

Gender Imbalance in Moroccan Broadcast News

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Abstract. *In recent years, researchers have become increasingly interested in gender portrayal and gender bias in media studies in general and newscast in particular. This paper develops a comprehensive account of the distribution of males and females in the news broadcast on 2M, a Moroccan public channel, at the peak viewing time during a two-week period. It investigates one main prime time newscast, namely Almasa'iyā, to identify the role and frequency of male/female personnel and the news content they cover. The findings of this analysis reveal that males dominate in all aspects of the news content. Males seem to be associated more with hard and soft news than their female counterparts. In addition, both male and female reporters rely on male sources to comment on the news content they report.*

Keywords: *gender bias, newscast, personnel, sources, news topics.*

Introduction

The news, the most influential genre of broadcast media, is designed to reach a large segment of the population and influence and shape people's perception of the world in general and society in particular. Besides, TV news covers a variety of topics, including politics, economy, education, health, sports, entertainment, etc. Thus, it can reach a sizable nationwide audience that can be described as anonymous and heterogeneous. Therefore, news content should reflect a variety of opinions, perspectives and socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. According to the world bank statistics, Moroccan women consist more than half of the population. That is why, the TV news should advocate the equality of people, irrespective of their gender.

It is generally recognized that media texts, the broadcast news is not an exception, often represent women in the stereotypical roles of weakness, submission and inferiority; whereas, men are associated more with the roles of power, dominance and authority. Although a considerable amount of

research has been devoted to the portrayal of men and women in the newscast, no adequate attempts (to my knowledge) have been made to investigate how men and women are represented in the Moroccan newscast.

The major task of the present study is to examine whether the representations of men and women are discriminatory in the Moroccan newscast since it is believed that TV news ought to be unbiased and objective. In fact, it attempts to demonstrate to what extent objectivity is foreshadowed in the treatment of males and females in the news stories. The TV news is the main goal of the study since most people rely on a TV set as the main source of national and international news.

Research problem

Media, as the basic realm that shapes ideas, opinions, and thoughts of different receivers about different issues, covering fields of sport, entertainment, art, government, economics, etc., should be the leading domain of the campaign against gender inequality since it can affect how the audiences perceive men and women. As a media genre, the newscast that makes use of different dimensions (linguistic and audio-visual messages) to inform, entertain and educate should have as a goal the spread of gender balance, not only in relation to the topics it presents, but also in relation to the choice of the personnel and the guests. The problem that this research paper tackles is whether 2M newscast promotes gender equity. To the best of my knowledge, no publications are available that address the issue of gender balance or equality in Moroccan broadcast news. In fact, gender distribution in the newscast is a topic that has not received adequate attention of scholars.

Objective of the study

The objective of the study is twofold:

- To delineate gender representations in Moroccan TV news.
- To determine the extent to which Moroccan media makers are sensitive to gender balance when assigning roles in the newscast.

Research questions and hypothesis

In the present study, the issue under scrutiny is to determine the frequency and the distribution of women in the evening broadcast news *Almasa'iyain*

order to show whether they are represented in a balanced way and occupy similar roles as their male counterparts. This research paper, thus, provides evidence to answer the following three questions:

- Do women cover the news stories as often as men?

The first research question intends to highlight the distribution of men and women as Moroccan broadcast personnel in 2M.

- How often are men and women portrayed as news sources?

This second question aims at outlining the prevalence of males and females as news sources, describing the choices that male and female reporters make in relation to the gender of their guests (experts and non-experts).

- What types of news are men and/or women associated with?

The last research question depicts the topics that male and female reporters present to the audience.

Therefore, based on the aforementioned review of the literature, we postulate the following hypothesis:

- Concerning the newscast personnel, men outnumber women.
- Expert news sources are primarily men; whereas, non-expert news sources are mainly women.
- Hard news is allocated mostly to males and soft news to females.

Significance of the study

The present research paper can be relevant and significant for a number of reasons. First, the results of the study could be beneficial for media makers. The findings can guide them whenever they want to make amendments to meet the changes that our society has been undergoing at the level of education and employment. In fact, the number of literate and working women has been increasing every day. Second, the findings can also be useful for activists and policy makers. While the former can use them as a reference to call for action in their national campaigns, the latter may be interested in the results in order to create new gender balanced policies. Last but not least, the findings will contribute to our understanding of the issue of gender in broadcast media in general and TV news in particular.

