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<https://doi.org/10.26577/HJ81320264>**S.Z. Tasbolat*** , **A. Tuleuova** 

Ege University, Izmir, Türkiye

*e-mail: saginishtasbolat@gmail.com

THEMATIC REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN THE NEWS CONTENT OF KAZAKHSTANI ONLINE MEDIA

The representation of women in the mass media is a key topic in contemporary research in the fields of media, journalism, and gender studies. Mass media shape public perceptions of women's social roles, professional activities, and social status. The purpose of this study is to identify the characteristics of the thematic representation of women in the news content of leading online media outlets in Kazakhstan. The empirical basis of the study consists of news articles published on the Kazinform, Zakon.kz, and Tengrinews news portals between June 29 and July 5, 2026. The sample included 63 news articles in which women were the main subjects of the news text. The methodological basis of the study relies on quantitative and qualitative content analysis, which involves the thematic coding of materials, the quantitative calculation of thematic categories, and the subsequent interpretation of the obtained data. The results of the study show that the dominant theme is sports, with more than 45% of all analyzed news articles related to sports. News related to politics and public administration ranked second, while articles on education, health, the economy, social and legal issues, accidents, and search-and-rescue operations appeared much less frequently. It was found that women were predominantly represented as professional athletes, civil servants, experts, managers, and specialists. Even in reports on extraordinary events, the primary focus was not on the reproduction of traditional gender stereotypes but rather on the specific event itself. The findings indicate that a professionally oriented media representation model reflecting women's active participation in the social, political, athletic, and professional life of modern Kazakhstan predominates in the online media examined.

Keywords: women's media representation, online media, content analysis, gender, Kazakhstan.

С.З. Тасболат*, А. Тулеуова

Эгей университеті, Измир, Түркия

*e-mail: saginishtasbolat@gmail.com

Қазақстандық онлайн БАҚ-тағы жаңалық материалдарында әйелдердің тақырыптық ұсынылуы

Әйелдердің бұқаралық ақпарат құралдарындағы көрінісі медиа, журналистика және гендерлік зерттеулер салаларындағы маңызды тақырыптардың бірі. Бұқаралық ақпарат құралдары әйелдердің қоғамдағы рөлдері, кәсіби қызметі мен әлеуметтік мәртебесі туралы көзқарастың қалыптасуына елеулі ықпал етеді. Бұл зерттеудің мақсаты Қазақстанның жетекші онлайн бұқаралық ақпарат құралдарының жаңалық контентінде әйелдердің тақырыптық тұрғыдан қалай ұсынылатынын анықтау. Зерттеудің эмпирикалық негізін 2026 жылғы 29 маусым мен 5 шілде аралығында «Kazinform», «Zakon.kz» және «Tengrinews» жаңалық порталдарында жарияланған мақалалар құрады. Іріктеуге жаңалықтарда әйелдердің басты кейіпкер болған 63 жаңалық материалы енгізілді. Зерттеудің әдіснамалық негізі сандық және сапалық контент-талдау әдістеріне сүйенеді. Зерттеу барысында материалдарға тақырыптық кодтау жүргізіліп, тақырыптық санаттардың жиілігі сандық тұрғыдан есептеліп, кейін алынған нәтижелерге талдау жасалды. Зерттеу нәтижелері бойынша басым тақырып спорт екені анықталды: талданған жаңалықтардың 45%-дан астамы спортқа қатысты болды. Екінші орында саясат пен мемлекеттік басқару тақырыбындағы материалдар тұрды. Ал білім беру, денсаулық сақтау, экономика, әлеуметтік және құқықтық мәселелер, жазатайым оқиғалар мен іздестіру-құтқару операциялары туралы жаңалықтар айтарлықтай сирек жарияланған. Зерттеу барысында әйелдердің көбіне кәсіби спортшы, мемлекеттік қызметкер, сарапшы, менеджер және түрлі сала маманы ретінде ұсынылатыны анықталды. Тіпті төтенше жағдайларға қатысты репортаждардың өзінде дәстүрлі гендерлік стереотиптерді көрсетуге емес, нақты оқиғаның өзіне басымдық берілген. Алынған нәтижелер зерттелген онлайн БАҚ-та әйелдерді кәсіби қызметі арқылы танытатын медиялық

көрсетеді. Бұл қазіргі Қазақстандағы әйелдердің қоғамдық, саяси, спорттық және кәсіби өмірге белсенді қатысуын айқын бейнелейді.

Түйін сөздер: әйелдердің медиадағы көрінісі, онлайн БАҚ, контент-талдау, гендер, Қазақстан.

С.З. Тасболат*, А. Тұлеуова

Эгейский университет, Измир, Турция

*e-mail: saginishtasbolat@gmail.com

Тематическая репрезентация женщин в новостном контенте казахстанских онлайн-медиа

Отражение деятельности женщин в средствах массовой информации выступает ключевой темой современных исследований на стыке медиадискурса, журналистики и гендерной проблематики. СМИ формируют общественное восприятие социальных ролей, профессиональной деятельности и статуса женщин в обществе. Цель данного исследования – выявить особенности тематического представления женщин в новостном контенте ведущих онлайн-изданий Казахстана. Эмпирическую базу исследования составили 63 новостных материала, опубликованных на порталах «Kazinform», «Zakon.kz» и «Tengrinews» в период с 29 июня по 5 июля 2026 года, где женщины выступали ключевыми субъектами новостного текста.

Методологический инструментарий опирается на количественный и качественный контент-анализ, включающий тематическое кодирование материалов, квантификацию категорий и последующую интерпретацию данных. Результаты исследования демонстрируют преобладание спортивной тематики: более 45% проанализированных новостей посвящены спорту. Вторым по частоте репрезентации блоком стали материалы о политике и государственном управлении. Новости сферы образования, здравоохранения, экономики, социальных и правовых вопросов, а также репортажи о происшествиях и поисково-спасательных операциях встречались существенно реже.

Установлено, что женщины преимущественно репрезентируются как профессиональные спортсменки, государственные служащие, эксперты, менеджеры и профильные специалисты. Даже в публикациях о чрезвычайных происшествиях фокус смещен с воспроизводства традиционных гендерных стереотипов на сам факт события. Полученные данные свидетельствуют о том, что в исследуемом сегменте казахстанских онлайн-СМИ преобладает профессионально ориентированная модель медийного позиционирования, отражающая субъектность и активное участие женщин в социальной, политической и профессиональной жизни страны.

