



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the
Netherlands

WE4L
Women Empowered for Leadership

Hivos
people unlimited

Effectiveness of Social
Media as a tool for
Opening Up Spaces
for Women Leaders'
Participation in **Jordan,**
Lebanon, Malawi, Zambia
& Zimbabwe

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INTRODUCTION

Social media has come a long way since its advent, shifting people's ways of knowing, connecting, communicating, and working. This ability to reimagine communities has seen social media evolved into a formidable tool for social change credited with reinventing spaces, the public sphere, and organising in ways that have catalysed socio-political "revolutions" and democratised citizens' participation. While celebrated for its catalytic effects, the "real" power of social media, its capacity to shift norms, reimagine communities proper, and facilitate gender-based social change remains a matter of conjecture. This multi-country study contributes to filling the empirical gap through describing and explaining the effectiveness of social media in promoting abertura (opening) and closure for women's leadership in Jordan, Lebanon, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The study uses these five countries, in which Hivos, and its partners have been implementing the Women Empowered For Leadership (WE4L) Programme for five years as case studies in for social media and women's leadership. In addition to insights from WE4L implementation, the study

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also employed an eclectic set of data collection methods and variety of participatory methodologies to form thick descriptions and sound explanations around social media and its varied impact on women leader's careers, causes, and aspirations. This study describes how women in leadership and the organisations that promote women's leadership have accessed, used, and experienced social media, as well as the interpellation of women and social media in generating influence and the emergence of space and new forms of online gender-based violence. It also explains how social media has assisted in making and breaking women leaders' careers directly and indirectly with consequences for their career progression. In doing so, the study shows the extent to which social media has lent itself as a useful tool for women leaders' activism, and its cross-country and within-country impact on promoting the 50/50 gender representation agenda.

This study describes how women in leadership and the organisations that promote women's leadership have accessed, used, and experienced social media

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SUMMARY FINDINGS

While there is a common thread around the adoption of social media for purposes of advancing women leaders' communication interests, the study's findings are also a story of variation across space, culture, and political contexts. The conclusions of the five-country study expose social media as a Janus-faced tool that has both enabled and disabled women's political

interests, facilitated and impaired their participation and interests in some instances. These dualities show that for women leaders and organizations, social media is a double-edged knife that cuts both ways, prying open space for their participation but also often inflicting deadly wounds and closing space for women leaders and organisations.

The dynamics of women leaders and organisations' use of social media

The study shows that social media has been effective in creating spaces for engagement within and outside male-dominated traditional spaces. This has dramatically assisted women leaders in attaining greater political participation parity and positively influenced societal dynamics and attitudes towards women leaders. The findings, however, demonstrate

that there is no singular narrative on social media and women's leadership because social media enabled but also inhibited women's transformative leadership and participation in governance. The global findings show that the social media revolution is a nascent regime in formation, whose overriding character is neither all progressive nor all bad. What social media



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eventually settles as is a function of disciplined efforts towards better, strategic use that deliberately promotes gendered, social change and effective women's leadership.

Women leaders' use of social media to bypass and mitigate limited access to

traditional media broadly varies across the choice of platforms and uses across the two regions. In Southern Africa (Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe), WhatsApp is the leading platform used by women leaders and institutions followed by Facebook; Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter. In the Middle East (Jordan and Lebanon), Facebook is the most preferred go-to platform for women leaders and institutions, followed by Instagram and Twitter. Table 1 shows women leaders and organisations' major social media uses.





Country	Major Uses
Jordan 	Dissemination of information, raising awareness, building credibility and legitimacy, following current trends and debates, self-promotion, creating interactive spaces for critical public discussion.
Lebanon 	Build credibility and legitimacy, access information, follow current trends and debates, raise awareness about women in the workforce in the region, inspire other women, political campaigns, communication, engagement, promote visions of organisations, promote events, recruit for offline events, voice concerns to a broader audience.
Malawi 	Support women's leadership, advocacy, awareness, bringing women's rights issues to the attention of the wider public, galvanising support for women leaders, encouraging policy change, vote-seeking, fund/resource mobilisation, information sharing, whistleblowing, enhancing visibility among voters.
Zambia 	Promote events, increase event attendance, influence public opinion online, communication, and information sharing, marketing themselves, education, research, collaboration and networking, social interaction, news, information seeking, lobbying and advocacy.
Zimbabwe 	Instant connections, sharing updates, maintaining relationships, learning more about their communities, activism and solidarity, sharing experiences, sharing information about their personal and organisational plans, social engagements.

