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Social media and women's leadership: a feminist analysis

Nour Jane Kachicho and Francesca El Asmar

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Executive summary

Patriarchal social norms and institutionalized discrimination in Lebanon have led to the systemic exclusion of women from formal and informal decision-making arenas. Nevertheless, women still take on a variety of leadership roles in different realms of public life and persistently challenge a system that positions them as second-class citizens. Across different fields, they lead daily struggles to reach their personal and organizational goals and, in many cases, to contribute to social change while adopting myriad strategies and tools. Amongst these, social media has emerged as one of the most predominant tools used by women to engage in leadership processes and roles. In fact, such modern communication tools are changing the leadership landscape and redefining spaces whilst creating possibilities for an increased representation of women. These tools are also used as a way to bypass the more traditional media, such as television and print, which are not always as accessible. Nevertheless, although social media may be a convenient platform for outreach, to build online communities, to amplify voices and to create global discourses, it also comes with risks. In fact these spaces could allow for patriarchal norms and practices of leadership to be reproduced.

This research paper looks at the ways in which social media can facilitate or hinder women's leadership and its transformative potential. It is informed by in-depth semi-structured interviews with individual women who hold or have held leadership positions, as well as women in leadership positions within organizations that support women's leadership in different ways. It also draws on a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the interviewees' social media accounts.

Examining social media as a tool for women's leadership requires a clear framework of how leadership is to be understood. Leadership is central and an essential aspect of humanity, and there are many theories of leadership that have emerged since the 19th century. With the aim of problematizing and challenging traditional notions of leadership, however, we focus our understanding on alternative models that have been conceptualized by feminist activists and scholars. More specifically, the analysis builds on Batliwala's feminist leadership framework (2011), in which she posits feminist leadership as a means to bring forth transformative change, with an attempt to avoid reproducing patriarchal structures and hierarchies. Feminist leadership emerges where there are structural inequalities and power imbalances that put women at a disadvantage. Women's lived experiences navigating patriarchal structures and oppression also play a big role in the leadership style and change goals they adopt. By applying auteur theory, which was initially introduced in the field of cinema with a focus on the film director, it is evident that the expression of the individual is often shaped by their experiences. For this reason, it is an imperative concept when placing women leaders on the map and in examining their activity and use of social media.

Current bodies of literature on feminist leadership is overwhelmingly informed by Western and published works. In an effort to contribute to knowledge around alternative models and practices of leadership, this paper draws on experiences, definitions and self-definitions of leadership of women in Lebanon. While definitions of leadership are many and depend on various factors, five key elements were identified, making up leadership as a dynamic and collective process, shaped by change goals, values and practices, as well as systemic constraints, personal experiences and relationships of power. First, a vision for social change built on solid values is central to any leadership process. When it comes to feminist leadership, transformative social change for gender justice takes center stage in defining such a vision. Second, the role of the self, particularly, women's lived experiences in navigating patriarchal

structures and systems of oppression, define characteristics, interactions, aspirations and practices of leadership. Third, collectivity is a central element for feminism, and translating this into leadership processes means challenging ideas of competition and individualism founded in patriarchal, capitalist and neo-liberal systems, and instead valuing collective action, knowledge and contributions and sharing power and responsibility. Fourth, sources of authority are a critical element that make up leadership, and those may be assigned, positional or earned. Authority also comes from lived experiences and may be translated into influence over others to follow a certain path, fight for a cause, or engage in leadership themselves. Finally, central to feminist theory is the understanding of power structures and how those may reproduce and perpetuate systems of oppression and inequality. A feminist analysis of leadership therefore focuses on the idea of holding, exercising or challenging power dynamics and distribution. Feminist leadership would seek to create structures and spaces in which power imbalances and patriarchal norms and practices would be disrupted, rather than reproduced. Feminist leadership is nevertheless exercised within larger oppressive systems, and establishing transparent, participatory, and communal accountability mechanisms is crucial.

This research paper also looks at how social media is used by women in leadership and by organizations that support them. Indeed while digital technologies are evolving, there are new virtual spaces being formed that can be used by women leaders to advance their agenda. Some of the women leaders make use of social media to self-promote and grow their offline networks, and some use these platforms to shape the narrative around socio-political issues. Others set about using these online platforms to raise awareness around certain issues when calling for action or change. Such platforms are used to engage and communicate with others both locally and globally. Organizations that support women's leadership also use social media to advocate and campaign to promote their vision and influence public opinion, as well as to disseminate information to a wider public and raise awareness around certain topics. These organizations also use the tools to promote events, improve outreach, take discussions online, as well as to engage with a wider audience and understand trends.

The paper further analyses the different ways in which social media can be used as a tool for women's leadership, while also presenting the risks and challenges that come with the platform. Women's roles in Lebanon are already defined by patriarchal social norms that limit their engagement with leadership, regardless of their field. Social media can generally be considered an alternative platform where women can voice their concerns, reach a wide audience, and influence public opinion. However, social media can also be a patriarchal space in which harmful social norms are mirrored, leading to attacks, violence and harassment. Nevertheless, many organizations in Lebanon seek to address some of these barriers, by working towards changing the narrative around women in leadership roles, and advocate for policy and legal reform, often with the use of social media. However, their progress in supporting women's leadership through online tools depends heavily on dedicated resources for online activity.



Moreover, feminist models of leadership have shown that fostering collective power and understanding community needs can lead to building fairer and more transformative leadership processes. Many have referred to social media as a tool to build 'a community' or a space to build solidarity and mutual support among women. However, even though social media can be regarded as a tool that increases outreach and engagement with a wider audience, limitations remain. For example, while the number and type of followers on social media can be an indication of community building in some cases, they are often misleading. Followers also tend to be from the same community, limiting awareness-raising and outreach efforts – restrictions which are for the most part created by the algorithms set in place by the social media platforms themselves.

As per the feminist leadership framework underpinning this research, there are different sources and manifestations of authority, credibility and legitimacy. Having a deep understanding of the community or the group's needs and experiences, and using this understanding to shape one's vision, provides a solid basis for credibility and authority. While social media may indeed be a useful tool to develop some understanding of the needs of a community or of mainstream narratives and debates, observing engagement on digital platforms is not enough to understand the lived experiences of others nor to get a comprehensive picture of reality. Additionally, gaining credibility and legitimacy on social media has been problematized, particularly in relation to "social media activists" or "social media leaders" or influencers, which may create an illusion of change, rather than contributing to actual change on the ground.



