THE EqualVoice Mindset

Stefan Mair
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How to make every voice heard

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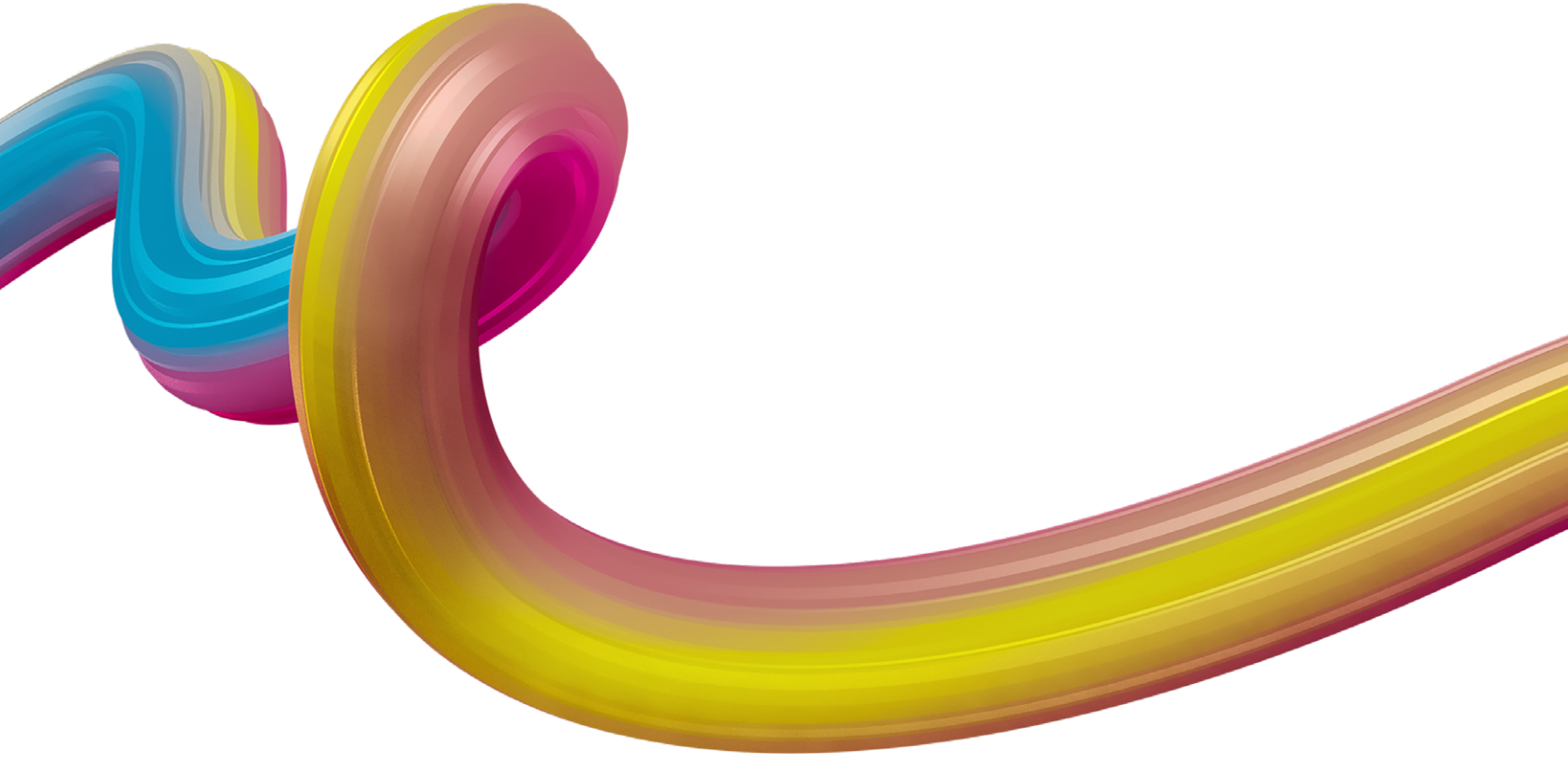

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Listening to every voice

When on November 10, 2019, at 7:30 am in meeting room 1 of the Ringier Press House in Zurich, the "EqualVoice" initiative was introduced, no one could have foreseen the sea-change that followed.