Table 1. Different uses of social media by women and women organisations in Jordan, Lebanon, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe

Asymmetries in use and access, Intersectionality & Optical illusions

Some of the variation on which type and social media platforms women deploy is based on differences in levels of internet penetration and literacy across countries. However, this variation is not just at the cross-country level, but also within countries. The latter shows that while access is not a significant issue for women leaders, it is for their followers on a count of a variety of reasons. It also shows that women leaders are not the same; neither do they have access to the same social media spaces at the same levels. The study indicates that within-country and amongst-women variation

has some class connotations. Data costs, access to assistance, and levels of digital literacy amongst women leaders and their constituencies play a large role in creating asymmetries in access and disparities in women leaders' possession and use of social media properties, as well as their constituents' access to social media. For instance, most women leaders personally manage their social media properties, but some have access to aids and volunteers who operate their social media pages. Whether one manages, or delegates social media management is a function of capacity

Low internet penetration, power shortages, high cost of smartphones and data are other limiting factors cited as preventing rural women leaders from using social media.

and differentiated access to human and material resources. Regardless, beyond the leadership class and the organisations, access remains an issue for their target groups along financial and other capacity lines.

The asymmetries in access are generally replicated along the urban and rural lines with the digital divide preventing rural women leaders from optimum social media utilisation. Low internet penetration, power shortages, high cost of smartphones and data are other limiting factors cited as preventing rural women leaders from using social media. Generally, the study establishes that women's financial (in)capabilities and traditional exclusion continue to be hindrances to women's active political participation online. These findings reemphasise the intersectionality of issues. They also show that conversations around optimising disruptive technologies as a tool to further women's leadership interests must account for gender-based income and other household inequalities. Adopting an intersectional lens on access and use of social media will assist the process of democratising access and control of social media as a resource.

The widespread use of social media highlighted in the study comes with a cautionary note. Despite being perverse, women leaders should consider social media as an aid and enhancement to opportunities for engagement, mobilisation and organisation not a replacement to traditional modes because of its extant limitations in building community. As the Lebanon section of the study highlights, social media remains a useful tool for sharing and accessing information but does not replace offline interactions. As a respondent from Lebanon aptly noted, social media use comes with the potential of "optical illusions." This is because while one may have a large social media footprint as "social media influencer", this may be allied with a glaring absence of respect and acknowledgement on the ground where leadership is practised.

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The study encourages organisations working with women leaders and women in general to provide comprehensive social media training for women leaders on optimal and appropriate targeted use of social media platforms. This, the study argues, will empower women leaders and organisation to move beyond using social media as bulletin boards for sharing information but also as a tool that can aid in enhancing the representative and oversight roles of

women leaders. Also, it urges the promotion and use of social media in vernacular languages, especially in Southern Africa, where most social media use is predominantly English.

The Janus face: Powerful campaign tool, yet replete with gendered violence

Where women leaders have adopted social media as an aid to other organising and communicative processes, the study shows that women have been able to harness and amplify its transformative power on issues of great importance to women. For instance, as the Zimbabwe section of the study shows, the #OurBodiesNotWarZones online campaign helped to raise awareness on the weaponisation of rape by security forces during crackdowns in January 2019. The campaign exposed previously denied cases of rape and the exposure and arrest of "rogue soldiers" demonstrating the power to spur to action, not just women but also authorities. In Jordan, women leaders and activists animated an online campaign with over 63 organisations campaigning for the repeal of Article 308 of the Jordanian penal code. The Article which had previously allowed rapists to escape punishment if they married their victims, was successfully abolished in August 2017. In Zambia, two prominent politicians, Princess Kasuse and Dora Siliya, demonstrated the amount of influence that could be deployed via social media for communication and influencing purposes. Both leaders from opposing sides of the political divide used their social media properties to inform the nation that they had tested positive for Covid-19. They warned citizens to take the disease seriously. These messages were important in painting the reality of the existence of COVID-19 in a country and region whose low infection rates had begun to lead to a lax approach to self-care and safety amid a pandemic.

Case Study:...the Zimbabwe section of the study shows, the #OurBodiesNotWarZones online campaign helped to raise awareness on the weaponisation of rape by security forces during crackdowns in January 2019.

Case Study: In Jordan, women leaders and activists animated an online campaign with over 63 organisations campaigning for the repeal of Article 308 of the Jordanian penal code. The Article which had previously allowed rapists to escape punishment if they married their victims, was successfully abolished in August 2017.

All the countries covered in the study buttress the point that social media is a powerful vehicle for campaigning for and promoting women's rights and galvanising action. However, the verdict is still out regarding social media's effectiveness gendered social change and livelihood transformation. The country studies also reveal that while social media has enhanced women leaders' public profiles and ability to articulate their issues, it is also a ruthless patriarchal battleground which mirrors deep-seated offline patriarchal stereotypes. Despite the space gained and voices enhanced, women leaders' engagement with

and on social media has exposed how retrogressive patriarchal masculinities transcend physical space and are replicated in the virtual, digital and social media space. Even with the safety of nonphysical contact, women's voices continue to be muzzled by men who also continue to impose societal expectations on women online. Across all five countries, women leaders are preyed on through negative and demeaning statements, insulting verbal abuse, and hacking, body shamming, sexualisation and harassment. Confronted by such violence, most women leaders lack clear strategies for dealing with social media abuse. The majority 'just ignore'. This includes abuse by ghost accounts hiding behind pseudonyms to launch attacks on women as well as the spread of fake news online.

