**The *fascination* of men VS The *weariness* of women**

**Perception of leaders during Covid-19**

**Outline**

In times of crisis, people turn to governments and their leaders for reassurance, comfort, and security.

During the global pandemic of Covid-19, leaders took onto traditional and new media to communicate with the public, oftentimes in very effective ways, resulting in them sometimes gaining both the approval and the “affection” of the citizens.

Given the diversity of our group, we decided to focus our attention on the leaders of our countries during 2020, and how the public, through comments on social media, perceived their frequent presence on their TVs or other devices.

Based on our countries, the respective prime ministers were:

* Giuseppe Conte (Prime Minister of Italy, male)
* Pedro Sanchez (Prime Minister of Spain, male)
* Mette Frederiksen (Prime Minister of Denmark, female)
* Sophie Wilmes (Prime Minister of Belgium, female)

We have noticed substantial differences between the genders, noticing how people started idolizing their male leaders compared to how weary and critical they became if their prime minister was a woman.

The project was developed in the format of an interactive infographic: the user can interact with the information given, move across the presentation in a dynamic and interesting way, while still being able to read and learn about the discrepancies in public perception of male and female leaders.

The topic is highly relevant, as public perception can make or break the credibility and professionality of a political figure.

Observing as one’s opinions and bias can change based on the gender of the politician in question is an issue worth discussing, given the ongoing discrimination that women in positions of power in politics are subject to.

**Goal and target**

The main goal of this project is to shed light on an issue that women in politics continuously face: a biased and unfair depiction of them and their work by the media. The project highlights how the public perception can be molded and influenced by whatever the media decide to portray and talk about. Choosing the Covid-19 pandemic as our timeframe is especially relevant because the media portrayal of political leaders was at an all-time high and often a cross-platform occurrence.

With this project we hope to target:

- Media professionals, who can change the narrative and the methodology of their work once they are made aware of the bias and discrimination that often populates the political discourse.

- Young people who, with their prolific use of social media platforms, can be educated about these topics and issues and have a more critical approach to what they see online, and how they perceive the news.

**Methodology**

Based on comments made on social media by users and media outlets, our project targets public perception of political leaders during Covid-19. The focus is on social media comments and profiles, especially on platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Reddit; news articles have also been taken into account, validating that the issue presented in our research is not isolated to social media only, but a cross-platform occurrence, able to gain traction and grab the attention of more traditional media.

This research specifically observes this phenomenon between March and October of 2020, as the global pandemic was peaking and media coverage of political leaders was at an all time high.

The topic is highly relevant, as public perception can make or break the credibility and professionality of a political figure.

Observing as one’s opinions and bias can change based on the gender of the politician in question is an issue worth discussing, given the ongoing discrimination that women in positions of power in politics are subject to.

The project has been developed in the following steps:

1. **Brainstorm**. The group worked together to provide ideas, resources, opinions and options.
2. **Research**. Members of the group researched literature, articles, and specifics of their country of origin:

* Francesca Maddii: Italy
* Marie Sonnet: Belgium
* Kirstine Bunde-P: Denmark
* Silvia Alfaro and Laura Faure: Spain

This division of labor was also applied when looking at social media comments and posts, as per our research objective.

1. **Infographic**. Ideas were then put together to form the final project, an interactive infographic showing our findings for each of the countries selected. The platform we decided to use is *genially.com*, as it was the most suitable creation platform for the type of content we were thinking of.

Outlining a narrowed down explanation of the respective roles of the members of the group (other than what already made clear previously), the division of assignments would look like this:

* Francesca Maddii: Academic research (mostly regarding the “Italy” section of the project), Content Production, Report redaction and Overview
* Marie Sonnet: Academic research, Content Production, with particular focus on the “Belgium” part of the project
* Kirstine Bunde-P: Academic research, Content Production, with particular focus on the “Denmark” part of the project
* Silvia Alfaro: Academic research, Content Production, especially regarding the “Spain” section of the project
* Laura Faure: Academic research, Content Production, especially regarding the “Spain” section of the project

**Challenges and limits**

The most apparent challenge of this research was definitely the actual search of tweets, comments, and posts made by users regarding political leaders during Covid-19. There is an almost overwhelming amount of resources to choose from, especially considering that during the specific timeframe of our research, most people were at home in lockdown, and social media usage was at an all time high.

For this reason, the research was very time consuming, but the time dedicated to this project also made us aware of the amount of work that goes behind this kind of research, which was a fundamental learning experience for the members of the group.