Ключевые слова: репрезентация женщин в медиа, онлайн-медиа, контент-анализ, гендер, Казахстан.

Introduction

Mass media play a significant role in shaping societal perceptions of women's social roles, professional activities, and social status. The news media not only reflects the processes taking place in society but also plays a role in shaping gender perceptions by determining which issues, achievements, and social roles receive the most attention. In this context, research on the representation of women in the media remains one of the most current areas of study in media communication and gender research today. Recent studies show that the image of women in the media is gradually changing; in addition to traditional family roles, women's professional achievements, participation in political life, and activities in the fields of entrepreneurship, science, and sports are increasingly coming to the forefront. However, the nature of this representation varies significantly

depending on the country, media type, and editorial policy.

Research conducted in recent years indicates a growing academic interest in gender issues and the representation of women in the media in Kazakhstan. Whilst existing studies examine the transformation of the image of women in the contemporary Kazakhstani media landscape and the perpetuation of gender stereotypes (Baskynbayeva et al., 2024), other studies have focused on gender balance in the country's print media, revealing inequalities in terms of women's visibility and representation in media discourse (Akhmetova et al., 2024). Research on digital environments has also examined hegemonic femininity and gendered discourses surrounding Kazakh women through online discussions on Facebook and Instagram (Arystanbek, 2023). These studies demonstrate that various aspects of women's representation in the media and digital com-

munication in Kazakhstan are already the subject of academic research. However, there has been a more limited focus on the thematic structure of women's representation in Kazakhstan's mainstream online news portals, particularly regarding which news topics and which professional or social roles women are made visible through in the daily news feed. Furthermore, comparative findings on how these patterns of representation differ across leading online news organisations are also limited. Building on this gap in the literature, this study aims to identify the key themes with which women are associated and the roles in which they are represented in contemporary Kazakhstani online news media by analysing news articles published on Kazinform, Zakon.kz and Tengrinews.

Literature review

2.1. The Concept of Representation and the Representation of Women in the Media

Humans obtain primary information about the world around them through their senses and perception. Some of this information is temporarily stored as a sequence of successive images. After some time, these images can be recalled. Scientists have termed this "representation." Representation is a mental process that reflects phenomena not currently perceived but reconstructed because of previous experiences. The perception of objects that existed in the past forms the basis of representation (Goldstone & Son, 2005).

Since the early 20th century, sociologists and psychologists have felt the need to examine, in practice, how individuals perceive reality. Thomas pointed out that people react to a situation depending on how they perceive it. Elaborating on this issue led Thomas to formulate "Thomas's theorem," according to which situations defined as real by people become real in their consequences (Thomas & Thomas, 1928).

Experts divide representations into two categories. The first, memory representations, arise from a person's direct perception of certain past events or objects. The second, imaginative representations, are formed based on information a person has acquired in the past and processed creatively. For example, a person's imagination regarding the tundra does not arise out of thin air. They have some ideas on this subject through movies, photographs, geography lessons, etc. Based on this material, it is possible to imagine an image of this natural region. When a melody is heard, an image of a person with

whom the melody was shared or the place where the melody was heard may emerge in consciousness. The richness of past experiences determines the integrity of representations. Representations do not arise spontaneously but are the result of practical activity and are of great importance for all mental processes that underpin a person's cognitive activity (Gibson, 1979).

In the mental regulation of human behavior, a representation, like any cognitive process, fulfills a series of functions. Pavlov distinguishes these functions from one another. The signaling function consists of the representation reflecting, in each specific situation, not only the image of the object that previously influenced human emotions but also various pieces of information about the object. Under the influence of certain effects, this information is transformed into a system of signals that controls behavior. According to Pavlov, representations are the first signals of reality that form the basis of conscious human activity. The scientist demonstrated that representations are generally formed by the conditioned reflex mechanism. When a person encounters an object or phenomenon, a representation is formed not only of the object itself but also of its characteristics. This information then functions as a primary orienting signal. For example, ideas about fruits as food provide a signal that it is possible to satisfy hunger with their help. The regulatory function is closely linked to the signaling function. It consists of selecting the necessary information about an object or phenomenon that has previously affected human senses. This selection is carried out by considering the actual conditions of the upcoming activity. The regulatory function helps implement the strategies that enable the most successful resolution of the defined tasks (Frolov, 2013).

Representation holds a special place among mental processes. For this reason, Vekker (1998) suggests considering representations as secondary representations. Representation can be thought of as a link between perception and memory, or between perception and thinking; unfortunately, however, there is little research on this mental process.

The concept of representation is examined not only in the context of individual psychology, but also within cultural and social contexts. The cultural values, norms, historical experiences and social relationships within societies can influence how certain individuals and groups are represented. In this context, the representation of women is not independent of current cultural and historical conditions. Women's position in society, expectations regard-

ing their roles, and gender norms determine which characteristics of women are emphasised in different communication environments. The media plays a particularly significant role in this process.

A distinct approach to the concept of representation in the context of media representation was developed by Stuart Hall. According to Hall (1997), representation is not merely a reflection of a pre-existing reality, but a process through which meaning is produced via linguistic and interpretative processes. In the process of representation, people, objects and events acquire meaning through specific concepts and signifiers, and these meanings are related to the cultural context in which they are situated. Viewed from this perspective, the media can be regarded not merely as a neutral vehicle for conveying social reality, but also as a space of representation that contributes to the creation and dissemination of meanings concerning specific individuals and groups.

This approach is significant for examining the representation of women in the media. The topics with which women are associated in news reports, and how they are positioned in roles such as athletes, politicians, experts, managers, victims or other social and professional roles, contribute to the formation of specific meanings concerning women. Consequently, in this study, the representation of women in online news is assessed not only in terms of whether women appear in the news content, but also in terms of which news topics and which social or professional roles are referred to. In this context, Hall's representational approach provides a theoretical foundation for evaluating the thematic representation of women in Kazakhstan's online news media.

Contemporary research indicates that women and men may be represented with different characteristics in news content. Andrich et al. (2023) analysed eleven years' worth of news content to investigate gender differences in the personality traits attributed to male and female politicians. The research reveals that the representation of politicians in the media is determined not only by their level of visibility but also by the characteristics attributed to them. This suggests that, when examining media representation, the terminology used in news texts and the qualities associated with women must be considered.