The study urges for a more proactive strategy beyond "ignoring" because of deleterious consequences that online attacks have on women's careers and their ability to destroy careers and the esteem of the targeted women leaders. Amongst some of the recommended actions to stem online gender-based violence and cyberbullying and its effects, the study urges women leaders and organisations to explore working with gatekeepers (religious/traditional leaders) on issues of online gender-based violence. In addition, **the study encourages women leaders and organisations to lobby for the enactment, strengthening and improvement of legal enforcement frameworks for prevention of online harassment and gender-based violence with clear punitive sanctions to perpetrators.**

The downside of Social Media & Automation

Another telling finding of the study requiring some committed reflection relates to the downside of

automation and the use of algorithms for user and content targeting by social media companies. Some the findings suggest that algorithm determined user-content targeting poses limitations to reach and diversity, limiting women leaders to silos along very narrowly defined categories. As such, as shown in the Lebanon study, women leaders' followers tend to be from the same community, share similar mindsets and may already engage and understand the same issues. The danger is that social media use can easily be an echo chamber where women leaders and organisations find themselves preaching to the converted. This also limits the ability of social media to assist women leaders and organisations in growing organic online communities and reaching "hard to reach groups" who these algorithms seldom target. It also leaves women leaders' social media utilisation with little room for nuance, complexity, and enhanced depth of engagement and reflection which can come from engaging diverse audiences. Outreach and awareness-raising require a diversity of audiences for women's voices to be heard in spaces beyond the usual audiences that social media algorithms may determine as a "like-minded" audience.

The pages that follow provide brief summaries of the country specific studies.

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JORDAN

FULL REPORT: <https://bit.ly/3p0AFXE>

By Mira Abumoghli

Culture, restrictive stereotypes, tradition and religion, as well as male dominance in the Arab world prevent women from full participation in the public sphere. In Jordan, the gender gap in all life domains manifest more sharply and with greater complexity in terms of women's presence in all types of media. Women remain underrepresented at all levels of governance and their voices are largely excluded in policy and decision making. Despite this, social media has the potential to be an alternative space for critical public debate and socio-political transformation

to improve women's participation in Jordan. It can expand women's influence and aid in asserting their political roles. However, part of the challenge that confronts social media and its potential as a vehicle for women's influence and elevation in political roles is the replication of patriarchal and traditional gender stereotypes of the real world on social media. This replication prevents the full participation of women in public spaces.



Methodology & Framing

This research sought to fill knowledge gaps in understanding whether and how social media in Jordan is an effective tool for opening up spaces for effective women’s participation and leadership in governance. It highlights the gendered ways through which social media is enhancing and hindering the effectiveness of women’s participation in the public sphere. Undergirded by a gender lens, the study employed a mixed methods research design that incorporated both quantitative and qualitative approaches. It used secondary data from policy documents, national and international studies as well as WE4L project documents. Interviews with six (6) Jordanian women leaders working in the fields of community engagement, technology, social work and the legislature generated primary qualitative data, while a survey administered to 18 women leaders with 15-25 years of experience in the public sphere generated quantitative. The data from interviews has been employed to generate case studies that highlight the experiences of women leaders in Jordan in relation to social media.

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Findings

Women’s social media use and purpose in Jordan

The study’s findings show that women in Jordan use social media for both personal and professional objectives, with personal objectives dominant, especially for communicating with family and friends as well as keeping up fashion, beauty and other trends.

Women who deploy social media to professional use often use it for community outreach and advocacy purposes on a women’s rights topics. The large online audiences and the pressure that such audiences place on policy makers through large subscriptions to online discussions has increased the utility of social media for public and private advocacy purposes. In addition, social media has generally helped women to grow their follower bases and audiences to which they can promote their accomplishments and businesses.

Social media’s high transmission speeds has led to it being identified as one of the fastest means of communication and gathering contemporary knowledge on different topics. For some respondent’s social media has additional utility through enhancing social relations and improving social interactions in ways which traditional media creates cannot.

Despite the preceding, there are some restrictions to social media use in Jordan, including restrictions on WhatsApp voice and video calls. There is also split opinion on the usefulness and efficacy of social media with half of survey respondents indicating they had no reservations on the use of social media, while the other half had serious issues with the misuse of social media to spread hate language and fake news.

Impact on policy

Nonetheless, the study found that social media carried a lot of potential as a possible nontraditional tool that Jordanian women leaders can use to enhance public participation, reach and impact. This power was on potential and the impact of social media on policy is the repeal of was on display in Jordan during deliberations, protests and actions around Article 308 of the Jordanian penal code (the infamous rape law), which allowed rapists to escape punishment if they marry their victims. Women activists from all walks of life in Jordan worked tirelessly to garner public support, advocate with Members of Parliament, and communicate with the international community to repeal this article. Individuals and organizations used social media to mount a concerted effort around repealing Article 308. Politicians, civil society groups and women’s rights organizations at local, regional and international levels also utilized social media around this campaign, making social media a “virtual galaxy”, capable of reaching different and disparate sections of Jordanian society.