Review of the literature

Previous studies about gender bias in TV news indicate that women are not fairly represented in different countries. Prado and Hughes (2009, 7), for instance, conducted a quantitative study about media diversity and gender

inequality in broadcast prime time news. They provided an ample evidence about the imbalanced distribution of male and female personnel in the newscast of four Latin American countries: Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico, and Uruguay, as the following quotation shows:

All of the newscasts allocated substantially more air time to male reporters. Women reporters are in the minority in all four markets, appearing on air on average 21.2% of the time given all markets combined. Women reporters were on air one-third of the time in Chile (32% of all airtime), but less than one-fifth of the time in Costa Rica (17.7%), Mexico (15.2%), or Uruguay (19.5%).

Concerning the topics covered by reporters, previous studies reveal that hard news is more prestigious than soft ones in the news hierarchy. That is why they are more often relegated to male reporters (North 2014; Ross and Carter 2011; Van Zoonen 1998 and many others). According to Van Zoonen (1998), soft news lack “informational value,” for they are not urgent serious topics. Similarly, North (2014) carried out a research in Australia to discern gendered aspects of the “newsroom culture” that are not exhaustively examined in the newscast. She conducted an online survey which raised a number of questions about different issues related to the respondents’ (1067 journalists) work place conditions and experiences. She found out that men still dominated as hard news reporters; whereas, women were assigned more soft news topics. According to North (2014, 15), “women remain steadfastly pigeon-holed in soft news areas that are deemed less prestigious than hard news genres.” She also states, “Hard news is still delivered with a predominantly male perspective” (p. 14). Therefore, previous research has reached the conclusion that males and females in the news stories are still associated with the traditional gender roles. These findings are also similar to those of Nwabuzor and Gever (2014/2015).

In a similar study, Irvin (2013) conducts a research to determine the types of topics associated with male and female reporters and to learn whether the gender of guests is even or not. That is why she uses content analysis to investigate the gathered data from three prime time newscasts. Her main findings can be summarized in the following quotation:

The results showed that male reporters were assigned more hard news than female reporters, and males were a little more likely to be assigned to hard news than soft news. Male sources were used more as experts in hard news by both male and female reporters. Actually, female reporters relied on males as expert sources more than male reporters (Irvin 2013, 9).

Sources refer to the people chosen by reporters to explain and comment on the topics discussed in the news. According to Irvin,

Both male and female reporters relied more on male sources than female sources in most categories. Even the female reporters relatively more heavily relied on male sources in three categories than their counterparts, except for when they covered soft news and used expert sources. Male reporters used male sources more heavily than female counterparts only when they covered soft news and used expert sources (Irvin 2013, 43).

This view is consistent with Prado and Hughes' (2009) findings of broadcast news in Latin America.

In the very beginning of this article, I used the term "representation" to refer to the theory which constructs how the audience views the world (people, places, values, etc.). In this research paper, representation of the personnel of the news media can be regarded as a process of constructing identities. In fact, this process is never transparent, natural or value free. There is always an ideology behind the roles assigned to each member of the news room. Moreover, the construction of cultural identities is tightly associated with the process of production as well as reception.

In an attempt to provide a sound analysis of the collected data, I intend to examine the representation of women in the Moroccan TV news in accordance with the variables mentioned in the review of the literature, i.e., personnel, topics and sources.

Methodology

Almassa'iyā newscast is scheduled at peak viewing time each evening around 8:30 pm at 2M, a Moroccan TV channel. This most watched newscast usually lasts about half an hour. It is often preceded by a soap opera and followed by a TV show or a commentary. Given its time of broadcast, it is likely to attract a huge audience; therefore, it influences and shapes the public opinion and reinforces certain world views among the viewers. This news program deals with domestic as well as international news; that is why it is considered an appropriate program for analysis. Therefore, data collection took place during the first two weeks of March from 2M official site. This period was chosen randomly.

To conduct this study, I used the content analysis of gender imbalance at Almassa'iyā newscast at 2M. The use of this method of analysis can be attributed to its systematic and rigorous nature and objective techniques that

enable the researcher to make the quantitative analysis of the data collected from the TV news. The statistics were carried out by categorizing the topics, the genders of the journalists (the news anchor and reporters) and the news sources in each news segment. A news segment (it lasts about 30 minutes) refers to a news coverage presented by one news anchor.

The coding parameters of this study take into consideration the aim of this investigation and the research questions mentioned above. Therefore, in an attempt to measure Almasa'iyā news segments, the main starting point is to count the number of males and females in relation to the following variables: the personnel (the anchor and the reporters), the news sources, and the topics assigned to each of these journalists.