In addition to gender, political and social contexts may also influence the formation of women's media representations. Greenwald (2023) analysed the media representation of international female and male politicians in terms of gender and ethno-po-

litical factors. The research shows that how female politicians are portrayed in the media cannot be explained by their gender alone; political and ethno-political contexts may also influence how they are presented. This approach highlights the importance of evaluating the representation of women in the media within different social and political contexts.

Another important aspect of representation is the definition of women through specific social categories and cultural expectations. Yu et al. (2023) investigated the visual representation of the 'left-over women' discourse in China within the English-language news media, and how traditional values and modern conceptions of womanhood intersect in media content. The research shows that, despite processes of modernisation, the representation of women in the media continues to be shaped by traditional gender expectations. This finding suggests that the representation of women may be influenced not only by modern media practices but also by broader cultural values within society and historical expectations regarding womanhood.

The positions in which women become visible in the media are also important in terms of representation. Ozer (2023) addressed the issue of how roles such as expertise and authority are distributed according to gender and examined the visibility of women in political media content. Research suggests that women's visibility as experts in public debates may be linked to gender inequality. From this perspective, when examining representation in the media, consideration must be given not only to whether women feature in news reports but also to the social roles in which they are portrayed.

Contemporary research on the representation of women in the media also indicates that forms of representation may change over time. Women's increasing visibility in the fields of education, politics, the economy and the workplace may facilitate the emergence of more diverse representations of women in media content. However, it cannot be said that gender stereotypes have completely disappeared. Therefore, when researching contemporary representations of women, it is necessary to consider the relationship between traditional images of womanhood and modern social roles.

Representations of Kazakh women have similarly evolved within a specific historical and cultural context. It is also important to consider the historical background of these representations. This makes it possible to assess which topics and roles women are portrayed in modern Kazakhstani online media. In Kazakh society, representations of women

have emerged in various forms, ranging from folklore, myths and legends right through to the Kazakh Khanate and the Soviet era. An examination of these historical processes provides the necessary cultural foundation for assessing which aspects of the representation of women in modern online news content demonstrate continuity or transformation.

2.2. Representations of Kazakh Women in Folklore, Myths, and Legends

Valikhanov compiled a list of female villain characters in Kazakh myths. For example, the albas-ty (a fat woman with long hair and sagging breasts), the zheztynak (a woman with copper claws), and the zhalmauyz kempir (an old woman usually depicted with seven heads) are among the most prominent (Valikhanov, 1984). Among the benevolent female characters in Kazakh mythology is Umay. Umay is the protector of women and children.

Kazakh folklore is primarily known for its heroic epics featuring men fighting against the people's enemies (for example, "Koblandy Batyr" and "Alpamys"). However, there are also lyrical epics in which the emphasis shifts to the theme of love and the struggle for happiness (for example, the epics "Kozy Korpesh – Bayan Sulu" and "Kyz Zhibek"). In such epics, details of daily life and traditions come to light. In Kazakh epics, men are portrayed as strong and courageous, while women are ready to go to any lengths in their struggle for love and happiness. Yeleukenov (1987) has written that the interaction between folklore and literature has created a deeply traditional phenomenon.

2.3. Representations of Kazakh Women in the Kazakh Khanate

Bayan Bopai is recognized as the first female politician of the Kazakh Khanate. She was the wife of Khan Abulkhair. She participated in decision-making regarding the Khanate and spoke at kurultays (Tanirbergenova et al., 2008). Aiganim Sargaldakovna is known as the grandmother of the Kazakh scholar Shokan Ualikhanov. She was elected khan following the death of her husband, Uali Khan. She negotiated with the Siberian Committee in St. Petersburg (Tanirbergenova et al., 2008). Aibike Aru participated in an intelligence operation on the orders of Abylay Khan. Captured by the enemy, she served in the Kalmyk army for many years disguised as a servant. Her mission was to gather information on the strength, armament, location, and invasion plans of enemy forces (Tanirbergenova et al., 2008). Akbikesh assisted Esimhan during the

Kalmyk campaigns. After returning to her homeland, Akbikesh built a tall tower in the Karatau region from which she could survey the surrounding area (Tanirbergenova et al., 2008).

Gauhar is yet another example of the bravery of Kazakh women. In 1724, Turkestan, the capital of the Kazakhs, was ambushed by the powerful Dzungars. For this battle, Abulkhair Khan mustered thirty thousand soldiers, and Kabanbay prepared to launch an attack against the Dzungars. Gauhar, meanwhile, demonstrated her heroism by providing Kabanbay with crucial information about the enemy's position. Later, Gauhar became Kabanbay's trusted companion and fought alongside him for many years (Baribar.kz, 2017).

Nazym, alongside her father, participated in the 18th-century Kazakh-Zhongar war to defend her homeland. On the hill where the Zhongar khan Seren was stationed, a woman on a white horse stood with other soldiers and shouted, "Kabanbay! Kabanbay!" Overjoyed by the woman's courage, Abylay removed his gold-embellished belt and presented it to her as a gift. Abylay's victory, which completely defeated the Dzungars, is associated with Nazym's name (Baribar.kz, 2017).

2.4. Representations of Kazakh Women During the Soviet Era

One of the bloodiest events in the history of the Soviet Union was World War II. During this conflict, Kazakh women fought alongside men for their Motherland. Historical sources mention three Kazakh women.

Hiuaz Dospanova went to the front in 1942 as a member of a women's aviation regiment that bombed enemy lines at night. The regiment in which Hiuz served took part in battles over the skies of the North Caucasus, the Kuban, Crimea, Ukraine, Belarus, Poland, and Germany. Hiuz was sent on more than 300 important missions and demonstrated heroism in each one (Zharkynbaeva & Urazbayeva, 2019). Aliya Moldagulova volunteered to be sent to the front in 1942. She completed her sniper training in 1943. Beginning in 1943, she served as a sniper in the 4th Battalion of the 54th Special Rifle Brigade. She killed more than 30 enemy soldiers and officers (Akdauletuly & Aminova, 2005). Manshuk Mametova studied at the Almaty Medical Institute. In 1942, she volunteered for the war and served as a member of the 21st Rifle Division. Manshuk distinguished herself during the war with her marksmanship and courage. In the decisive battle for the city of Nevel, Manshuk fought until the very end, using

her machine gun to kill the enemy, and she herself was killed in that battle (Samtakova et al., 2014).