Case Study: ...protests and actions around Article 308 of the Jordanian penal code (the infamous rape law), which allowed rapists to escape punishment if they marry their victims. Women activists from all walks of life in Jordan worked tirelessly to garner public support, advocate with Members of Parliament, and communicate with the international community to repeal this article. Individuals and organizations used social media to mount a concerted effort around repealing Article 308.

Challenges around social media use, women’s leadership, and participation

While social media is modern innovation, patriarchal and traditional gender stereotypes still manifest on social media. Beyond this general observation, the study specifically noted the following challenges with women’s social media use in Jordan:

1. Cyber bullying and hate speech as well as praises for and inciting misogyny and other unethical behaviors.
2. Social media’s role in catalyzing the emergence of unrealistic societal expectations of beauty and fashion based on the consumerist culture promoted online. The fashion and beauty standards, which are difficult to attain, put pressure on women users of social media who see the glamorous ideal and tend engage in the futile effort of wanting to live up to it leading to increased dissatisfaction and unhappiness with one’s life and reality.
3. Some women do not use social media in their work because of the sensitivities of their work that prevents free expression.

Recommendations

1. Cybercrimes law: While Jordan enacted a Cybercrimes law in 2015 and amended it in 2018 to deal with cyberbullying ostensibly in aid to women, its effectiveness and that of its implementing arm, the Cybercrimes Unit, remains as has publicity around it. It needs to be popularized and women leaders and organisations need to increase conscientisation around it as well as increase awareness on policies and legislation that protect women online.
2. Alternative ways to defend women from cybercrimes beyond blocking offending parties and reporting need to be developed and inculcated

in women leaders and organisations plying their activism online.

3. Changing narratives and discourses: Capacity building for Women leaders on how to enhance their online presence as well as use it to generate engagement on non-traditional topics and gender sensitive content is required through technical, financial and substantive support for progressive narratives development and marketing.

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Lebanon

FULL REPORT: <https://bit.ly/3eDQtuC>

By Nour Jane Kachicho and Francesca El Asmar

Patriarchal social norms and institutionalized discrimination continue to entrench the systemic exclusion of women from formal and informal decision-making arenas in Lebanon. Modern communication tools, including social media, have the potential to disrupt systemic exclusion and counter barriers to effective women's participation in leadership structures. Technology has the potential to redefine, remodel and reshape women's leadership, their interaction with communities, and development of networks. This research contributes to the body of knowledge on the effectiveness of social media in enhancing women participation in their individual capacity and as organized groups in Lebanon. The study explores the use and transformative impact of social media on women's leadership and empowerment and assesses whether and how social media has been a boon and bane regarding the interests of women leaders and the organizations that support them.

Methodology & Framing

The study is anchored on evidence from in-depth interviews with individual women leaders drawn from the fields of business, medicine and academia, as well as women in leadership positions within organizations that support women's leadership. It also draws on a qualitative and quantitative ethnographic exploration of transient digital meta-fields and interviewees' publics to triangulate perspectives on the use and impact of social media. The research focused on specific social media platforms, i.e.

Women's lived experiences, positionalities, and technical expertise significantly shape the leadership processes or positions as well as their personal leadership styles.

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn. It uses Batliwala's framing of feminist leadership as

a means for transformative change and juxtaposes social media use and feminist leadership along five key qualities as follows: (1.) a vision for social change, (2.) the role of the self; (3.) collectivity; (4) sources of authority and, (5.) understanding of power structures.

The framing positions social media as a structure and space for the reversal of power imbalances and patriarchal norms and practices. In complementing Batliwala's feminist leadership theory, the study invokes the auteur theory in explaining differences in use based on the individual experiences of women leaders. Women's lived experiences, positionalities, and technical expertise significantly shape the leadership processes or positions as well as their personal leadership styles. These factors ultimately impact their use of social media, their vision, values, practices and the transformative potential of the same. Personal experiences shape the sub-consciousness choice behind content generation and social media choice, levels of engagement of social media, and pushback strategies to the social media toxicity.

Findings

Women's social media choices, use, and purpose in Lebanon

With the digital environment in a constant state of flux, existing digital platforms are evolving and giving birth to new platforms that are continuously launched into the market. The study shows that women choose particular social media platforms based on their objectives for using social media, and that this choice is moderated by the context and dynamics in which they interact as well as the realm in they exercise leadership. The findings confirm the utility of social media as a tool for women leaders and organizations and promotion



of such leadership. They show that social media can bypass traditional media, such as television and print, which often mirror offline patriarchal structures because of the political economy of their ownership and control.

