



Website [www.zeroviolenza.it](http://www.zeroviolenza.it) (Zeroviolenza)

Italy

2009-2014

## Using web 2.0 to promote debate on the relationship between men and women

### Summary

The Zeroviolenza ONLUS association was created in 2008 to make the way women are presented in the media a matter of public debate, and to give media publishers direct feedback on the way they portray women and report gender issues. Early in 2009 it launched the [zeroviolenzadonne.it](http://zeroviolenzadonne.it) website, which published a daily press review of articles on all forms of violence and discrimination due to gender or sexual orientation.

From 2014 the website has broadened its work to connect social and economic dynamics, such as relations between different generations, to the relationship between men and women. In order to promote a civil consciousness on these topics, it focuses on the value of the identity of every human being and the transformation of the life experiences of people from every social group, condition and geographical origin.

As well as publishing original editorial content, by 9:30 each morning it publishes a comprehensive review of press coverage concerning violence and discrimination in the leading Italian newspapers. The articles are organised into 12 thematic sections, and are also accessible via keywords. This makes the site a very useful resource for researchers and other media organisations.

The very clear and professional site receives up to 40,000 visits a month, and has 6,500 Facebook likes and nearly 5,100 Twitter followers. Subscribers also receive a weekly newsletter. To stimulate debate, the site encourages comments from users, which are not censored.

Zeroviolenza.it is an independent project, supported by donations from citizens – both men and women – and from the religious organisation Tavola Valdese, via the *otto per mille* scheme under which Italian taxpayers can donate 0.8% of their tax payment to religious organisations.

### The persistence of stereotyping



The latest report on Italy from the GMMP (Global Media Monitoring Project), published in 2010, confirms the growing visibility of women journalists, though this is only deduced from news

bylines and not from in-depth investigation in newsrooms and editorial boards. The overall visibility of women in the news is higher than it was in 2005 (19% vs. 14%), yet Italy falls



below the global figure of 24%. In spite of a larger presence in the news media, women's visibility and portrayal tend to remain more anonymous than men's: women are much less represented than men in all professional categories; they are often interviewed and heard as expressing popular opinion, and a quarter of their presence on TV results from their being victims of violence or crime (in the case of men the figure is 8%).

Women are rarely the focus of news (only 3% of articles). Within this 3%, in only seven cases out of 100 is specific mention made of issues concerning equality between men and women.

In comparing the situations in 2005 and 2010 what can be noticed is a smaller 'neutral zone' in which stereotypes are neither strengthened nor challenged. It is therefore interesting to link the data concerning trends and stereotypes with the gender of journalists: what we see today is a higher number of challenged stereotypes in news reported or presented by women (14% of cases vs. 4% of men presenters), while there is a higher percentage of strengthened stereotypes when male journalists report the story (24% vs. 15% in the case of female journalists).

This leads us to conclude that the revival of public debate on women and images in the media which has been engaged many Italian journalists and media professionals over the last few years may have made some of them more aware of the need for more gender-aware journalistic practices in the country.

### **Constantly updated information on gender**

In 2008, the Zeroviolenza ONLUS association was created to remedy this situation. It is an independent information project which promotes a social conscience that recognises the cultural and sexual identity of men and women, both in home environments and in social and political ones. Preventing violence creates the conditions for good growth, by enabling people to recognise difference as an enrichment in exchanges with others. Zeroviolenza believes in defending labour, culture, food and natural resources as fundamental collective tools in preventing violence and managing personal and social conflicts. It aims to build a culture of accountability in the relationship between adults and children, children and adolescents, as an essential key to understanding the dynamics of social conflicts. It helps parents to recognise the individuality of their children and makes educators more aware of the needs of children and adolescents, as well as their own needs and educational functions.

In 2009 it established a website with the global objective of raising awareness of the imbalance in the presence of women in the media, in terms both of representation and of their access as journalists, media producers and decision-makers. The target groups for this awareness-raising are public institutions, women's NGOs, equal opportunities committees, universities and the entire Italian public.

The Zeroviolenza.it website does this by publishing by 9:30 every morning a daily review of Italian press articles on violence, including the representation of women and gender issues. Articles are categorised under 12 headings, such as economy and work, migrants, health and environment. Its search engine covers articles from newspapers, magazines and organisations from 2009 to the present. Users can comment on any article and post related information. The contents are shared through social networks like Facebook, Twitter and Google+.

Media organisations are an important recipient of feedback regarding their daily practices of gender representation. The site gives media organisations direct feedback on how they



represent gender, and has created a space on the internet for public debate on the visibility of women in the media and on particular issues related to gender representation.

The editorial team comprises four people taking care of the daily press review, web and Twitter items and the public debate calendar, two people managing original content, national public debate, associations and accounting, and one fundraiser.

Statistics from Google Analytics show that the number of accesses to the site increased by 50% between the first and second years (2009-2010), and by 30% in all successive years. There has also been an increase in the number of people contributing comments on the articles quoted in the press review.

