to colleagues on how to write gender balanced content. They encourage the newsroom to submit stories that would fit the ARA Feminismes brand.

As part of the project, the team also launched several calls to action on the website in a bid to solicit input for stories from women. One of these led to a successful interactive article about problems and issues new mothers are experiencing, giving them an opportunity to voice their opinion about a rarely discussed topic in mainstream media.

Having found that women experts are more hesitant to speak to the media, regardless of their competency compared to their counterparts who are men, they next want to put together a database with women sources the entire newsroom can draw on. Other company-wide initiatives include an analysis of gender balance in the newsroom and content, conducted by an external company.



Additional reading

- **Gender Balance Handbook**, Women in News – this needs updating
- **Reflect Reality**, United for News
- **Women and Leadership in the News Media 2020: Evidence from Ten Markets**, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism
- **Name It. Change It. The Women’s Media Center’s Media Guide to Gender Neutral Coverage of Women Candidates + Politicians**, WMC
- **UNESCO Guidelines for Gender-Fair Use of Language**, UNESCO
- **‘Main Theme One: Representation, Language and Discourse’** in Gender, media & ICTs: new approaches for research, education & training, UNESCO
- **‘Section II. Media Content and Violence Against Women’** in Setting the Gender Agenda for Communication Policy, UNESCO
- **‘Glossary of Terms’ in Unspinning the Spin: The Women’s Media Center Guide to Fair and Accurate Language**, WMC
- **The long, hard road to gender equality in journalism**, LSE

Footnotes

¹ www.nordicom.gu.se/en/latest/news/media-male-business

² reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/women-and-leadership-news-media-2020-evidence-ten-markets

³ womensmediacenter.com/reports/the-status-of-women-in-u-s-media-2019

⁴ www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2016/02/gender-diversity-journalism/463023

⁵ wanifra.moselaymdserver.com

⁶ www.prognosis.se/GE/USA

⁷ gendergaptracker.informedopinions.org

⁸ www.gendermeme.org

⁹ downloads.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/reports/reports/5050-may-2019.pdf

¹⁰ en.ejo.ch/comment/what-does-happen-when-women-choose-the-news

¹¹ Other Backward Class (OBC) is a collective term used by the Government of India to classify castes which are educationally or socially disadvantaged.

¹² www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/people-wouldn-t-think-of-me-as-a-journalist-kavita-devi-editor-in-chief-khabar-lahariya/story-cVys3dYHiz290ExSU4irDP.html