Generally, Women in Lebanon utilize social media for its large audiences. They use social media to promote themselves, build credibility, authority and legitimacy, shape socio-political and economic narratives, raise awareness, and call for political action/change. As examples Haytayan, used social media to share her political views during the 2018 elections, while Amira Kobrosli, a mother and educator, uses specific hashtags (#motherhood #momsofinstagram #momlife #motherhoodunplugged #motherhoodjourney) to raise awareness around motherhood through her own experiences. Uses by organizations include campaigning, raising awareness, to promote visions, to promote events, increase event attendance engage with a wider audience and to understand trends to support women in leadership in acquiring visibility and sometimes credibility. LLWB uses social media mainly to share information; a closer look at their platforms shows that they also use it to share upcoming and past events. LLWB for instance uses social media to share information with the external publics. They used social media to announce their new board of directors for 2020-2023.

Case Study: Haytayan, used social media to share her political views during the 2018 elections, while Amira Kobrosli, a mother and educator, uses specific hashtags (#motherhood #momsofinstagram #momlife #motherhoodunplugged #motherhoodjourney) to raise awareness around motherhood through her own experiences.

Social Media as an Advocacy Tool

However, how individual women leaders and organisations use social media for advocacy differs on two main grounds, i.e. the power of numbers and links to other powerful organizations in the political and public policy arena; and the availability of human, financial and technological resources earmarked for social media advocacy within the organizations. In Lebanon, advocacy by organizations has been effective in challenging public opinion on gender justice and women’s leadership. LADE, as an example, develops and shares social media content raising awareness around democratic elections, including electoral laws, quotas, policy and legal reform. LADE also produces several social media campaigns to tackle social distribution of gender roles. Another common use for social media is information sharing. Stand For Women, for instance, delivers training for women leadership in business developed by founder Caroline Fattal based on her own professional experience with discrimination of women in business.

The current study identified social media as a tool that can be used to build virtual “communities’ with potential impact offline. According to Moawad, ‘the online world is important for a lot of people to build credibility and use individual and collective voices to highlight critical issues, but it is not enough to get a comprehensive picture of reality without work on the groundwork. For online engagements to achieve some degree of impact, they must not substitute, but complement work on the ground to avoid the phenomenon of an “optical illusion of social media”. Nonetheless, social media has achieved the impact of building solidarity and support among women and women’s groups at local, regional and international levels with positive outcomes on both policy and practice.

Challenges & Limitations around social media use, women’s leadership, and participation

The study found that social media impact is not always positive but is a double edged sword with both positives and negatives. It also found and problematized the perverse use of social media as a space for “calling out” and “criticizing” rather than being a solution-oriented platform to hold others accountable.

The other downside of social media in Lebanon is the replication of harmful social norms such as the use of toxic language, online violence and threats that cause self-censorship, in the process restricting women’s engagement in the leadership processes. In line with the feminist theory, social media brings into play challenges related to competition and individualism founded in patriarchal, capitalist and neo-liberal systems. This prevents social media from contributing to feminist leadership as a collective political process. As a result, social media does not allow nuanced debates with complexity, depth and reflection. Social media does not contribute to feminist leadership goals of creating structures and spaces for disrupting power imbalances and patriarchal norms.

In line with the feminist theory, social media brings into play challenges related to competition and individualism founded in patriarchal, capitalist and neo-liberal systems.

Another negative dimension revealed by the study is the profit-orientation of social media applications. Social media platforms determine post placement on users’ feeds based on complex computation of a series of factors ranging from the geographic location of the user to the degree of engagement with a particular subject. As such, one’s followers tend to be from the same community with similar mindsets and already engaged on the issues shared. Algorithms become obstacle to reaching wider audiences, making the nexus between community-building, feminist

leadership, and social media very complex turning social media into more of an “eco-chamber” that limits engagements with wider audiences.

Conclusion & Recommendation

Social media remains a rapidly evolving set of tools and platforms, and its effectiveness in supporting women’s leadership and facilitating women’s individual and collective abilities to create social change is also evolving. Ultimately, the usefulness of the tool depends on the type of leadership that is exercised, as

well as its objectives. For such tools, platforms, and the internet as a whole to facilitate space for organizing and collective work on feminist change, there is need for the creation of people-owned, free and alternative networks that foster healthier interactions, accountability mechanisms and spaces for debate. Nevertheless, sustaining offline tools and spaces for engagement and collective leadership processes with visions of feminist social change remains crucial.

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Malawi

FULL REPORT: <https://bit.ly/3eDTdrt>

By Centre for Civil Society Strengthening (CCSS)

Despite an increase in the number of women leaders elected into councils and parliament in the May 2019, political leadership in Malawi remains male-dominated. Women occupy only 23% of the National Assembly seats while at local government level women occupy only 14% of the council seats. Women face various challenges to active participation in politics including deeply entrenched patriarchal systems, gender norms, political violence, corruption, intimidation, hatred and character assassination. Social media can bypass some of these constraints and bridge the gap that often separates grassroots women’s activism from policy-making processes. The explosion of social media and women’s unprecedented use of new technologies represents important opportunities to bring gender equality and women’s rights issues to the forefront of both policies making and media attention. Social media has grown exponentially in the last decade rendering traditional information and data gathering methods almost obsolete.