The final act in the struggle for Kazakhstan's independence was the December Uprising. This event, which took place in Almaty from December 16 to 19, 1986, was a protest by young people against the Soviet system. The Soviet Union appointed Kolbin as first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan without taking the people's views into account. This change triggered the December Uprising. On the morning of December 17, approximately 300 people gathered in Brezhnev Square and called for political independence. By evening, the number of protesters had reached 20,000, but the uprising was brutally suppressed with the support of Operation "Kuyun-86," carried out under Order No. 0385 of the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Kazakh women were also among those who participated in the uprising. The courageous actions of Sabira Mukhamedjanova, Kenzhegul Moldanazarova, and Lazzat Asanova are still remembered today (Tolepbergen, 2010). During the December Events, they and other young people fought for Kazakhstan's independence.

2.5. The Representation of Women in the News Media

The media plays a significant role in the formation and reproduction of societal perceptions of women. The extent to which women are visible in the news flow, the issues with which they are associated, the social roles in which they are portrayed, and the characteristics that are highlighted are key indicators of women's representation in the media. Consequently, women's representation in the media must be assessed not only in terms of quantitative visibility but also in terms of the issues, roles and news contexts with which women are associated.

Although digitalisation has led to significant changes in news production and consumption, it cannot be said that online news environments have eliminated gender inequality. Taha and Fahmy (2023) examined 2,210 subjects across 420 news articles selected from six online news sites in the US, Sweden and Egypt. The findings of the study indicate that, in all three countries examined, women are under-represented in the news compared to men and that, despite differences between countries, certain gender stereotypes persist in the online news environment. These results demonstrate that the creation of digital news environments despite being a technologically new sphere of communication does not,

on its own, ensure the balanced and equal representation of women.

Changes in the representation of women in the news over time are also one of the topics on which contemporary research has focused. Beckers et al. (2024) examined television news in Belgium between 2003 and 2021, investigating the representation of women as speaking actors in the news. The findings of the study revealed that women are structurally under-represented in the news, although there has been a slow increase in the visibility of women over time. The study also found that women are represented more evenly in softer news topics and non-elite positions, whilst female journalists tend to place greater emphasis on female sources compared to their male counterparts. These findings suggest that women's prominence in the news is linked to various factors, such as the news topic, social role and journalistic practice.

The issues on which women feature in the media constitute another important aspect of news coverage. Andrich and Domahidi (2024) compared the media visibility of male and female politicians across various political spheres by analysing a broad range of news data published by major US media organisations between 2010 and 2020. Research shows that women in high-level political roles receive less media coverage than their male counterparts on specific political issues such as the economy and national security. This finding demonstrates that women's representation in the news is linked not only to how frequently they appear but also to the specific news topics in which they are featured.

One of the factors influencing women's visibility in the news is the characteristics of journalists and the news organisations producing this material. Bauer et al. (2024) examined the position of female journalists in political news production, focusing on the relationship between the gender structure within journalism and political news production. The research shows that the presence of female journalists in political news can vary depending on the news and the characteristics of the political sphere. It highlights that, when assessing the representation of women in the media, consideration must be given not only to the women who are the subjects of the news but also to the structure of the journalists and media organisations involved in the news-making process.

Riedl et al. (2024), who examined how journalistic practices influence the representation of women in the news, conducted a mixed-methods study combining content analysis, surveys and interviews.

The study found that journalists' own gender is one of the key factors explaining the representation of women in political news. Furthermore, it is noted that the under-representation of women in the news stems not only from social inequality in the political sphere, but also from journalistic production processes that could either reduce or exacerbate this inequality. Such an approach demonstrates that women's representation in the media cannot be assessed independently of the news production process.

D'Heer et al. (2022), who examined the representation of female politicians in the news, also focused on the visibility and forms of representation of women in Belgian election coverage. The researchers emphasise that, when assessing the rate at which female politicians are represented in the news, not only the gender factor but also political and contextual variables must be considered. This approach is significant in demonstrating that the representation of women in the media can vary depending on different media systems, political conditions and the context of news production.

These findings, presented in the international literature, provide a comparative framework for assessing the representation of women in the Kazakhstani media. With the support of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation's Kazakhstan Office, the Kazakhstan Institute for Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities conducted a study. Participants in the study were asked two questions regarding the media. The first question was, "In your opinion, does the media in Kazakhstan play a role in shaping the representation of women and men?" In Kazakhstan, 28.7% of participants believe the media influences the representation of women and men, while 32.8% believe it sometimes influences it. At the same time, 21.7% were certain that there was no such effect, and 16.8% did not consider the matter. The second question was, "How do you assess the impact of the media in Kazakhstan on the formation of gender representation?" 30.8% of participants were unable to assess the impact of the Kazakhstani media on the formation of gender representation. 24.5% assessed the impact of the Kazakhstani media as negative. 22% did not answer this question (Uskambaeva et al., 2017).

On March 7, 2024, Exclusive.kz published a ranking of women frequently mentioned in the media. In first place is Aida Balayeva, Minister of Culture and Information, with over 400,000 mentions. In second place is Irina Smirnova, a member of parliament from the "People of Kazakhstan" party, with over 390,000 mentions. In third place is Kara-

kat Abden, a member of parliament from the "Auyl" party, with over 120,000 mentions (Exclusive.kz, 2024).

In particular, the development of online news media constitutes an important area for researching the representation of women in Kazakhstan. Determining whether women feature in news content is not, on its own, sufficient to explain all aspects of media representation. It is also necessary to identify the news topics in which women feature prominently. Similarly, examining the roles in which women are represented such as politicians, experts, professionals, mothers, wives, victims, celebrities or ordinary citizens can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the image of women constructed in online news content.

As discussed in previous sections, the representation of Kazakh women has taken various forms across different historical periods. In folklore, myths and legends, women are portrayed as protectors, mothers, lovers or figures engaged in struggle. During the era of the Kazakh Khanate, female figures associated with political activity, diplomacy, courage and the defence of the homeland held a significant place. During the Soviet period, themes such as war, heroism, self-sacrifice and political struggle took a prominent place in the historical imagery of women. However, it should not be assumed that these historical themes have a direct continuation in modern online media; potential continuities and transformations must be examined empirically.