Moreover, as feminist leadership practices suggest, increasing transparency, participatory and communal accountability, can create shared power, which potentially avoids reproducing oppressive forms of leadership. Therefore, women in leadership processes must reimagine non-hierarchical practices in the way they take decisions and are held accountable for them, and more importantly in how they facilitate a space for healthy discussions. However, structures where decision-making power is shared can produce challenges as well, especially when considering individual vs. collective power. This is also true when examining social media and its individualistic nature. To foster support and ensure that power isn't used unaccountably and in an oppressive manner, it is important to ensure accountability mechanisms are in place, when addressing leadership that is individual or shared. To that regard, social media could be problematized as a space for calling out and criticizing rather than holding people accountable constructively and in a healthy manner. It is also relevant to explore the roles of women who lead organizations that support women's leadership and unpack how this power is translated to social media, as it inadvertently influences the leadership model those organizations promote.

In brief, women's lived experiences, their positionalities in certain communities and groups, and sometimes their technical expertise, significantly shape the leadership processes or positions they engage in as well as their personal leadership styles. As patriarchal social norms in the actual world are very often also reflected in the virtual world, women face significant pressures in accessing resources and spaces, but also different forms of attacks and violence, online as well. This makes the relationship between community-building - an aspect that is central for feminist leadership - and social media complex. Social media may indeed provide an alternative space and tools for women's leadership to be exercised, and for women to work towards and achieve transformative change. However, it is important in studying leadership to understand the nuances and diversity in different women's experiences, and between the different types of leadership they exercise in different fields, and with different objectives. It is important to also note that where social media is useful, its effectiveness is increased when resources are available. 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 could therefore evolve as well. Ultimately, the usefulness of the tool depends on the type of leadership that is being exercised, as well as its specific objectives. For such tools and platforms to be used to facilitate a space for organizing and collective work on feminist change, this would necessitate 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.



Introduction

Patriarchal social norms and institutionalized discrimination in Lebanon have led to the systemic exclusion of women from formal and informal decision-making arenas. Opportunities for women to engage in decision-making and access positions of power are limited, which pushes them to compete rather than support each other through alternative models of leadership. Nevertheless, women still take on a variety of leadership roles in different realms of public life and persistently challenge a system that positions them as second-class citizens. This not only includes their engagement with both established and nascent political parties, but also the active and leading roles they take on in civil society, and most recently in the October 17 revolution. Women in Lebanon have also taken on leadership roles in other spaces, such as the private and entrepreneurial sectors, as well as in their families and their communities. Across different fields, women lead daily struggles to reach their personal and organizational goals and, in many cases, to contribute to social change while adopting myriad strategies and tools. Amongst these, social media has emerged, in today's digital age, as one of the most predominant tools used by women to engage in leadership processes and roles.

With the shift of communication channels from traditionally-led advertising through radio, newspaper, tv, etc. to modern channels such as social media, the world has opened up new spaces that create more inclusivity and offer accessibility for women, despite many limitations. Social media literacy allows women to use the platform to gain more visibility and exposure for themselves and their causes. By being active on the medium, women automatically increase their representation, thereby eliminating the invisible power that often takes place offline, one that Srilatha Batliwala (2011) refers to in her framework on feminist leadership. Therefore, it is not surprising that over time social media has become the media of choice for women's civil and political activism; a place to connect and build online communities. Research has found that there are similarities between behaviours of women offline and on social media that are of an encouraging nature and supportive of one another, using the platform to establish contacts and seek opportunities (Erçetin, 2016). In this regard, social media has been used to respond to injustice, amplify voices, and generally form global discourses around the social and political changes occurring in the region (Moghadam, 2019). This is evident through protests and the retransmissions of events 'live' to a vast online audience, such as during the waves of uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa region (Loiseau and Nowacka, 2015). Women's digital political activism also include hashtags to create global and local discourses. For instance, in Lebanon, the #NoLawNoVote campaign by KAFA in 2014 sought to put pressure on decision-makers to adopt a law protecting women from domestic violence (KAFA, 2014). Although research shows that women outnumber men on social networking sites, social media can be a patriarchal structure in itself. The fact that the platforms are initiated and developed by men raises the question of the reproduction of patriarchal norms. Women are generally expected to communicate more socially and with a positive tone (Taras and Davis, 2019) and have been found to place higher priority on creating a positive self-presentation, while men are less concerned about the image they present (Haferkamp et al., 2012), mirroring offline norms. While social media can be a tool that enables and facilitates, such as with the 'live' feature that creates instant communication, and the number of followers that is often perceived as an indication of popularity among leaders, it does, however, create risks and additional challenges including censorship and harassment as well as information overload and activism fatigue. A message that is communicated from an exposed individual on social media, can easily be used against them to lower their credibility instantly. There is also the risk of gender based violence that often occurs, though the tool can also help victims share their experiences and sometimes even hold their perpetrators accountable (Loiseau and Nowacka, 2015). Lastly, popular accounts which boast a large number of followers can often be associated with leadership and success, but what is overlooked in fact, is their potential to contribute to social change and create impact.

This research paper seeks to examine the ways in which social media tools and platforms can promote or hinder women's leadership. It first addresses definitions of leadership, drawing on insights and self-definitions by women engaging in leadership in Lebanon. It then looks at how social media

is used by women in leadership and by the organizations that support them. Finally, it provides an analysis of the different ways in which social media can be used as a tool for women's leadership, but also the risks and challenges it presents. This analysis focuses on key elements of leadership as understood and defined by feminist theorists and the women who participated in this research; these include structural constraints and the temporalities of women's leadership, the critical role of communities and collective action, the need for healthy accountability mechanisms, and the importance of examining power relations, as well as sources and manifestations of authority.



Methodology

This research report is based on a **qualitative research methodology**, with the aim of capturing the diverse and nuanced experiences of women in relation to their use of social media platforms and tools for various objectives related to exercising and engaging with leadership. It draws on a **desk review** focused on three core literature bodies:

- **Women's leadership in Lebanon, online and offline experiences**
- **Feminist leadership theories**
- **Women's leadership and social media**

A series of **12 in-depth semi-structured interviews** conducted in July 2020 inform the analysis in this paper. 9 live interviews were conducted through video-conferencing tools, while the remaining 3 consisted of email interviews. Interviews focused on definitions and practices of leadership, and the use of social media as a tool for women's leadership, including the opportunities, challenges and risks that it creates. Two categories of interviewees make up the sample for data collection: individual women who were identified as holding or having held positions of leadership in their respective fields, as well as women in leadership positions within organizations that support women's leadership in different ways. Below is a list of interviewees that participated in the research process:

Individual women who hold or have held leadership positions:

1-Amira Kobrosli, educator, manages an Instagram page to share her experience of motherhood and counter mainstream narratives of "perfect" mothers, core member of the Know Your Place (KYP) community.