1- The **personnel**, in this study, refers to the news anchors and reporters.

The **news anchor** is the person who presents the news; s/he reads the titles, introduces the stories, presents and interacts with reporters, comments on news stories and/or interviews guests. S/he tries to attract the attention of the audience through his/her serious voice, clothes and posture in order to gain loyalty and trust.

The **reporter's job**, in this research paper, refers to the voiceover that informs, reports and/ or comments on the news content from outside. The audience knows only his/her voice that comments events and activities, and also asks questions of news sources. Therefore, the gender of the reporter is determined via his/her voice. In this research paper, the reporter can also be a correspondent.

2- **News sources** are people interviewed by the reporter or the news anchor either as experts or witnesses (non-experts) that answer questions either from the news anchor or the reporter: "We defined news source as any actor appearing in a news item and delivering a text of at least one sentence" (Hooghe, Swert 2009, 13). Experts are guests specializing in a field related to the news content; whereas, non-experts are common people. They are usually bystanders or witnesses. The aim of this study is to determine the gender of the reporters/news anchors' guests whether they are experts or non-experts.

3- **News stories** are usually divided into hard news and soft news. Different researchers provide different definitions for these two terms. According to Tuchman (1978), hard news can be defined as serious stories about important topics. Hard news refers to timely news that includes topics about politics, economics and finance. Soft news, on the other hand, deals with such topics as entertainment, art, health, education, etc. In this research paper, the term hard news covers the following topics: politics, government, the king's activities, economics, business and financial affairs. They are usually the lead stories, often broadcast at the beginning of each news segment.

Soft news covers all other topics. This study is concerned with the gender of the reporter/ news anchor in relation to the type of story he/she is reporting.

Data analysis and findings

The investigation of the gathered data adopts content analysis as a systematic method of analysis of 2M broadcast news. That is why there are tables and figures to highlight the frequency of the main variables (the personnel, news sources and news stories or topics) in relation to males and females. This section examines the representation of men and women in the Moroccan TV news via the use of statistics.

Personnel

Table 1 outlines the data used to answer the first research question about the distribution of males and females as the personnel of the newscasts, specifically news anchors and reporters who deliver the news content.

TABLE 1: GENDER DISTRIBUTION OF NEWSCAST PERSONNEL

	Males		Females	
News Anchors	9	60%	6	40%
Reporters	76	54.6%	63	45.3%
Total	284	61.2%	180	38.8%

The first element we need to delineate is the number of males and females delivering news content in the data. Table 1 displays the numbers and percentages of the personnel presenting news stories. It shows that the ratio of males to females is 61.2%, a significant percentage that highlights the prevalence of males as the main sources of information.

The data in table 1 put forward the view that women appear on the air less frequently than their male counterparts. Women are seldom news anchors, for only 40% of them are allowed to read the title and present other reporters. This is may be due to the fact that women do not inspire trust in Moroccan audiences. 60% of males as news anchors reflect the predominance of males.

The disparity between genders prevails in other areas of news stories including the number of reporters. In fact, female reporters seem to be a minority in 2M prime time news since only 45.3% of females are allowed to deliver the news content when 54.6% of males do the same job. Does this mean that women are less competent than men? Or is this an idea that the

news makers want to disseminate among the population? It is important to mention that the difference between the number of male and female reporters is not huge, which can be regarded as a positive sign in seeking a bias free newscast.

The table 1 illustrates that the percentages of men and women as members of the personnel are different: men have a much greater presence in 2M newscast than women. It also reveals that male reporters outnumber females. In fact, the most striking feature of the statistics in the table above is the dominance of males both as news anchors and reporters (61.2%) in front of the microphone and the camera in the field of news broadcasting. It seems, therefore, that males are overrepresented given their real number in the Moroccan population (less than half of the population). Women, on the other hand, less frequently cover the news stories than their male counterparts. This imbalanced distribution of man and women in the Moroccan newscast foreshadows whose views, opinions and values the audience is likely to share.

News sources

Gender discrimination becomes very apparent when we consider the news reporters' sources of information (experts or just common people). Concerning the roles of the male guests, they hold a wider range of jobs than their female counterparts. They can be ministers, officials, soldiers, teachers, doctors, painters, etc. Women can also hold some of these jobs; however, their number remains trivial when compared with the number of men. The data generated by the reporters' choice of their sources are provided in the following table.