International research indicates that women's visibility and forms of representation in the media may be influenced by various factors, such as news topics, political stances, journalistic practices and the media context. However, a significant proportion of contemporary research focuses on diverse media systems, such as those in the United States and European countries. On the other hand, it is important to systematically examine the topics and social roles through which women are represented in news materials, particularly online, within the context of Kazakhstan. Taking this into account, this study aims to examine the thematic representation of women in the news content of online media organisations in Kazakhstan and to determine which news topics, roles and social contexts women are associated with.

Material and methods

The study employed both quantitative and qualitative content analysis of news articles. To de-

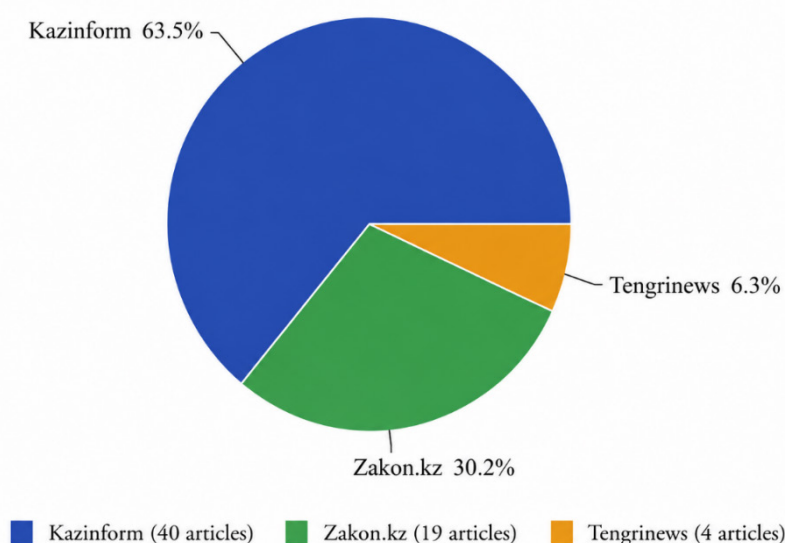
termine the research sample, all news articles published on the Kazinform, Zakon.kz, and Tengrinews news portals between June 29 and July 5, 2026, were screened individually. Only articles in which a woman was the main subject or central figure of the news text were included in the study. Following the application of this selection criterion, the final dataset comprised 63 news articles. The study addresses the following research question: What are the main themes through which women are represented in the news content of Kazakhstani online media?

The content analysis was conducted in several stages. The coding categories were developed considering the content of the news articles included in the sample. Following a preliminary review of the news articles, the key themes emerging from them were identified, and similar themes were grouped

under broader thematic categories. The following categories were identified: sports; politics and public administration; education; health; economy and entrepreneurship; accidents and emergencies; social and legal issues; social life and personal remembrance; and psychological assistance and social welfare. Each news item was coded into the relevant thematic category according to its main topic.

The coding process was carried out jointly by two researchers, and decisions regarding the allocation of news items to thematic categories were based on the researchers' joint assessment. A separate and independent coding procedure was not applied, and no statistical inter-coder reliability coefficient was calculated. Instead, the process was based on reaching consensus between the researchers regarding category assignments.

Figure 1
Distribution of News Articles by Media Outlet

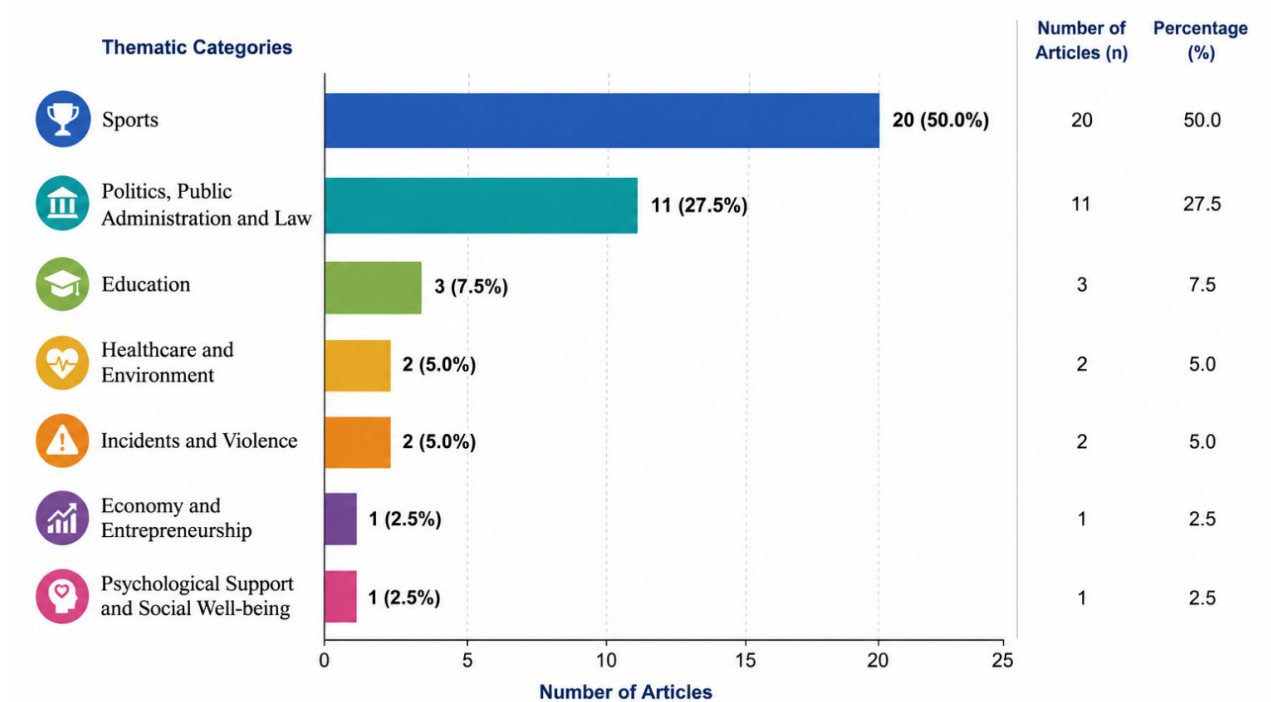


Note: Compiled by the authors

Results

A total of 40 news articles meeting the research criteria were collected from the Kazinform news agency. The thematic analysis shows that sports clearly dominated the news agenda. 20 of the 40 articles (50%) were devoted to sports. Among the Kazakhstani athletes most frequently featured in the news articles are Elena Rybakina, Bibisara Asaubayeva, Zhibek Kulambaeva, Anna Danilina,

and Sonya Zhenbayeva, as well as the Kazakhstani women's volleyball and wrestling teams. In sports news, women are consistently portrayed as professional athletes focused on achieving high results. The focus is on victories, advancing to the next rounds in international competitions, winning medals, rising in world rankings, and receiving state awards. Thus, the sports discourse shapes women as active, competitive, and professionally successful subjects.