2-Gael Abou Ghannam, obstetrician and gynecologist (OB/GYN), manages an Instagram page to raise awareness about women's health, with 25k followers.

3-Laury Haytayan, candidate in the 2018 Lebanese parliamentary elections; MENA Director at Natural Resource Governance Institute (NRGI), oil & gas expert.

4-Nadine Moawad, feminist activist with experience and knowledge around issues of digital rights.

5-Paula Yacoubian, former member of parliament, won in the 2018 elections and resigned in August 2020 following the Beirut explosion.

6-Rima Majed, sociologist, assistant professor of sociology at the American University of Beirut (AUB), researcher with a focus on social movements, sectarianism and gender, feminist and economic justice activist.



Women representing organizations supporting women's leadership:

- 1 - **Asma Zein**, advisor to the Board, Lebanese League for Women in Business (LLWB), an organization that supports professional women.
- 2 - **Caroline Fattal**, founder of Stand for Women, an organization that supports women's leadership in business, managing an Instagram page with 16.1k followers.
- 3 - **Joelle Abou Farhat**, co-founder and president of Fiftyfifty (formerly co-founder of Women in Front), an organization that supports women in politics at all levels, including in elections and with political parties.
- 4 - **Loyal Banham**, program manager at Maharat Foundation, an organization that works on freedom of expression and access to information, as well as challenging traditional representation of women in the media.
- 5 - **Samah Hamawi**, co-founder of Know Your Place (KYP) community, an initiative that aims to highlight women's experiences to inspire other women to defy patriarchal social norms, and to build a community of women that support each other.
- 6 - **Yara Nassar**, former executive director of the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE), an organization that works to enhance the democracy of elections in Lebanon. Their work entails working on laws, as well as with women candidates and voters, to enhance women's political participation.

An **analysis of the interviewees' social media accounts** across Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn (where relevant) was also conducted to further develop the link between women in leadership roles and how they utilize social media, from a public/outsider perspective. This analysis contributes to an understanding of their subconscious public self, and is complemented with interview questions to determine their purpose and intention on social media



Research Questions

1. In what ways can social media facilitate or hinder women's leadership and its transformative potential, or feminist leadership?
2. How can/do women leaders use social media as a tool to reinforce their transformative potential and promote/achieve their change goals?
3. What kind of risks, challenges, but also strengths and opportunities, does social media present for women leaders, and to their transformative potential and ability to achieve their desired change?



Positionality

We recognize our positionality in relation to this study; first as Lebanese women, with a deep understanding of the context, having navigated patriarchal structures and social norms in this country ourselves; and second, as western educated women, also recognizing the other privileges we hold. We commit to examining the assumptions and biases we bring into this research and to be as explicit about them as possible. We do not claim to be objective observers. Rather, we understand and acknowledge that our own backgrounds and lived experiences shape our understanding of the world, and therefore our analyses and claims. Indeed, we build on principles of feminist epistemology in our understanding that no knowledge or “truth” can ever really be objective or unbiased (Hesse-Biber and Piatelli, 2012).



Theoretical framework

I. Theories of leadership

The notion of leadership has always been a central aspect of humanity and many have attempted to define the concept, identifying attributes and practices that make an effective leader or defining processes and practices that make up different leadership styles. It is only until the 19th and 20th centuries, however, that key theories around leadership emerged. Those are categorized by different scholars under various eras, with some of the most commonly highlighted below (King, 1990):

- The personality era, focused on innate and inherent abilities or character traits that lead to effective leaders - leaders are born, not made;
- The behaviour era, focused on leaders' actions and learned skills rather than innate traits - leaders are made, not born;
- The situation and the contingency eras, with theories claiming that effective leaders adapt their style to the situation at hand, the type of task, and/or the nature or maturity of followers;
- The transactional era, in which theories focused on leadership as management, centered on supervision and group performance using a rewards and punishments system;
- The transformational era, focused on connections between followers and leaders, who motivate and inspire by highlighting common goals, and can change and transform perceptions, behaviours and expectations, and who are said to often hold high ethics.

Srilatha Batliwala (2011), an India-based Scholar Associate with the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), critically notes in a CREA publication on feminist leadership, that most widespread, published and mainstream literature on leadership is overwhelmingly Western and male. Indeed, one of the very first conceptualizations of leadership, which came under the personality era, is called “the Great Man Theory” (Carlyle, 1841), denoting a male-centric notion of leadership, focused on a heroic and valiant male figure who is born with the skills, confidence and intellect to lead. Additionally, the most prevalent themes covered by those theories include innate or acquired personality traits, actions or styles of leading, situations or the nature of followers. However, rarely do they address change goals, values or power dynamics. Even attempts at theorising “feminine” leadership - the main traits of which being nurturing, empathatic, collaborative and focused on relationship-building - fail to address these key issues (Batliwala, 2011).

Notions of feminist leadership critically engage with existing theorizations of the concept, providing essential contributions to the study of leadership. Primarily, conceptualizations of feminist leadership have focused on leadership as a means to advance transformative change, rather than an end in itself, and unpack questions of power, politics and values. In her CREA publication on feminist leadership, Batliwala (2011) gathers theories and debates around leadership by feminist scholars, activists and practitioners. Those often come as a result of their own attempts to avoid reproducing patriarchal structures and hierarchies within their own organizations. Though her contribution brings us close to a comprehensive conceptual definition of feminist leadership, Batliwala nevertheless acknowledges that it has not yet been fully developed as a feminist construct. She explains that her framework draws on online or offline feminist contributions, though much of those are biased in favor of recorded and accessible feminist thought, generally from the West and in the English language. Building on those recognitions and limitations, Batliwala's framework of feminist leadership is considered key resource on the subject, as it presents a comprehensive overview of available and accessible literature, and provides key elements and principles of what feminist leadership is. This research paper will significantly draw on elements from this framework as a theoretical backbone, as explained in the section below on the research framework.

For conceptual clarity, the main aspects of the framework are presented below:

Batliwala summarizes the four key elements, or 4Ps, of feminist leadership in what she calls the Feminist Leadership Diamond, shown in figure 1. Those four elements include Power; Politics and Purpose; Principles and Values, including some non-negotiables of feminist leadership; and Practices.