TABLE 2: DISTRIBUTION OF NEWS SOURCES BY GENDER

	Males		Females	
Experts	110	70.5%	46	29.5%
Non-experts	86	58.1%	62	41.9%
Total	196	64.4%	108	35.6%

Table 2 clearly shows again that males predominate as sources in the news. They make up about 64.4% of the commentators whereas females – only 35.6%. The number of male experts (70.5%) is much higher than that of females (29.5%). The same thing can be said about the choice of non-experts since the majority are males (58.1%). One very remarkable finding is the scarcity of women both as experts (29.5%) and non-experts (41.9%).

It is important to mention that all news stories included in the data contain at least one male source.

Concerning the gender of reporters' guests, the table above indicates that both male and female reporters cite more males than females (both as experts or non-experts) to comment on the news stories. It provides an ample evidence that the general tendency goes beyond the choice of the primary sources of information (experts) to include the secondary sources (non-experts) as well. In other words, the statistics show the overwhelming predominance of men as news sources in 2M broadcast news. These findings reflect the conservative views prevalent in the Moroccan patriarchal community.

Topics

There are two types of news stories: hard and soft topics. A significant number of studies indicate that hard topics are often presented by males whereas soft topics, by females. With regard to this, the statistics concerning the correlation between reporter's gender and the topic with which s/he deals are compiled in table 3.

TABLE 3: NEWS TOPICS RELEGATED TO MALES AND FEMALES

	Males		Females	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Hard Topics Politics/ economy/ finance	39	26.6%	18	12.2%
Soft Topics All the other topics	46	31.3%	44	29.9%
Total	85		62	

The data in table 3 indicate that the gender gap becomes more widespread when we consider the topics covered by males and females. The association between the topics and genders is rather stereotypical. Hard news, which includes politics, financial affairs, and economics, is allocated mainly to men. In fact, men are assigned hard topics (26.6%) two times more than their female (12.2%) counterparts. Even if soft news covers most of the broadcast news, males (31.3%) are more likely to present soft news, a realm usually associated with females (29.9%) as mentioned in the review of the literature above.

For instance, financial topics are nearly exclusive to males. During the collection of the data, the financial news was presented by females only whereas far as sport is concerned, it seems to be nearly exclusive to males since more than 96% of reporters are males. These reporters always cite

males as the primary source except when the news story is about female sports. Sport and financial affairs are two male dominated fields *par excellence*, which reflects the traditional views on men and women. As far as the field of politics is concerned, even if the number of males is still prevalent (58%), women are not completely absent. On the contrary, they comment on news stories, interview politicians and describe events.

In all types of topics whether they are hard or soft a male is invited to comment on an event or activity in each news story. Conversely, females are not necessarily allowed to present and comment on all topics. Consequently, the choice of males over females is evident in the broadcast news.

The statistics provided above paint a dim picture of the portrayal of gender in the news broadcast in 2M since they demonstrate the proclivity towards the prevalent choice of males over females.

Discussion of the findings

It seems that the Moroccan evening newscast *Almasa'iyā* confirms the global patterns that highlight the imbalanced distribution of men and women in the TV news. The following discussion of the findings aims at providing answers to the research questions in order to demonstrate the reasons behind these discriminatory activities in the field of broadcast news based on the statistical analysis provided in figures 1, 2, and 3.

RESEARCH QUESTION ONE:

Do women cover the news stories as often as men?