Methodology & Data Collection

The Malawi study assess the effectiveness of social media as a tool of opening up spaces for women leaders’ participation. It gathered information on the trends, possible case studies and projected future trends of social media and its use by women in and aspiring for leadership. The study gauged the social media sentiment about women leaders and how it influences public perception of women in leadership positions. It compares social media and traditional media to determine the added value of investing in social and online media. It also investigated the potential pitfalls of social media use by women leaders in Malawi and used data from Key Informant Interviews (KII) to develop case studies. The Key Informant

Interviews were with women leaders, voters, service providers, and WE4L partners. The research also utilized secondary data extracted from WE4L project documents and other relevant sources.

Findings

Women’s social media choices, use, and purpose in Malawi

The type of social media platform used by women leaders in Malawi is dependent on cost and the women leader’s level of digital literacy. Facebook and WhatsApp are the main platforms being used by women leaders in Malawi. Limited digital literacy, high data tariffs and growing levels of cyber-bullying towards women, despite available protective legislation, prevent women from full utilization of social media platforms. The study identified vote seeking, resource mobilization, social, information sharing, whistleblowing and activism as the main uses of social media. Low digital literacy limits Women leaders full optimization of social media through sophisticated campaigns, advocacy and engagement with solution holders.

Limited digital literacy, high data tariffs and growing levels of cyber-bullying towards women, despite available protective legislation, prevent women from full utilization of social media platforms.

However, despite limited utilisation, social media has proved to be a powerful vehicle for bringing women’s rights issues to the attention of a wider public, galvanizing action, and encouraging policymakers to step up their commitments to gender equality. The study recommends additional training for women leaders to realize the full potential of social media networks.

There has been a widespread realization that the majority of voters in Malawi are the youth and are active on online platforms. With growing diaspora population, social media will continue to allow influential people and opinion leaders abroad to communicate with people in the constituencies and influence the opinions and voting trends. Going forward social media will remain a useful platform to engage voters and for elected officials to share development programs and progress with the electorate.

While the study acknowledges the power of social media, there are nearly 8.57 million mobile phone subscribers in Malawi, millions of whom are not online. Despite Malawi being one of the poorest countries in the world, it has one of the highest internet charges. Poor telecommunications infrastructure, digital illiteracy and low internet penetration (especially in marginalized areas) limit the use of social media by low income groups. Social media can thus be complemented with the use of bulk SMSs to take campaign messages to a large percentage of voters. Traditional media namely, TV, Radio and newspapers reach wider audiences. For example, 96 % of Malawi's population listens to the radio including the state-owned Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC), seven private broadcasters and 17 community stations. Social media advocacy must be complemented with traditional media for maximum impact.

Social Media As An Advocacy Tool On Women's Issues

50-50 campaigners in Malawi used social media ahead of the 2019 elections to promote women candidates. The campaign is credited with increasing women's participation in the election and increasing the number of elected women leaders. It is however, the limited role of the individual in the campaign that was a missed opportunity to profile the individual women leaders' abilities and strengths. This was a lost opportunity, and the study found that women leaders have limited knowledge on how they can maximize/amplify their

profiles and enhance their visibility online, and bear the high costs associated with social media campaigns. The study recommends that development partners should consider providing more funding to strengthen digital strategies so that more women can use social media in the exercise of their representative and oversight roles as members of parliament and councilors.

Challenges & Negative aspects of social media use in Malawi

The study noted the manifestation of patriarchy online as a worrying trend. Many negative online stereotypes trace back to entrenched patriarchy, and highly personalized political systems that are difficult to change in the short term. Social media platforms are abused to harass and intimidate women leaders.

The study also identified fake news and its quick spread on social media as a challenge for women leaders. While legal frameworks such as the Electronic Transactions & Cybersecurity Act, 2016 (ETCA) are in place to deal with cyberbullying, enforcement is poor, and awareness of the laws is minimal resulting in citizens not being eager or able to seek legal recourse for the violations. The study further observed a lack of strategy or mechanism, by both implementing agencies and women leaders, to counter online gender-based violence. This increases the vulnerability of women leaders, possibly explaining why many choose to abandon the electoral race due to the psychological impact of online abuse, compromising their ability to compete. Voters tend to believe what they hear and read on social media, particularly if there are no efforts to quell the rumors perpetrated by their competitors. The study also recommends exploring the role of men in supporting the fight against unethical online conduct including identifying HeforShe champions in all implementing areas to support in the fight.

Case Study: 50-50 campaigners in Malawi used social media ahead of the 2019 elections to promote women candidates. The campaign is credited with increasing women's participation in the election and increasing the number of elected women leaders.