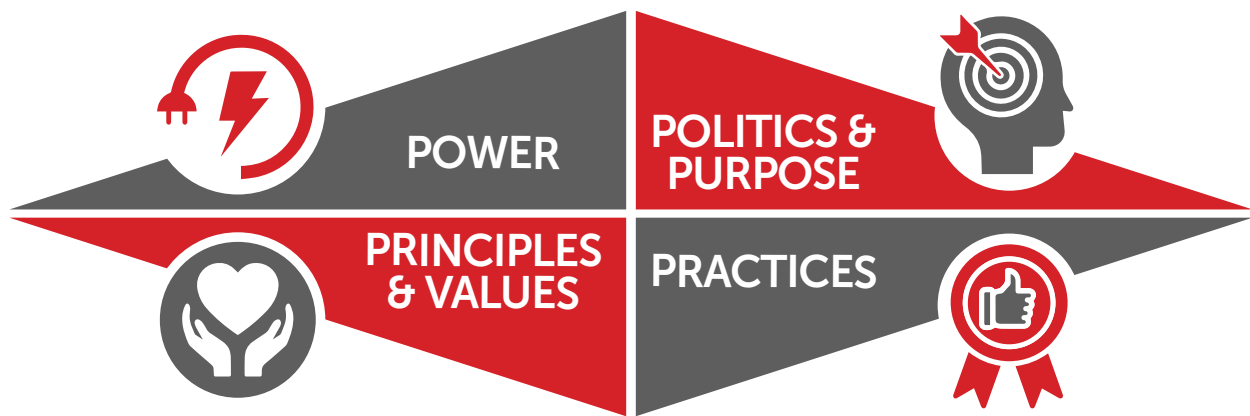


Figure 1: The Feminist Leadership "Diamond". Batliwala (2011).

Power: Feminist leadership is essentially about holding, exercising, and examining one's own power. It is also about transforming power relations and aspiring to create new models of how it is distributed. It requires a consciousness of different dimensions and sources of power, and challenges distribution of power wherever it puts women at a disadvantage. Though leadership is often associated with decision-making and visible power, it operates in other dimensions as well, notably, hidden and invisible ones. Feminist leadership seeks to amplify the most visible realms and practices of power, while reducing as much as possible expressions of power in invisible and hidden realms.

Principles and Values: Feminist leadership is informed by feminist values and principles that guide strategic decisions, action and behaviours. Some non-negotiables of feminist leadership include: participatory, transparent and inclusive attitudes and decision-making; extensive and often first hand knowledge of the issues it engages with; constant introspection and review of one's work and structure; space for leaders of different generations; as well as having an affirmative vision for change.

Politics and Purpose: Feminist analysis of socio-economic and political realities informs feminist leadership and its vision for change. Feminist leadership puts gender justice at the center of whichever change process it embarks on, and consistently attempts to transform the structures it engages with.

Practices: Feminist leadership entails a wide array of practices, among which are visioning, relationship-building, strategizing, communicating, managing and resourcing. Practices of leadership are never disconnected from power, politics and values. Interestingly, some of the practices of feminist leadership are linked to roles that are traditionally deemed more "feminine" and that have been rejected by mainstream leadership and male leaders generally - such as nurturing and relationship-building roles.

In brief, the framework developed by Batliwala (2011) posits that feminist leadership emerges where there are structural inequalities and power imbalances that put women at a disadvantage - be it in private or public spheres, including households, communities, markets, governments etc. Women's socialization and lived experiences navigating patriarchal structures and oppression play a big role in the leadership style they adopt. However, what distinguishes feminist leadership from other forms of leadership is not only that it entails women in positions of power, but also the existence of a transformative agenda - it is a kind of leadership that centers gender justice and/or challenges power imbalances in whichever change process it envisions or embarks on.

It is important to note that the concept of leadership is being redefined as technological advancements evolve, which is inevitably restructuring the professional field (Ercetin, 2016). Those who are considered leaders today, regardless of their industries, have both an offline and online image to build. Regarding the latter, having a profile on social media as a leader signifies that they are held under a magnifying glass, observed nationally but also across borders, and critiqued for every word, which is recorded. With the increase of social media use, online campaigns and strategies are being further developed and employed by leaders, especially those in politics. For example, those who enter election campaigns without previous experience in parliament might use social media to a larger extent to secure their position. Moreover, closer to the election day, there may be an increase in sentiments on social media, emphasizing that the online platform is a crucial tool (Taras, and Davis, 2019).

II. Theories of auteur, the self, and expression

Auteur theory, which was initially applied to cinema, looks at film as an individual expression of filmmakers (auteurs/authors) who play one of the most important roles. The main auteur theorists, Andrew Sarris (1973), Andre Bazin (1957), and Alexandre Astruc (1992), all suggest that, often subconsciously, the film reflects on the filmmaker's personal experiences, and that it is two person-like agents at play: the narrator and the camera. For this matter, it is important to perceive the filmmaker as a gendered body and acknowledge that there is a difference in the way that male and female characters are shot by male and female filmmakers (Bordwell, 1989). Building on auteur theory, many have argued that a filmmaker is considered to be an agent capable of bearing semantic weight, and revealing personal expression through film (Bordwell, 1989). In the words of Andrew Sarris, "auteur theory is not so much a theory as an attitude, a table of values that converts film history into a directorial autobiography" (1996, p.30).

More recently, auteur theory has been applied to new-age media such as bloggers and social media, where the self and expression of the individual is often shaped by their experiences (Ellcessor, 2014). As Maggie Humm (1997) points out: "No concept of gendered media representation can function without a concept of authorship" (p.92). She also suggests that gender is highly relevant in shaping aesthetics and signature, which is especially why it is important to uncover the experiences of women on social media for instance. It is suggested, however, that social media can be linked to performance, which questions authorship, the self and authentic expression. For instance, celebrities' embodiment can be seemingly authentic, when in fact they are echoing traits from the society at large, reaffirming values that exist offline and are often shaped by the patriarchal society (Humm, 1997).

Some feminist film theorists have argued that auteur theory remains male-centered, perhaps because it was developed to deconstruct male filmmaker's films, and films made by women were omitted as a result (Martin, 2003). When the first women's film festivals began in 1972, questions about representation of women in film began to be discussed, which led to a feminist perspective of auteurism. This brought about new ideas related to style termed 'écriture feminine' (feminine writing) which looked at women's roles in the production process (Stam, 2000). In relation to this, poet and feminist, Adrienne Rich argues that women "should not accept the existing power structure and...are committed to changing it by the content and structure of ... images" (Stam, 2000, p.172). While there are contradicting perspectives on auteur theory, it is an important concept to take into consideration when placing women on the map and looking at their agency and subjectivity within the social media field.