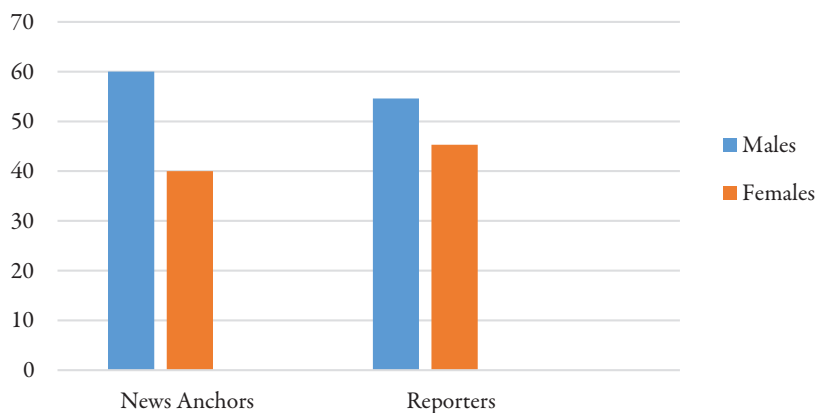


FIGURE 1: NEWSCAST PERSONNEL BY GENDER

Concerning the first research question, the data from figure 1 provide an answer to this question by revealing that the female personnel (news anchors and reporters) are underrepresented in news stories. This means that men dominate in front of the camera. This finding is confirmed by the literature review. For instance, Irvin concluded that “Male reporters covered more stories (107 stories) than female counterparts (60 stories). First, viewers would more likely to have viewed the hard news stories that were covered by male reporters than female counterparts” (Irvin 2013, 44). However, this finding is not in accordance with the real number of men and women in the Moroccan population. Given the fact that women make up slightly more than half of the Moroccan society, the statistics revealed in figure 1 indicate that the TV news disseminates patriarchal values often regarded as normal and natural by Moroccans. In addition, it seems that the traditional discriminatory stereotypes have a strong impact on the selection process of males and females in the Moroccan newscast.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2:

How often are women/ men portrayed as news sources?

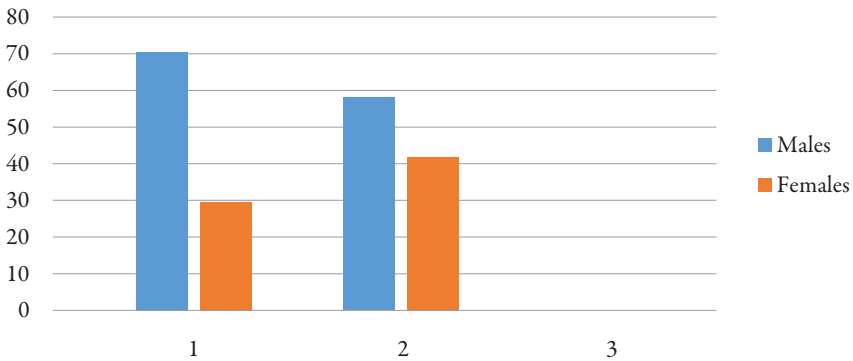


FIGURE 2: NEWS SOURCES BY GENDER

The statistics in figure 2 provide a suitable answer to research question 2, for they demonstrate that women are significantly underrepresented both as experts and non-experts. However, they are more frequently portrayed as common commentators rather than experts. Males, on the other hand, are often depicted in specialized professional roles in all domains. This finding is confirmed by Irvin: “The results of this study include female underrepresentation as reporters and sources, probably continuing a perception of women as being in a lower social status than men” (Irvin 2013, 9), hence,

the marginalization of the female perspective, which means that the female voice is silenced. Put differently, women are more associated with domains traditionally considered women specific. Therefore, contrary to our expectations, the analysis has yielded results that reject our second hypothesis which suggest that males are experts and females are non-experts.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3:

What types of news are women/ men associated with?

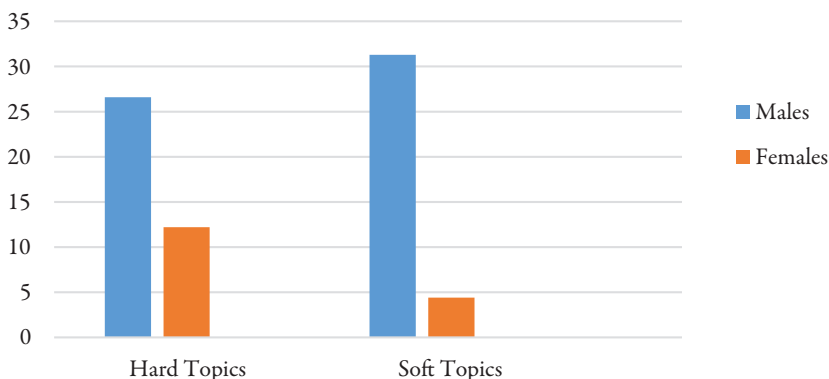


FIGURE 3: NEWS TOPICS BY GENDER

Regarding the third research question, the data suggest that there is no connection between each gender and the type of topics they discuss. It seems that men outnumber women in relation to both hard and soft topics. This finding is inconsistent with our third hypothesis which proposed that hard topics will be covered by men and soft news by women. In fact, both hard and soft news are preponderantly male domains. This conclusion is also confirmed by Irvin (2013, 44):

Less assignment of female reporters to glamorous hard news as well as the unequal ratio of male to female journalists featured on the news could discourage women interested in becoming broadcast news professionals from pursuing careers in the field. During this study, male journalists covered more hard and soft news stories than female journalists not necessarily because of the story content, but because there were more male journalists.