By DevCom Consulting Ltd

Representation of women in Zambia's decision making and governance structures remains short of meeting the African Union (AU) and Southern African Development Community (SADC) threshold of 30 percent and 50 percent respectively. In Southern Africa, Zambia has the lowest proportion of women's representation in parliament and local councils at only 15% of the legislature and 6% within local councils. The gender disparity is also reflected in traditional leadership where out of 288 Chiefs, only 30 (10%) are women and all paramount chiefs are men. Limited representation of women, who constitute 50.7% of the population undermines Zambia's democracy. Some of the barriers to women's participation include the legal framework, the political culture, patriarchal values and norms, women's limited access to resources, negative practices in political parties, and negative portrayal of women in traditional media. The use and popularity of social media technologies that have grown exponentially particularly since the United Nations declared access to and use of the Internet a human

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right in 2011, has the potential to help women achieve greater political parity and leadership positions across all facets of life.

Methodology & Approach

The growth of social media has fueled interest in how social media affects citizens' participation in civic and political life and specific areas of activism, such as gender and child rights. Internet penetration in Zambia is moderate with a clear digital divide between rural and urban and other socio-economic demographics. With a median age of 16.6 years and a literacy rate of 65.76% (15 and 24 age group), Zambia has a fairly young and literate population with potential for improvement in the coming years hence it is important to establish trends in social media use and its challenges. This study investigated the opportunities and challenges posed by social media and social network systems to women in leadership and how women rose to meet these technology mediated challenges and opportunities. The study sought to determine the effectiveness of social media in opening up space for women leaders' participation in Zambia.

Using the network society and technological determinism as theoretical frameworks, the study examines the extent to which social media influences societal dynamics in Zambia, specifically on whether it is an enabler or inhibitor to women's leadership careers and gender activism. It also investigates and characterizes women's participation on social media and their experiences with social media technologies. Technological developments over the last decade have led to the convergence of online media, such as online newspapers, and social networking platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, blurring the distinctions between them. This study also compares use of social media to traditional media for gender activism and career progression among the women leaders in Zambia. Data for the study was gathered using mixed approaches in both collection and analysis. The study used a survey that was completed in face to face and virtual interviews. The survey was a 'forced-choice' questionnaire administered to 108 women aged 18 years and above, drawn from past, present and aspiring women leaders in politics, NGOs, CSOs, CBOs, sports, private sector, church, traditional establishments among other sectors. Survey participants were randomly sampled from lists provided by HIVOS partners in Zambia. The researchers also carried out ethnographic review of social media pages of influential personalities and women-centric organizations and campaigns within the Zambian digital space. Data collected from online ethnographic research was also used in identification and selection of case studies for analysis and documentation of experiences from the use of social media among four women leaders. In-depth interviews with four leading women social media users were used to develop four case studies.

Findings

Social media use

Findings from the study show that the majority of women leaders interviewed had relatively high access to and use of the Internet, only 20% of those interviewed had no access to the internet at all. The study established strong relationships between income, Internet experience and perceived knowledge of use of social media. Most women leaders in the higher income brackets have been online for more than five years. Based on previous studies establishing a positive

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correction between long experience with the Internet and effective digital media use, the study infers women leaders in Zambia could be effectively using social media. However, beyond certain income brackets,

the study revealed low social media use for politics and advocacy despite the majority of the respondents being in politics. This 'admission' is consistent with the limited number of women-led advocacy platforms during the ethnographic exploration of the Zambian digital space.

The study revealed that women leaders use social media for communication, information sharing, opinion reviews, marketing themselves, utility, education and research, collaboration and networking, social interaction, news, lobbying and advocacy. Regarding communication, social media appears to provide a good platform for leaders to discover what the public is thinking and is a better arbiter of public sentiment than traditional media. The study affirms the positive role of social media regarding women leaders' career progression with some indicating they would not be where they are had it not been of social media. Almost all the women in the survey agreed that social media was a helpful tool for both upcoming and established women leaders.

Challenges & Recommendations

The use of social media in Zambia suits the description of a double-edged sword. While social media platforms present the novelty of interactivity, flexibility and customization to every facet of human life, they also pose the risks of abuse that come with all digital and interactive media. The hostile cyberspace prevents women from fully realizing the potential of social media in their leadership and careers. The study identified demeaning/negative comments, insults, verbal abuse, cyberbullying and hacking as the most common abuse experienced by women on social media. Challenges identified by some respondents include 'threats to life or career', sexual abuse and false accusations. In addition, the majority of respondents felt that social media is so focused on personality rather than issues of importance to society.

The possibility of anonymity on social media also breeds users that are braver than they are in reality. However, this is also giving rise social media trolls who attack those who question government policy. Patriarchy also feeds these attacks and negative sentiments through personal attacks based on one's looks and marriage status and not substantive issues. The study recommends for more women-centric social media platforms and legal measures to control cyberbullying like enacting the ICT Data Protection Bill, Cyber Security Bill, Cyber Crime Bill, E-Commerce and E-Transaction Bill.