Just four years later, 32 newsrooms across Europe are employing EqualVoice technology. 50 million people receive their information from newsrooms where the EqualVoice software is integrated – an AI tool that assists media in measuring the representation of women in their articles and visual content. This artificial intelligence (AI) analyzes thousands of articles daily and even hundreds of thousands monthly, providing editorial teams with insights and evaluations regarding the proportion of women in their reporting. It also signals when women are disappearing from coverage.

All of this would have been scarcely expected on that bitterly cold November day, even with considerable optimism. This is partly because the discussion on that morning was intense and controversial: What is EqualVoice, really? A PR campaign by Ringier? A new idea in journalism? Yet another data tool dissecting journalism? Isn't editorial work already too driven by numbers? The debates in the newsrooms remained intense and contentious even after the introduction of the EqualVoice software and its associated tools. This book provides insights into these discussions for the first time.

The goal of EqualVoice has remained the same from day one: to increase the visibility of women in media and to promote journalistic debate on diversity. After all, only those who are visible are perceived by media audiences. Only those who speak and are heard can play a role in public discourse. And the gender visibility gap, meaning the unequal visibility of women and men in media, results in many voices, solutions, and contributions to debates going unheard.

Today, EqualVoice is the most successful initiative for promoting the visibility of women in European media. This book describes how the gender visibility gap can be addressed with a data- and technology-driven solution – without imposing mandates, with a liberal approach. Furthermore, it aims to share learnings for other initiatives and diversity programs in companies.

Much of what has happened in recent years at media companies working with EqualVoice is of interest to the entire industry. Some companies can avoid detours and obstacles by considering the learnings from this book, from top management down to individual department levels, from sports to politics, from people to economics. Additionally, a compact tool for everyday editorial work is provided through the analysis of ten editorial roles, which is included with the book in the form of a detachable booklet.

This book aims to demonstrate how a generation of journalists, both within and beyond Ringier, who debate and treat equality and diversity as journalistic dimensions, can change the media industry. It draws on experiences, learnings, best practices, and a chorus of inspiring voices at journalism's front line, driving momentum for positive change.

The gender visibility gap

Women are significantly less visible and audible in the media than men. This imbalance, known as the "gender visibility gap," shapes public debates.

A male view of the world

Men and women are equal in Switzerland. However, their visibility is unequal. Gender equality has been enshrined in the Swiss Federal Constitution since 1981. However, in 2023, this equality has not been achieved in the media and public sphere. Media still predominantly represent men. In newspapers, online media, television, and radio, men receive more space and airtime. And it's significant.

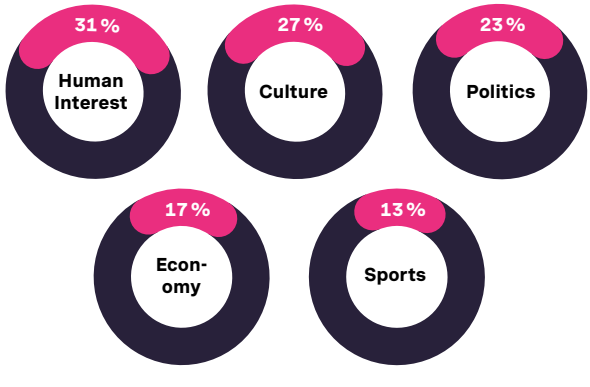
In Switzerland, media reports are about 77 percent about men. For every mention of a woman, there are about three mentions of men, as the Research Center on Public Opinion and Society (fög) at the University of Zurich found in a study. This inequality exists, with minor differences, in all Swiss language regions and across all types of media, according to fög, which examined the period from 2015 to 2021.

When examining individual sections, the numbers are alarming: Women constitute 40 percent of athletes in sports but are mentioned only in a fraction of articles on the subject. Women also play a minor role in economic reporting, with over 80 percent of the actors being men.

Underrepresentation is also evident in Germany and Austria: A study by the Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW) showed that women are clearly less visible: An analysis of around 3,500 political news contributions from twelve Austrian daily newspapers, TV, radio, and online media in 2018 revealed that only 25 percent of the contributions featured

Limited representation of women in the media

■ Proportion of men and
■ proportion of women in sections of Swiss media.



Source: Research Center for the Public Sphere and Society (fög) at the University of Zurich