The quantitative data provide clear evidence supporting our main finding that broadcast news in 2M is significantly masculine both in content and personnel. In the light of the above discussion, we reach the conclusion that

the first hypothesis is correct; however, the second and the third hypothesis are incongruous with the statistical analysis of figure 3.

The censure of females from this dynamic field will inevitably affect the views and opinions of the upcoming generations. The factors behind this finding may be attributed to the following reasons:

1. Gender inequality in news stories is concomitant with the disparity between males and females in society. According to the last census which took place in 2015, males are the prevalent working force in all fields. In fact, males hold the key positions in the Moroccan society. Therefore, the news coverage cannot be an exception. According to Prado and Hughes (2009, 10), "Gender discrimination in the work force is a reality... where women are commonly perceived as a secondary source of labor. The scarcity of working women in most of the fundamental fields in society makes the situation worse. On the other hand, "Men are more frequently represented in positions of authority and power that legitimize their dominant role in society" (Prado, Hughes 2009, 9).
2. The key occupations in the field of media are male dominated. The hierarchical ordering inside the field will inevitably affect the choice of the personnel covering the news stories, as Prado and Hughes (2009, 9) mentioned, "Organizational procedures in newsrooms significantly affect which stories are covered and which news sources are used."

The main recommendation stemming from this research paper is that media should deploy more efforts to maintain equity between males and females among the personnel and ensure diversity in their representation. In other words, women should be given more opportunities to hold a wider range of roles and tasks similar to their male counterparts.

Conclusion

This research paper has provided adequate evidence to demonstrate how males and females are represented in *Almasa'iyā*, an evening newscast scheduled during the prime time. It has reached the conclusion that women are unfairly relegated to secondary roles in the Moroccan newscast in relation to three investigated variables: personnel, news sources and news stories. This deliberate and intentional gender inequity may be attributed to the occupational imbalance among men and women in Morocco. In fact, the disparity between men and women in the work place is rampant even if it is believed that women are better academic achievers.

Although the data highlight the gender bias and imbalance in relation to newscast personnel and stories, some of the limitations of this study should be mentioned. First, the results have failed to provide empirical reasons behind such bias. Therefore, further research is necessary to offer a comprehensive explanation of this phenomenon. This study has another limitation since it investigated only one news program *Almasa'iyā*; the chosen data may fail to adequately represent the broadcast news in Morocco. Therefore, larger samples are needed to examine women's professional participation in the news industry. Besides, more research is necessary to investigate more variables other than the ones discussed in this paper.

It seems obvious that the news broadcasting which tries to represent the world and makes it a small village does not mirror this world accurately. On the contrary, the world is presented to the viewers through the male's lens. Media makers should make an effort and take into consideration the diversity of the communities that the TV news targets. To promote gender balance in the news media and to encourage women to fight for more leading positions, further studies with larger samples and complex design are necessary to empirically determine how to change the situation and make our broadcast media a better field that reflects different interests and perspectives irrespective of people's gender, color or ethnic group.

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Lyčių disbalansas Maroko televizijos naujienų laidose

Santrauka

Pastaraisiais metais mokslininkai vis labiau domisi lyčių vaizdavimu ir šališkumu lyties požiūriu tiek žiniasklaidoje apskritai, tiek konkrečiai žinių laidose. Šiame straipsnyje, remiantis dviejų savaitių stebėjimo rezultatais, analizuojama, kaip pasiskirstę vyrai ir moterys Maroko visuomeniniame kanale „2M“ žiūrimiausiu laiku. Aptariama viena iš svarbiausių žinių laidų „Almasa'iyā“, siekiant nustatyti, koks yra vyrų ir moterų darbuotojų vaidmuo, kaip dažnai jie pasirodo ir kokio turinio žinias praneša. Analizės rezultatai rodo, kad darbuotojai vyrai dominuoja visais žinių turinio aspektais. Vyrai daug labiau siejami tiek su „kietosiomis“, tiek su „minkštosiomis“ žiniomis nei jų kolegės moterys. Be to, ir vyrai, ir moterys reporterės, komentuodamos žinių turinį, pasikliauja „vyriškais“ žinių šaltiniais.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: šališkumas lyties požiūriu, žinios, žiniasklaidos darbuotojai, žinių šaltiniai, žinių temos.