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Zimbabwe

FULL REPORT: <https://bit.ly/3kXddlI>

By Professor Bruce Mutsvairo

The Constitution of Zimbabwe has "recognition of the equality of all human beings" as a founding principle in Section 3(1). The law in Section 17(1) implores the state to promote gender balance and the full participation of women in all spheres of Zimbabwean society. However, there is notable male dominance in leadership due to sociocultural and traditional beliefs regarding the role of women in the society, patriarchal attitudes and religious practices. Women have, however, begun to reclaim some power in sectors like civil society and business using social media to claim space and assert their leadership. Despite this progress, social media platforms

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in Zimbabwe are dominated by business, religious and entertainment personalities although there is increased uptake of social media by Zimbabweans in other sectors presenting opportunities for women to strengthen their leadership roles. Against this backdrop, this research sought to examine the dynamics of social media use in Zimbabwe using the its women leaders as a point of departure. Its methodology centered on key informant interviews with 20 women leaders and a digital ethnographic assessment of selected social media pages.

Findings

Women leaders' social media use in Zimbabwe

Findings from the study show that Zimbabwean women use social media to share information about their personal and organizational plans or accomplishments, as well as to post updates about

their family and friends. They credit social media with exposing them to a more diverse world, allowing them to construct positive images of themselves as well as helping to build and strengthening long-lasting friendships. The study found that social media allows women to instantly connect and share updates on their lives and businesses and is a key tool for connecting and maintaining relationships, learning more about their communities and the world through news updates as well as providing opportunities to be involved in online activism.

Social media networking opportunities also help women find jobs, get exposure to critical information and establish enduring business contacts and solidarity. However, the extent to which women use social media to discuss political issues is limited on account of a politically charged environment. Despite these challenges, the study found that Facebook's ability to use text, videos and pictures to evoke feelings of sympathy and empathy among followers is a valued resource. Some women leaders use social media to communicate with people in their constituencies and as a touchstone for the communities' pulse. Other women leaders also use it to conduct trainings because it reaches a wider audience in a short time.

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Social media as an advocacy tool on women's issues

Social media platforms have given a voice for women to air their grievances and to champion campaigns on different issues including security sector brutality and rape, equal representation in key institutions and social issues such as child marriages. Twitter has proved to be an online arsenal for advocacy because of its ability to reach a diverse global audience. News articles covering a march against sexual abuse, for instance, were shared through the #OurBodiesNotWarZones hashtag, allowing others to share and like messages and photos.

The effectiveness of social media to support policy change is however questionable in a context where policy is still mostly driven by men, who have the political power and influence to impose it. As an example, hashtags such as #OurBodiesNotWarZones raised awareness to critical issues affecting women but at the army disputed any allegations that cast its members in negative light, making it difficult for victims to get justice. This example

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revealed the limitations of social media advocacy which is useful in raising awareness to critical issues but limited in its ability to drive genuine and sustainable policy change. The study found that awareness is a good starting point but is not good enough on its own.

Social media challenges in relation to women leaders

While some women leaders consider social media a fun and unfiltered platform for self-expression in a many-to-many communication format, the Zimbabwean Twitter-sphere is a particularly ruthless battleground where women have to endure online harassment. The study showed that male dominance in Zimbabwe extends to social media, replicating the patriarchal attitudes that reinforce existing sexist attitudes against women in real life. Online abusers, who often hide behind anonymous names, stage attacks on Facebook and Twitter and see no harm in openly abusing women online, at an increasing rate. The study found that harassment usually occurs on public spaces of social media platforms although some abusers have the audacity to extend abuse to the inbox.

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While the study notes cyberbullying as a general online ill, online violence, cyberbullying, digitally based misogyny, sexism and systematic campaigns to tarnish reputations of women are more common in politics. Some women said the danger of being active on social media included exposing themselves to potential abuse, especially if their political correctness collided with the worldview of popular social media figures. From these attacks, the reputations of women emerge damaged from the online political and electoral contestations that manifest as mudslinging and skulduggery. Other negative aspects of social media identified by the study include its capacity to quickly disseminate fake news and the promotion of immorality.

In response to the toxicity of social media, likeminded women are finding solace in women-only, closed Facebook groups initiated specifically to address and discuss women's 'issues and grievances. The study shows that technology has not only directly impacted women's development but has also enabled their voice to reach out to likeminded individuals and groups. Other strategies employed in response to use of abusive language and harassment towards women include self-censorship of content and staying away from social media altogether.



The study also found that the preponderance of the use of English as the lingua franca on social media prevents some women from effective online participation, turning social media into an elite space. The technological digital divide, caused in part by deep-seated cultural barriers against women especially in rural areas, means not all women are able stay digitally connected. To guard against potential disconnection caused by digital inequalities, this report recommends the following:

1. Digital dissemination in local vernacular languages.
2. Funding to promote inclusive digital participation among vulnerable groups, like rural-based women and youth.
3. Introduce tough laws that impose heavy penalties for online abusers.
4. Women groups to provide online support groups to victims of online abuse.







Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the
Netherlands