III. Research Framework

The focus of this research is the effectiveness of social media as a tool for opening up spaces for women's leadership in Lebanon. Examining the different ways in which social media enables or hinders women's leadership requires a clear framework of how leadership is to be understood. With the aim of problematizing and challenging traditional notions of leadership, we focus our understanding and analysis on alternative models that have been created, conceptualized and developed by feminist activists and scholars. We define leadership within the parameters of Batliwala's framework of feminist leadership developed for CREA in 2011, while keeping in mind the impact of new technologies on leadership. Critically, we draw on elements of this framework to focus on the transformative potential of women's leadership - whether it explicitly includes feminist change goals or not. In discussing the transformative potential of feminist leadership within movements and organizations, Batliwala poses the following essential question: "Can feminist leadership occur without a transformative goal?". She then explains that even within settings that may not appear revolutionary or fertile for transformative change, leaders who are actively transforming the structures within which they operate or challenging power imbalances in more subtle ways, could indeed be engaging in feminist leadership. Building on this claim, we will seek to explore the way social media is used as a tool, as well as how it acts as an enabler, or creates barriers, for feminist leadership or women's leadership with a transformative potential.



Additionally, auteur theory guides our analysis to determine the ways in which women leaders are able (or not) to exercise agency in their use of social media. Even though it was developed in the cinematic field using film as a medium, the concept is highly relevant to newer media such as social media. Auteur theory will inform our understanding of the social media platform's ability to be effective in voicing expression, sharing lived experiences, and giving more space for women to be represented. However, using auteur theory to center the self, will also raise challenges that the social media platform could create, such as mirroring the offline patriarchal society and norms, especially if notions of performance are involved where the individual acts as society would expect. Finally, the role of the self is critical for both auteur and feminist leadership theories. It will therefore be a central aspect of the analysis, particularly in the way lived experiences of navigating patriarchal structures translate into women's leadership style, practices and tools, with a main focus on social media.



Findings and Discussion

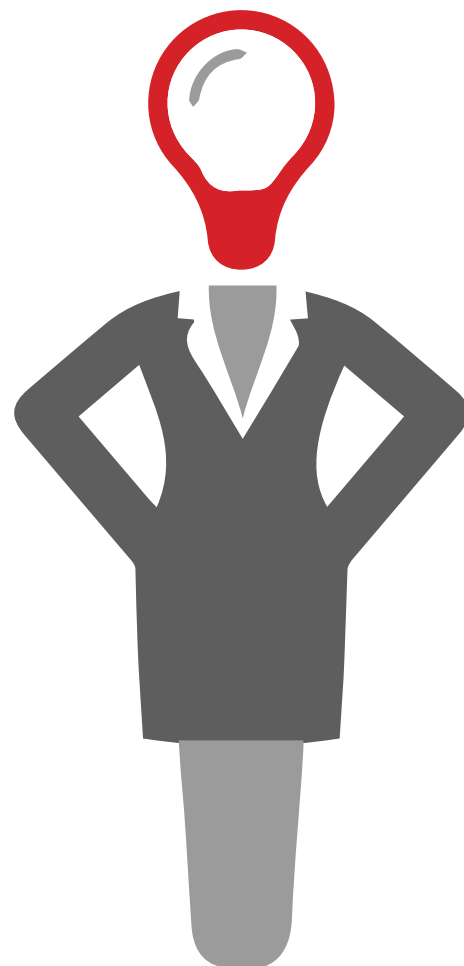
I. Definitions and self-definitions of leadership

Building on the aforementioned recognition that current bodies of literature on feminist leadership are overwhelmingly informed by Western and published works, this paper draws on experiences, definitions and self-definitions of leadership of women in Lebanon, and seeks to contribute to knowledge around alternative models and practices of leadership. The analysis is not founded on a single definition of leadership, but unpacks different elements that were identified as key components in a leadership process by the interviewees - both women who engage or have engaged in leadership in different ways, and others who have founded or work with organizations with a mandate of supporting women's leadership in different fields/realms. Indeed, definitions are many and depend on various factors, such as one's objectives, the context and dynamics in which individuals and groups interact, or the field or realm in which leadership is exercised. In this section, we explore key elements that make up leadership as a dynamic and collective process, shaped by change goals, values and practices, as well as systemic constraints, personal experiences and relationships of power.

A vision for social change

A key element that was emphasized by all interviewees as critical for leadership is a vision for social change. Regardless of the field where leadership is practiced, or the type of social change that is sought out, having a vision is central to any leadership process. Indeed, Laury Haytayan mentions the importance of a strategic vision built on a solid understanding of the landscape of the country or the problem being addressed. Additionally, Samah Hamawi and Asma Zein both emphasize the necessity of having a vision founded on solid values. It is a widely agreed upon fact across various bodies of literature that a vision, which inspires individuals and groups to act or come together, should be the primary driver for leadership. When it comes to feminist leadership, transformative social change takes center stage in defining such a vision. According to Batliwala's framework, a vision serving feminist leadership is one that has gender justice as the overall aim, and that is founded on a feminist analysis of power and socio-economic and political realities. Rima Majed, for instance, who views a vision as an important element for leadership, makes a critical distinction for feminist leadership which according to her must "serve a cause". Similarly, Layal Banham believes that having a solid set of values founded on principles of equality and human rights for all is crucial for transformative models of leadership.

Women engage with and exercise leadership at different levels, in various fields, and in a variety of ways, and this of course shapes the type of vision and objectives that they would be working towards. Similarly to the interviewees, some may engage in leadership through formal electoral processes, others may do so in their activism, and others may yet again be doing so in fields of business, medicine or education. Nevertheless, as per the theoretical framework underpinning this research, even in settings which may seem less fertile for social change, women in leadership positions who actively transform power imbalances in the deep structures of their organizations or within their communities, inadvertently bring forth a set of values and an analysis of the world that shape a more transformative vision. Yara Nassar, for instance, explains that women in positions of leadership often help promote a vision of gender equality within their organizations, influence their policies and facilitate more enabling environments for other women to reach and thrive in positions of leadership. This analysis is often built on their own lived experiences within these structures, which shape the vision they advance. Caroline Fattal mentions having founded her organization, Stand for Women, to respond to injustices that she herself has faced as a woman in the field of business: "Because of what I lived through during my career, and also because of the difficulties I have encountered and I have seen, I have decided to create this platform to raise awareness about women in the workforce in the region." Haytayan speaks of the importance of having a long-term sustainable plan to complement a vision, and builds on her own analysis of the socio-political realities of the country in saying "I can't be part of the problem, I should be part of the solution." She discusses her experience as a trusted figure in the oil & gas sector, and explains that being a woman in this field has inadvertently helped her advance "women's causes and the voice of women". Having a deep and solid understanding of systems of oppression and inequalities is therefore central to feminist leadership. Majed indeed defines feminist leadership as one which is "always tilting towards those who are less privileged in society, whether in terms of gender, or sexuality, or class, or race, or ethnicity. One that is attune to these things."