Figure 2*Thematic Distribution of News Articles Featuring Women on Kazinform**Note: Compiled by the authors*

The second-largest group, in terms of volume, consists of materials related to politics, public administration, and law. 11 news articles fall into this category (27.5%). In these materials, women are primarily portrayed as public officials, political scientists, lawyers, experts, and representatives of government institutions. Women interpret constitutional amendments, explain the activities of official institutions, participate in the implementation of state policies, and emerge as authoritative sources of information. Such a representation model demonstrates that women possess a high degree of professional agency within the socio-political discourse.

Regarding education, there are 3 news articles (7.5%). These news articles highlight women's achievements in the field of education and in the administration of educational institutions. Women are portrayed as successful graduates and as administrators of higher education and regional educational institutions. This underscores their professional competence and their importance within the education system.

Materials related to health, the environment, and public health are covered in 2 news articles (5%). In these articles, women appear as healthcare workers

and experts explaining the causes of the spread of allergic diseases and the precautions to take to prevent tick bites. This creates an image of women as bearers of specialized knowledge and professional expertise. The remaining 2 articles were divided between accidents, emergencies, and violence (1 article, 2.5%) and search-and-rescue operations (1 article, 2.5%). These articles focus on the murder of a woman in Atyrau and the search for a missing woman in Kokshetau. Unlike most of the articles in the sample, women here are portrayed as victims and as the subjects of search-and-rescue or law enforcement operations. However, this representational model occupies a minor place in the overall structure of the news agenda.

There is 1 news article (2.5%) related to the economy and entrepreneurship. In this article, the emphasis on the high proportion of women among business executives in Kazakhstan portrays women as successful entrepreneurs and integral participants in economic processes. Additionally, 1 news article (2.5%) was identified regarding psychological support and social well-being. In this news item, a woman is presented as a psychologist specializing in workplace bullying who offers professional advice.

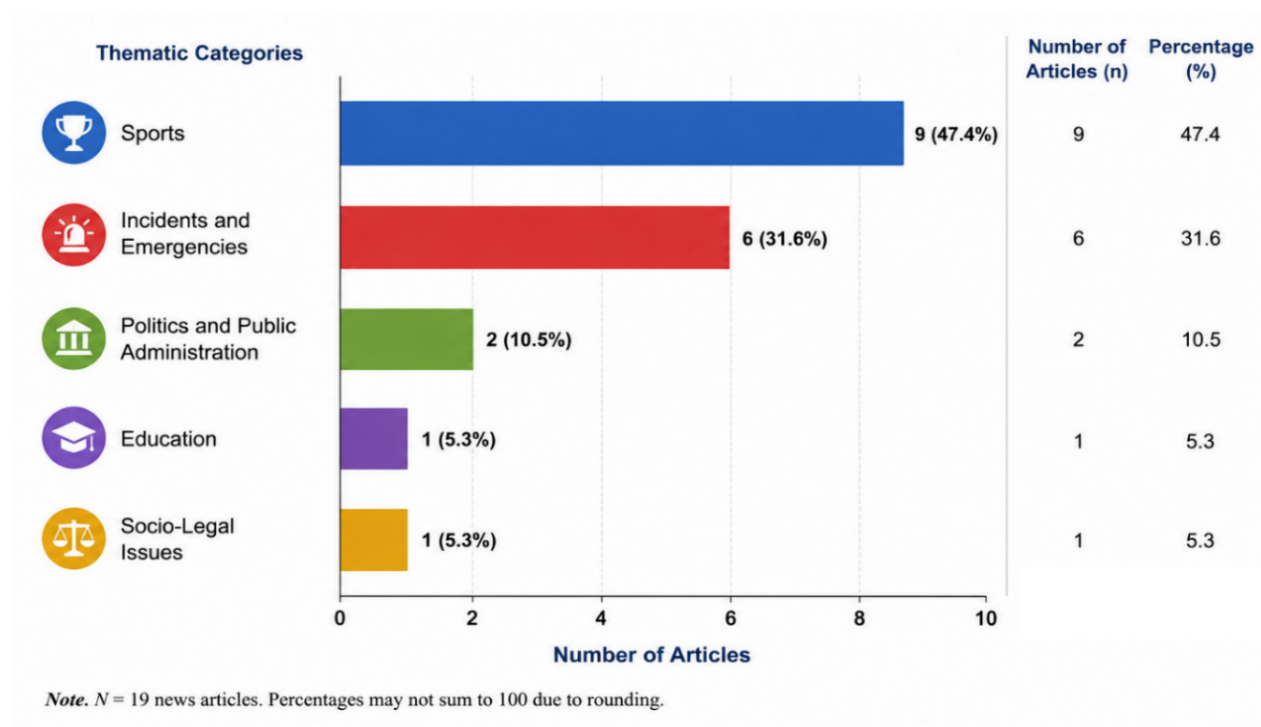
77.5% of all analyzed news items fall into 2 main topic groups: sports and political-legal issues. The results indicate that, during the period under review, Kazinform portrayed the modern Kazakhstani woman as a successful, socially active, and competent individual. Women are predominantly represented as athletes, public figures, experts, managers, and professionals. News articles in which women are portrayed as victims of a crime or an emergency account for only 5% of the sample. This also demonstrates that a positive and career-focused approach predominates in Kazinform's news content regarding the representation of women in the media.