### **Positive and negative examples**

Since 2014, the Zeroviolenzadonne information project has been subsumed into broader coverage on violence in general. Its main tool is the daily press review, which pursues the objective of gender equality and sustainable relations between the sexes. It not only points a finger at gender imbalances in access to expression through the media, but also makes the most of the positive cases by focusing on women who are able to carve out a place for themselves in the media, and who appear in prestigious roles showing their competence and skills to the full. In this respect, it works as an instrument of feedback to the messages presented to the public and also provides evidence to researchers and gender activists to support their claims. It allows research by keyword and through time, allowing users to track the evolution of a particular phenomenon. The site is thus embedded in a wider strategy and has found its place in the public debate on women and images in the media that is taking place in Italy. Zeroviolenza draws on contributions from organisations pursuing similar aims at an institutional level, such as publishers, the press, professional and sector associations. However, the tool cannot directly address related issues like women's access to higher positions in media organisations.

The website was created to achieve three objectives:

1. to redress gender imbalances in media production and contents and to compensate for the totally inadequate media representation of women's role in Italian society and culture;
2. to raise awareness and build up a 'critical mass' within newsrooms and their decision-making processes leading to the stable presence of a gender perspective in news media outputs;
3. to empower women and push them to try to obtain top-level positions in media organisations as a means of influencing public debate and achieving gender equality.

The first goal has been achieved, as the website has become a primary source of information for mainstream media covering gender issues. The 30% annual growth in usage and the increasing number of user comments show that it has also proved to have a wider impact, particularly in the media sphere.

### **A trusted source of information**

It is sustainable over time for several reasons, the main one being that it has become a source of information for the mainstream media on gender issues. It has also built up a large following among public institutions, women's NGOs, equal opportunities committees and universities. In great part, its appeal is based both on the up-to-date information it provides



and also because it works as a public archive of data regarding gender as seen by the Italian media, which is searchable through time.

Additionally, it has become a space for public discussion on gender relations because it opens up dialogue and gives ample room to women's opinions. Working on a web 2.0 platform, the site allows users to comment in real time on the information published. Zeroviolenza does not exercise any sort of censorship but instead encourages posts on the articles and issues presented every day. Unfortunately, the wider impact of this strategy on society is difficult to measure because its incidence on gender mainstreaming may be limited to certain niche groups already interested in the topic.

It is an efficient operation: with a modest annual budget of around €30,000, the project has raised awareness of the unfair representation of women in Italy's media. The cost/benefit ratio is positive because the website reaches a wide audience not only through the internet but also through being cited by other media. The project relies on the work of an editorial team comprising two professional journalists and various collaborators with gender expertise, as well as a statistician. Funding is obtained independently, and includes donations by users.

### **Successful use of web 2.0**

The site's success stems from the commitment of its organisers, which has enabled them to achieve a high level of continuity and to publish a daily press review without interruption for more than three years. The data gathered can be consulted in pdf format, which makes the site a good source for researchers seeking historical information. The openness of the web 2.0 format has opened up access to diverse groups interested in the topic by allowing them to take part in discussions. Evaluation methods for the project are easily applicable (Google Analytics) and the results are comparable from one year to another. The site could be improved by showing statistical data on the results of the press daily review, to help users to understand more clearly the imbalances in women's representation.

On the financial side, the project relies on voluntary contributions, which have flowed in since its inception on 2009. In 2013, 75% of the funds came from the religious organisation Tavola Valdese (via the *otto per mille* scheme under which Italian taxpayers can donate 0.8% of their tax payment to religious organisations), 16% from personal donations and 7% from the *cinque per mille* scheme through which Italian taxpayers can donate 0.5% of their tax payments to social causes. Hence, it is foreseen that the project will continue working over coming years with a similar amount of support and possibly even with an increase in personal donations (the three-year comparison shows a year-by-year improvement in this area). Thus, the growing commitment of the public to this kind of initiative is translated into financial support. There is some financial risk however, as support from the Tavola Valdese could be threatened by a policy change. This risk might be mitigated through a public fundraising campaign.

Zeroviolenza demonstrates how web 2.0 technology can be used successfully to publish media reviews that prove the low visibility of women in media. It plays the important function of maintaining a public record of the variations of women's visibility in the media, which provides a context for analysis of the issue through time. Its success shows that an NGO can become a reference for academics and even for the same media outlets it monitors. The openness of the web 2.0 platform contributes to the use and popularity of the site, as does the of zero censorship approach.

This website could work as a model to apply in other countries. With proper funding, it seems highly replicable.



**Contact:**

Monica Pepe

info@zeroviolenza.it

**Further information:**

Website: <http://www.zeroviolenza.it>

Pepe, Monica (2014) *Uomini, donne, identità, differenze. Come resistere e perchè cambiare?* (Men, women, identity, differences. How to resist and why we should change): <http://www.zeroviolenza.it/chi-siamo/item/64502>

Lipperini, Loredana (2014) *Metamorfosi (Metamorphoses)*: <http://www.zeroviolenza.it/chi-siamo/item/64603>

Videos:

*Gli adulti imparano, gli adulti insegnano l'arte della convivenza tra uomini e donne* (Adults learn, adults teach the art of living together between men and women): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQhThEuTRGI>

*Uomini, donne, amore e violenza ai tempi della crisi* (Men, women, love and violence in times of crisis): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A3RYtQJ\\_\\_Vc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A3RYtQJ__Vc)

*Ascolta il tuo corpo* (Listen to your body): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8JhRLsNFWjc>

**NB image copyright**

Logo is from project website