The role of the self and temporalities of leadership

Leaders and leadership processes do not operate in a vacuum but are rather positioned within power structures and systems that often reproduce oppression. Batliwala argues that since leadership is exercised by people - whether individuals or groups - the role of the self takes center stage in leadership processes, and often shapes interactions, aspirations and practices. This was also emphasized by interviewees; Haytayan for instance, explains, "Leadership starts from yourself, if you know what you want, if you are happy with yourself, you are strong and you know what you want to achieve, it reflects on others." Many more traditional or mainstream conceptions of leadership define it through certain character traits, whether innate or learned, which may often reflect patriarchal notions of engaging with others and using one's own power. Such traits may include dominance, emotionlessness, and competitiveness for example. Charisma was referred to as a crucial character trait by many interviewees, and it is also heavily present across literature on leadership. While the abstract concept of charisma may simply refer to the ability to appeal to audiences in whichever form, it cannot be absolved from the patriarchal system in which charismatic leadership is being exercised. Calas (1993) argues that such notions of leadership "maintain the patriarchal mystique of heroic leadership..." , which is often found in literature, such as the "Great Man" theory or Weberian¹ definitions of leadership.

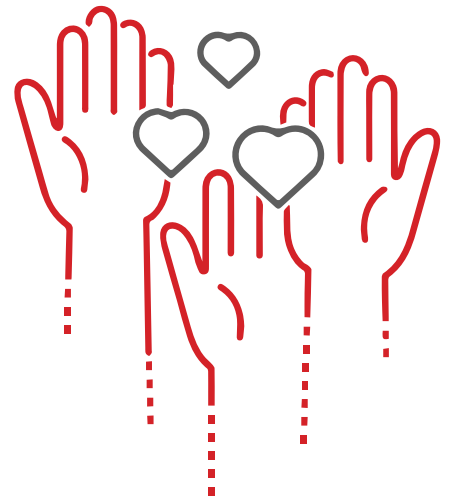


The role of the self is critical for women's leadership as it is shaped by women's lived experiences in navigating patriarchal structures and systems of oppression. In that sense, both socialization and structural restrictions play an important role in defining the processes and characteristics of women's leadership. Majed explains that socialization allows certain character traits that are traditionally perceived as key for leadership, to prosper only for some. Nassar speaks to the weight of such restrictions, stating, "I don't believe that people are born leaders. I believe that there are conditions surrounding you in your personal life but also in your experience at work that could help you either increase your involvement and leadership skills or not. It depends on the environment and opportunities you were able to get throughout your life." Amira Kobrosli concurs, stating that "anyone could be a leader if she were given the opportunity to lead". Indeed, women's ability to exercise leadership is particularly hindered by patriarchal social norms, which limit their participation in the public sphere. All interviewees discussed the implications of those limitations on their own experiences, such as having to work "triple the amount compared to a man". Interviewees highlighted the temporalities of leadership and the limitations imposed by such structural constraints. Being a leader is not something that one carries over time, for a number of different reasons, including fair distribution of power and accountability (further unpacked below). Critically, however, leadership requires hard work and dedication, as well as the ability to dedicate time and energy to a certain cause. This also shapes the temporalities of leadership, as those very structural constraints limit women's ability to dedicate time and energy, and as put by one of the interviewees, to be "someone who's around". Personal growth, gaining wisdom over time, learning from and apologizing for one's mistakes, being open for critique and accountability, were all mentioned as crucial.

¹ Max Weber is a German sociologist and political economist who developed a tripartite concept of authority who has had great influence on social theory and social research. Weber developed the concept of charismatic authority as one of three types of a tripartite classification; the other two being legal and traditional authority. The concept of charismatic authority is related to leadership that draws its authority from charisma.

Collective aspects of leadership

"I don't think you can be a leader on your own. There is no such thing as an individual feminist. Feminism is a collective politic." Problematizing traditional individualistic notions of leadership is critical if we are to frame our analysis of women's leadership and its transformative potential within a feminist paradigm. Indeed, through this statement Nadine Moawad highlights collectivity as a central element of feminist leadership. Feminism is a collective political process, and translating this into leadership processes means challenging ideas of competition and individualism founded in patriarchal, capitalist and neo-liberal systems. Moawad continues by saying, "There is nothing in the world I value more than my feminist comrades. I think with our collective power, together, we can achieve anything." Feminist analyses of leadership emphasize the importance of the



collective, whether in relation to defining a vision, making decisions, ensuring accountability, or in practices and action. In fact, valuing the collective knowledge and contributions of different individuals within a leadership process allows for power and responsibility to be shared, and feminist collective action has largely been credited for creating lasting social change (Sweetman, 2013). Many interviewees have focused on the importance of having a group or a community, with whom to work, to make decisions, and to envision a better future. Some have also extended this conceptualization to the idea of collective leadership, whereby leadership isn't exercised by a single individual, but is instead shared amongst different individuals, or is defined as a process in which an entire group engages in. Nassar highlights the importance of participatory approaches in engaging with one's group, while Loyal Bahnam speaks of the ability to recognize the work of others. Kobrosli views leadership as something that "starts with individuals and spreads to the group", re-affirming the centrality of the self in leadership processes, but also the necessity of sharing leadership or engaging with others in leadership processes.

KYP Community, for example, whose definition of leadership is built on the premise that anyone can be a leader in the different realms, structures and spaces of their lives, promotes a collective leadership model, internally as a core group as well as with their wider community (Box 3, page 25). Hamawi, the co-founder of the initiative, explains: "Leadership is not about working alone. For us, leadership is working together [...] There are individual leaders but when we work together we create a better impact. It's all about working with your community and the people around you."

Sources of authority, credibility and legitimacy

In addition to the role of the self or "intrinsic power", leadership is also shaped by "extrinsic power", which are types of authority that come to the feminist leader from "outside" herself. Those include assigned authority, which is given by others, positional authority, which is the power that stems from the leadership role itself, and earned authority, which comes from fair use of the former two forms, as well as by sharing power (Batliwala, 2011). Women who were interviewed for this research add to this definition, explaining that sources of authority, but also credibility and legitimacy, also come from experience, either lived, and/or in relation to a particular area of expertise. For instance, Gael Abou Ghannam explains that the credibility and authority she enjoys on her Instagram page, and in particular in relation to posts about motherhood and women's bodies during and after pregnancies, come from her own experience of being a mother. She does not perceive herself as a leader with assigned authority, for example, but holds a different kind of authority due to her experience. Kobrosli similarly believes her credibility sharing posts and influencing practices and narratives about motherhood stems from her own experience as a mother. In fact, most interviewees do not perceive themselves as leaders with assigned authority. Stand for women, for instance, delivers a training curriculum for women's leadership in business, developed by its founder Caroline Fattal herself based on her own professional experience, but also her experiences of discrimination in the business field. This in itself has provided credibility to the material. Moawad also speaks about authority that stems from one's lived experiences, the mistakes they've made and the lessons they've learned, but also from their positionality in a certain community: "Because of my mistakes, I feel like I have a perspective to offer for people who find themselves in a leading role..." Other interviewees find that some of the authority they gain stems from their technical expertise in a specific field, such as Haytayan, who is perceived to be an expert in the oil and gas sector (Box 1).