An analysis of the content on the Zakon.kz portal revealed that 19 news articles, in which women were the main subjects, met the research criteria.

The thematic analysis shows that sports dominated the agenda. 9 of the 19 articles (47.4%) focused on the athletic achievements of Kazakhstani female athletes. The most frequently mentioned names in the news articles are Elena Rybakina, Anna Danilina, Bibisara Asaubaeva, Zhibek Kulambaeva, Yulia Putintseva, and the Kazakhstani women's national wrestling team. In these articles, women are portrayed as professional athletes focused on achieving high results. Prominent features of the sports news include victories, advancing to the top tiers of tournaments, successes in international rankings, and athletes being honored by the state. In this context, the sports discourse positions women as active, competitive subjects who achieve professional success.

Figure 3

Thematic Distribution of News Articles Featuring Women on Zakon.kz



Note: Compiled by the authors

The second-largest group, in terms of volume, consists of 6 news articles related to accidents and emergencies (31.6%). This category includes news articles such as the discovery of a missing young girl with the help of a drone, a young girl seriously injured when a tree fell, the murder of a woman in Atyrau, the rescue of an elderly woman, a case of

fraud involving a retired woman, and the deaths of five young girls in a traffic accident. Unlike sports news, women in this group are predominantly portrayed as individuals in vulnerable or unprotected life situations. However, this portrayal is related to the nature of the news agenda rather than an emphasis on traditional gender roles.

Politics and public administration are represented by 2 news articles (10.5%). In both articles, the central figure is Aida Balayeva, Minister of Culture and Information of the Republic of Kazakhstan. She is portrayed as a stateswoman involved in implementing state policy and legal reforms. Unlike many traditional media portrayals, the focus is on her professional activities and administrative functions.

There is 1 news article (5.3%) dedicated to education. The article mentions a high school graduate who scored the highest on the university entrance exam. The young woman is portrayed as a successful student who achieved high academic accomplishments through her knowledge and personal efforts. Another article (5.3%) relates to social and legal issues. It addresses a legal dispute between two women over how to bury a relative. Despite the contentious nature of the issue, the women are portrayed as independent parties defending their rights in legal proceedings.

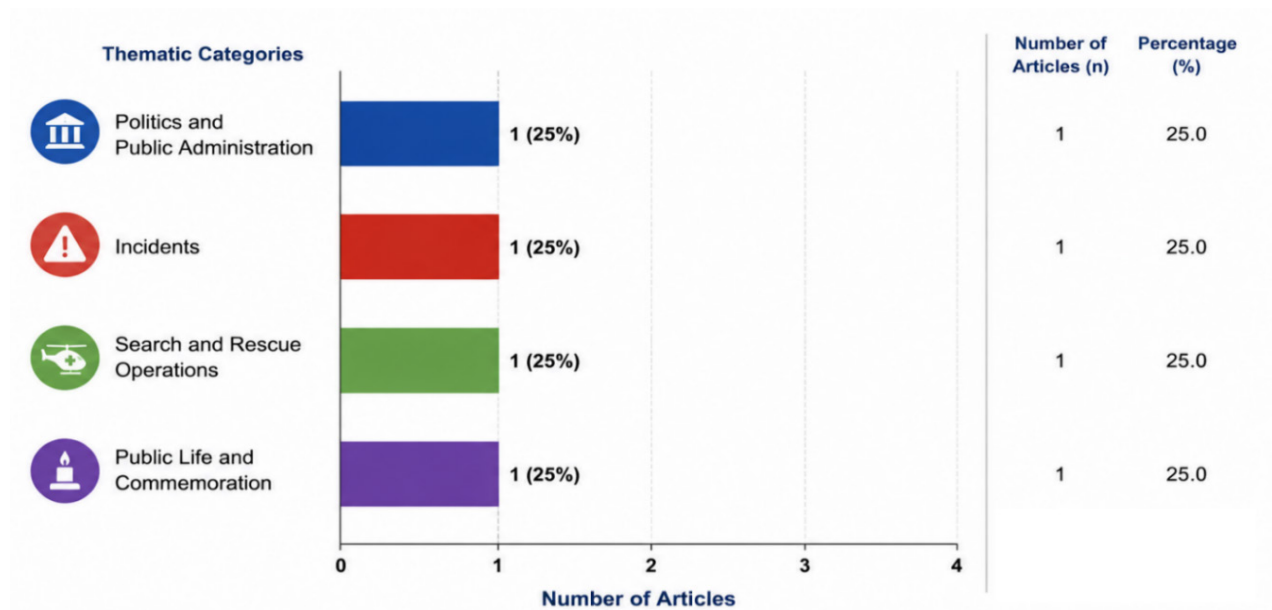
Thus, the thematic structure of the news articles on Zakon.kz indicates that the primary focus is on 2

areas: sports and accidents. These 2 areas account for 79% of the total sample analyzed. However, while sports news predominantly portrays modern women in a positive light as professionals and winners, news about accidents tends to depict women in situations of risk, loss, or social vulnerability. Political and educational topics account for a much smaller share of the news agenda; however, even in these articles, women are represented not by traditional family roles but by their professional achievements, experiences, and social activities.

4 news articles in which women were portrayed as subjects were included in the analysis on the Tengrinews news portal. The thematic analysis shows that there is no dominant agenda, as each of the identified news articles falls into a separate thematic category. Consequently, 1 news article (25%) is dedicated to politics and public administration, 1 news article (25%) to an accident, 1 news article (25%) to a search and rescue operation, and 1 news article (25%) to public life and the memory of an individual.

Figure 4

Thematic Distribution of News Articles Featuring Women on Tengrinews



Note: Compiled by the authors

The political topic is represented by a news article regarding a meeting between the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan and Minister of Culture and Information Aida Balaeva. In this article, she is presented as a female stateswoman and a participant in

the decision-making process of the government. Attention is primarily focused on her professional activities, the implementation of state policy, and the fulfillment of her duties. This also demonstrates that women are active agents in political communication.

The news article about a 19-year-old girl in Almaty who was struck by a falling tree falls under the category of accidents. In this case, the woman is portrayed as a victim, and the primary focus is on her health condition and the actions of medical personnel. The news article about the search for a missing Kazakhstani woman using a drone is structured in the same way. In this report as well, the woman is portrayed as someone in need of assistance, while the conduct of the search-and-rescue operation becomes the central theme. Thus, both news articles present the woman as a vulnerable individual facing an extraordinary life situation.