**References and web resources**

The following references have been used in the development of the interactive infographic.

Chiringuito, E. (2019). Gatti: “He votado a Pedro Sánchez por guapo.” *Mega*.<https://mega.atresmedia.com/programas/el-chiringuito-de-jugones/gatti-he-votado-a-pedro-sanchez-por-guapo_201911125dca053c0cf26ce455913070.html>

Close, C., & Deswert, C. (2020, December). Femmes politiques : des leaders pas comme les autres? *The Conversation*.<https://theconversation.com/femmes-politiques-des-leaders-pas-comme-les-autres-148553>

Deswert, C. (2020). Gender in the discourse of the Belgian French-language press on Prime Minister Sophie Wilmès in a context of coronavirus crisis: a call for a “feminine” leadership? *Ulb.ac.be.*<https://difusion.ulb.ac.be/vufind/Record/ULBDIPOT:oai:dipot.ulb.ac.be:2013/339254/Holdings>

Deswert, C. (2021). The Praise for a “Caretaker” Leader. *Politics of the Low Countries*, *3*(2), 186–204.<https://doi.org/10.5553/plc/.000017>

Deswert, C. (2022) “De l’intérim à l’état de grâce : le leadership de Sophie Wilmès à la loupe du genre”. *RTBF - Les Grenades* <https://www.rtbf.be/article/de-linterim-a-letat-de-grace-le-leadership-de-sophie-wilmes-a-la-loupe-du-genre-11094604>

Fusi, C. (2021, September 29). Le bimbe di Conte e la bellezza in politica. *Formiche.net*.<https://formiche.net/2021/09/le-bimbe-di-conte-fusi/>

‌Garikipati, S., & Kambhampati, U. (2021) Leading the Fight Against the Pandemic: Does Gender Really Matter?, *Feminist Economics*, 27:1-2, 401-418, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13545701.2021.1874614>

Mari, L. (2021, January 20). La crisi vista dalle “Bimbe di Conte”, il fenomeno social delle fan del premier. Che ora lanciano la t-shirt celebrativa della "vittoria" al Senato*. La Repubblica.*<https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2021/01/20/news/pagine_facebook_le_bimbe_di_conte_gioia_per_la_maggioranza_alle_camere-283422620/>

‌MSNBC. (2021). Spanish Prime Minister Travels To U.S. In Effort To Promote Business [YouTube Video]. On *YouTube*.<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qbE3gqy5igI>

Persaud, R. (2023, January 23) “Women are better leaders in a crisis”. *The Asean Post*.<https://theaseanpost.com/article/women-are-better-leaders-crisis>

Roberts, R. (2020). COVID‐19, leadership and lessons from physics. *Australian Journal of Rural Health*, *28*(3), 232–235.<https://doi.org/10.1111/ajr.12649>

Rodero, E. (2022). Perception of the leaders of the United States, the United Kingdom, and Spain in television conferences about Covid-19. *El Profesional de La Información*.<https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2022.jul.06>

RTBF. (2020, April 17). Coronavirus : quel point commun entre les pays ayant les meilleures réponses face à la pandémie ? “Des femmes au pouvoir.”, *RTBF.be*.<https://www.rtbf.be/article/coronavirus-quel-point-commun-entre-les-pays-ayant-les-meilleures-reponses-face-a-la-pandemie-des-femmes-au-pouvoir-10484391?id=10484391>

Sperring, K. (2020, May 21). “Refracting success through gender: persistent sexism during the Covid-19 crises”. *PI Media*.<https://uclpimedia.com/online/refracting-success-through-gender-persistent-sexism-during-the-covid-19-crisisnbsp>

Vanguardia, L. (2022, August 3). La estudiante polaca que se ha hecho viral por su amor hacia Pedro Sánchez: “Está guapo con o sin corbata.” *La Vanguardia*.<https://www.lavanguardia.com/cribeo/viral/20220803/8447588/estudiante-polaca-hecho-viral-amor-pedro-sanchez-esta-guapo-corbata.html>

Zuazo, E. (2021, July 22). EE.UU. se rinde ante la “belleza” de Pedro Sánchez: “parece Superman.” *La Vanguardia*.<https://www.lavanguardia.com/gente/20210722/7618245/eeuu-rinde-belleza-pedro->

**Group 2: Members**

Silvia Alfaro, Kirstine Bunde-P, Laura Faure, Francesca Maddii, Marie Sonnet.