Most interviewees also stressed on the idea of inspiration as being directly linked to leadership, and this in itself may be considered a form of authority or power as it influences others and encourages them to follow a certain path, fight for a cause or a vision, or practice certain behaviours. Paula Yacoubian, for example, believes she is leading by example when she fights “the women’s fight”. According to Joelle Abou Farhat and Yara Nassar, both Fiftyfifty and LADE respectively believe in highlighting and making visible the successes of women in leadership to allow them to be role models. Interestingly, KYP Community also emphasizes the importance of leading by example, and their work is centered around highlighting women’s experiences. Amira Kobrosli, who is part of KYP Community, has explained feeling inspired herself by other women’s stories, which she is able to hear and engage with through KYP.

Box 1 : The “Expert”



Some interviewees have found that authority gained by women in leadership positions sometimes stems from their technical expertise in a specific field. When that expertise is visible and widely recognized, they become perceived as “the expert”. According to Joelle Abou Farhat, the leadership model promoted by WiF encourages women to identify a cause or an expertise that they can relate to. Additionally, one of the organization’s key campaigns, called “women of expertise”, highlights the technical expertise of women who would make suitable candidates for ministers.

Laury Haytayan, who ran for the 2018 parliamentary elections and is a key figure in the oil and gas sector in the country and the region, considers herself to be a leader based on her expertise, as well as the innovation and analysis that she provides on the topic of oil and gas. She speaks to the time and effort it took for her to be recognized as an expert amongst parliamentarians and other key stakeholders, in a field that is widely male-dominated. Her knowledge has proved to be a solid tool to help her gain influence and authority, and has inspired confidence in her ability to make an impact. Once the topic of oil and gas took center stage in Lebanese politics, it gave her a lot of visibility; “In oil and gas I do feel that there is a leadership role that I am playing, so I’ll be shaping the narrative around things that are happening and you would see others following without even knowing you.” She is now recognized and has become a reference in this field, allowing her to “shape the narrative”.

Rima Majed, an assistant professor of sociology at the American University of Beirut, whose research focuses on social movements, sectarianism and gender, is often referred to or perceived as an expert as well. However, in her experience, this categorization is problematic. As a sociologist, she believes it is her responsibility to contribute to public debates but referring to her as an expert oftentimes becomes a tool to demand free labour. “I am not referred to as a leader. I’m perceived as the expert, and I don’t like this category. It is a very problematic box. Institutions have created the category of the expert and they make us believe that we are experts so that in many cases they can exploit us for free. [...] Sometimes it reaches a stage where a journalist wants you to write an article for them. They come to the expert constantly, which also takes a lot of our time. [...] I believe we should recognize political labor (in the form of experts’ work) as labor...” Majed views the “expert” category as a double-edged sword as “on one hand it gives legitimacy to what we say because we are approached as “experts”, on another hand it creates the unpaid labor.”

In brief, it is critical to understand the nuances and diversity of different women’s experiences in studying leadership. While for some, this is perceived as a welcomed source of authority and credibility, it is also important to recognize that it may also be used as a tool to exploit their knowledge and labor. Additionally, a model of leadership founded solely on expertise may be problematic in relation to feminist analyses of the concept as expertise doesn’t necessarily entail a vision for social change and it is a model that may not allow for accountability or space to challenge decisions and practices.

Power and accountability

Central to feminist theory is the understanding of power structures and how those may reproduce and perpetuate systems of oppression and inequality. A feminist analysis of leadership therefore focuses on the idea of holding, exercising or challenging power dynamics and distribution. Critically, examining one's own practices, use and relationship to power is central for feminist analyses of leadership. Feminist leaders or leadership processes thus seek to create structures and spaces in which power imbalances and patriarchal norms and practices would be disrupted, rather than reproduced (Batliwala, 2011). Feminist leadership is nevertheless exercised within larger oppressive systems, and according to Friedman and Twala (2017), it is therefore possible in feminist processes and spaces, as in others, for power and privilege to be abused, and for distrust and hostility to be fostered. Consequently, establishing satisfactory and fair accountability mechanisms is crucial to ensure processes are just and indeed do not reproduce inequalities and systems of oppression. A feminist analysis would focus on transparent, participatory, and communal accountability processes where individuals who are entrusted with power for a certain period of time can be held to account for their actions, and where communities or groups can engage in healthy discussions around values, practices and behaviors. According to Batliwala (2011), feminist definitions and practices of leadership often reflect feminists' own relationship to power, and extensive discussion and research has been done on imagining new, non-hierarchical or alternative ways of sharing, using or practicing power and leadership. A common model found in different feminist organizations and groups is the idea of having co-directors, a model through which power is diffused and shared. Interestingly, however, Nadine Moawad reflects on this model and highlights the importance of responsibility and accountability mechanisms in any process of leadership: "There's something about individual responsibility that I think is very important. I recognize most examples we've had where it's been difficult to take back power once it's been afforded to people, and we know from history that individuals with unaccountable power are oppressive. The question of holding people to account, of delegating power, of diffusing it, decentralizing it within the network, but still encouraging people to assume this kind of power, to take responsibility, to be able to lead into a certain vision is quite important." Moawad builds on a definition of leadership by Marshall Ganz, a Senior Lecturer in Leadership, Organizing, and Civil Society at Harvard University, and ties leadership with responsibility to the collective in uncertain times, and in building collective action to enact change. Ganz (2008) indeed defines leadership as "accepting the responsibility to create conditions that enable others to achieve shared purpose in the face of uncertainty".