The news article regarding the sudden death of media community manager Aygerim Meyrkanova constitutes a separate thematic category. The article serves as a tribute, emphasizing not the woman's family situation or personal life, but rather her professional activities and public recognition. Thus, an image of a woman is created in which her social and professional roles form the basis of her media representation.

Unlike Kazinform and Zakon.kz, the number of news articles about women in the Tengrinews sample is significantly lower. However, the analysis shows that women are primarily represented within three distinct models: as a stateswoman, as a person facing extraordinary circumstances, and as a figure of public importance. In each case, the focus is not on the woman's traditional family roles but rather on her professional activities or a specific life situation.

Discussion

The research findings indicate that, in the Kazakhstani online media examined, women are predominantly represented in professional and socially active roles. In particular, the fact that sport is the primary news area in which women feature prominently reveals that women's representation is closely linked to factors such as professional achievement, competition and international success. On the other hand, in news coverage relating to politics and public administration, the representation of women as public officials, experts and participants in decision-making processes clearly reflects their public and professional roles in the news discourse.

These findings point to both similarities and differences with certain trends emerging in the international literature regarding the representation of women in the media. Taha and Fahmy (2023) note that online news platforms have not eliminated representation inequalities between men and women,

and that certain gender stereotypes persist in digital news. Similarly, Beckers et al. (2024) demonstrate that women remain structurally under-represented in the news, although their visibility has increased over time and the nature of their representation varies according to news topics. The results of this study differ from the aforementioned studies in that it focuses on content in which women are the primary subjects of the news. Within this sample, it was observed that women were predominantly represented not through traditional family roles, but as athletes, public officials, experts, managers and professionals working in various fields.

The findings also indicate that the way women are represented may vary depending on the news organisations' editorial priorities. Whilst sport, politics and public administration featured prominently on Kazinform, Zakon.kz was found to place significant emphasis not only on sports news but also on accident and emergency reports. In the Tengrinews sample, however, it is not possible to speak of a distinct thematic focus due to the limited number of news items. Consequently, the representation of women in the media must be assessed not only from a gender perspective but also within the context of news organisations' agenda preferences and the topics they cover.

In particular, the portrayal of women as victims or those in need of assistance in news stories about accidents, emergencies and search-and-rescue operations reveals a pattern that differs from the representation model based on professional roles. However, across the sample, it is evident that such representations do not overshadow news stories in which women are presented as active participants in both professional and social spheres. This situation demonstrates that the representation of women is not monolithic; depending on the nature of the news topic, different forms of representation ranging from professional agency to vulnerability can emerge.

The data obtained indicate that it is insufficient to assess the representation of women in Kazakhstan's online media solely based on visibility levels. The news topics in which women appear and the social or professional roles with which they are associated become key factors in understanding the nature of their representation. In this context, the research findings provide an empirical example for the international literature on the representation of women in the media within the Kazakhstani context and demonstrate that the representation of women can vary depending on the news topic and the structure of the media agenda.

Conclusion

A comparative content analysis of the news portals Kazinform, Zakon.kz and Tengrinews reveals that, within the sample examined, women are represented not in traditional family and domestic roles, but in professionally and socially active roles. Whilst women are predominantly featured in news reports as athletes, public officials, experts, managers and professionals working in various fields, representations of women as victims or in vulnerable situations occupy a more limited place in the general news agenda.

The study's findings also indicate that the representation of women may vary depending on the news topic and the media organisation. Whilst sport stands out as a thematic area where women feature most prominently, news on politics and public administration also contributes to women being recognised as professionally competent and active participants in social life. In contrast, a different form of representation emerges in news coverage of accidents, emergencies and search-and-rescue operations, where women are more often positioned as vulnerable individuals or those in need of assistance. These results demonstrate that the representation of women in Kazakhstan's online media is not uniform; it can take different forms depending on the thematic agenda and the nature of the news content.

Overall, the research indicates that, within the online news discourse examined, women stand out due to their professional achievements, public engagement and social activities. In this context, the study highlights that the representation of women in

the media should be assessed not only in terms of their level of visibility in news reports, but also in terms of which news topics and which social or professional roles are brought to the fore.

The findings of this study should be interpreted within the context of certain limitations. The study's dataset is limited to 63 news articles published on three online news portals Kazinform, Zakon.kz and Tengrinews between 29 June and 5 July 2026, in which women were the main subjects of the news. In particular, the fact that the research period was limited to one week may have increased the influence of period-specific events on the thematic distribution of the news. Consequently, the findings should not be generalised to the entire online news media landscape in Kazakhstan or to the representation of women over longer periods. Future research covering longer time periods, a greater number of news organisations and larger samples could provide a more comprehensive picture of changes in the representation of women in Kazakhstan's online media over time, as well as the patterns of representation across different media organisations.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

S.Z. Tasbolat: Conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, writing-original draft, and writing-review and editing.

A. Tuleuova: Formal analysis and writing-review and editing.

All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to its publication.

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Information about the authors:

Tasbolat Sagynysh Zakariyaulı – PhD student, Department of Radio, Television and Cinema, Ege University (Izmir, Türkiye, e-mail: saginishtasbolat@gmail.com).

Tuleuova Aizhan Zhanatkyzy – PhD student, Department of Public Relations, Ege University (Izmir, Türkiye, e-mail: aizhan27032703@gmail.com).

Авторлар туралы мәлімет:

Тасболат Сағыныш Закарияұлы – докторант, Радио, телевидение және кино кафедрасы, Эгей университеті (Измр, Түркия, e-mail: saginishtasbolat@gmail.com).

Түлеуова Айжан Жанатқызы – докторант, Қоғаммен байланыс кафедрасы, Эгей университеті (Измр, Түркия, e-mail: aizhan27032703@gmail.com).

Сведения об авторах:

Тасболат Сағыныш Закарияұлы – докторант, кафедра радио, телевидения и кино, Эгейский университет (Измр, Турция, e-mail: saginishtasbolat@gmail.com).

Түлеуова Айжан Жанатқызы – докторант, кафедра связей с общественностью, Эгейский университет (Измр, Турция, e-mail: aizhan27032703@gmail.com).

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