II. Using social media - practices and purpose

Over the past decade, the term 'social media' has become a common way of referring to a collection of online systems that produce, store and distribute user-generated content (USG). The virtual social spaces "are seen as a place in which public opinion is formed, and where interventions in public opinion are possible by an increasing array of institutions and individuals." (Chen, 2013). With social media, offline conversations can be translated online into 'public spaces', used differently depending on available time, resources and objectives. This research unpacks the use of social media by individual women leaders, looking at how the medium creates tools and a platform to support or hinder their engagement with their communities and wider audiences in Lebanon and in the region. On these channels they tend to share their opinions and exercise leadership in relation to their vision and to how they come to define the concept. Additionally, the research looks at how organizations that support women's leadership use social media as a tool for both their work in promoting women's leadership, and supporting women leaders themselves.

While it is important to highlight that social media platforms and their tools are constantly evolving, with new platforms continuously launched into the market, this research specifically looks at Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn. In regard to the interviewees, they had differing opinions as to the platform that met their needs more extensively. For instance, Gael Abou Ghannam prefers Instagram for its focus on delivering messages through visuals, and considers Facebook as a 'has-been'. Laury Haytayan prefers to use Twitter given its limited level of interaction, seeking above all to diffuse messages. She does consider Facebook to have a wider reach though, contrary to Rima Majed who favors Facebook for its more private interaction. Majed is only active on Twitter because: "Twitter is more geared towards my public and academic interests." She does however highlight editing and word limitations that come with the platform.

In this section, by applying social media analysis to the interviewees accounts', we explore the different ways in which women in leadership positions in various realms use social media, their objectives and their practices online. We also investigate the objectives of using social media for organizations that support women's leadership.

Social media can be a platform for women in leadership to self-promote and grow their offline networks

In some cases, social media is used for self-promotion. Abou Ghannam explains that she first launched her Instagram account after a patient had recommended that it would help her attract more patients and make a name for herself. She had just moved to Beirut and needed to grow her network to advance her OB/GYN career. Similarly, Nadine Moawad uses social media to recruit activists from a wider audience by sharing her views and seeking those that will relate to her perspectives.

Social media channels can help women leaders shape the narrative around socio-political issues

Social media is another medium used for politics and campaigning. Haytayan shares that she made use of social media platforms to share her political views specifically during the electoral campaign of 2018. She continues to share her political views, as seen when she tweeted about the Lebanese Prime Minister in May 2020, tagging him and demanding accountability for policies and practices of the political elite, which have led to the economic crisis that Lebanon is facing. Some women in leadership roles use social media to further social change and for activism purposes. Majed used social media during the Lebanese October revolution to advance her vision and share her ideas: "When there are things I wanted to say publicly, especially in October, I was seeking all sorts of tools." Moawad used Twitter for activism and solidarity during a protest whereby a woman protester was arrested. She shared the video taken of the arrest and pleaded for support from her Twitter followers. The tweet was retweeted 257 times, and after a couple of hours she replied to the thread reassuring her audience that the protester had been released. As a public figure, Paula Yacoubian has a clear political agenda and vision which she pushes on social media to further her political views and join current debates around social and justice concerns, which are critical to her in light of the current establishment.



Social media can provide a platform for women in leadership positions to raise awareness around certain issues, calling for action or change

Several of the interviewees shared that they use social media to raise awareness in their industries. For example, Haytayan's main objective on social media is to share knowledge and information around the oil and gas industry and to shape the discourse. For instance, when oil drilling in block 4 started in Beirut, in February 2020, she posted a video on Twitter from a dingy boat, explaining and showing her followers the Tungsten drillship. She engaged with her followers on the platform by speaking directly into the camera. Abou Ghannam uses Instagram to educate women about their health because, "it's easier for people to talk behind the screen about women's health issues." She often posts with the purpose of educating, such as when she uploaded a photo holding a hula-hoop with cling-film explaining why 'this is not a hymen'. The post received over 3,300 likes, as well as a series of follow-up questions from her audience in the comment section, as a result of the powerful photo that she uploaded. Paula Yacoubian emphasized that awareness is the key reason for which she engages on social media: "Awareness, awareness, awareness! The most important thing I learned through my political work is the importance of awareness." Amira Kobrosli, a mother and educator, states that she uses social media to raise awareness around motherhood by sharing her experiences. To ensure that she targets other mothers on Instagram, one of the tools that she uses is a wide array of specific hashtags such as #motherhood #momsofinstagram #momlife #motherhoodunplugged #motherhoodjourney. She also uses personal photos to explain how she deals with motherhood-related topics. For instance, in one post she uploaded a photo of her son and his friends to explain the importance of children's friendship that helps them in developing emotionally.

Social media can be used by women in leadership positions to communicate and engage with others, both locally and abroad

Social media is a platform that can be used for building online clusters and communities. Yacoubian for instance uses social media to: “address and communicate with the people.” On her Twitter and Instagram accounts she seems responsive to her followers who support her as well as those who critique her, often diplomatically inviting them to discuss further. Majed engages with the social media realm to build connections, solidarity and networks across borders. It is clear on her Facebook and Twitter accounts that she aims to build solidarity in the American University of Beirut’s (AUB) community where she teaches. In one of her posts from July 2020 that was shared 89 times, she highlighted some facts about AUB working conditions to challenge recent mass layoffs of workers and call for better organizing. Kobrosli also uses social media to engage with a wider audience, reaching out to mothers across Lebanon, regionally and internationally to build a community around a common topic: how to communicate with children and how to raise them to be mindful.

Organizations supporting women in leadership positions often use social media to campaign for their cause, spread awareness, engage and support with information. They do, however, differ from individuals in the way that they use social media, specifically because they often have a set budget and available resources for online activities.

Social media can be used by organizations that support women’s leadership for advocacy and campaigning, and to promote their vision and influence public opinion

As a public platform, social media is widely used to promote the vision of organizations, specifically those advocating for change. For instance, LADE uses social media to promote women’s political participation. As one of their planned activities, they hired an artist to paint a mural that called for women in positions of power, organized an event around this and promoted this vision on social media. They developed a series of short videos to push images of the mural that supports their vision on their social media platforms, creating discourse with a wider reach. Generally, LADE’s content on social media is devised to raise awareness around democratic elections, including electoral laws, quotas, etc. LADE also produced several social media campaigns to tackle social distribution of gender roles, one of which they did in partnership with HIVOS to pressure decision-makers on the gender quota. To promote their vision on social media, Stand for Women uses statistics and facts that highlight key messages through attractive visuals. They believe that by using illustrations and imagery, they can influence public opinion more easily with engaging content. In 2019, Fiftyfifty used social media to create a campaign to promote women for the new government formation. In their campaign they used the hashtag #Women_of_expertise as a tool to promote 54 women for political positions, while highlighting their expertise. Similarly, Maharat Foundation has used their social media platforms to disseminate the content from their reports visually, but also to challenge perceptions, amplify women’s voices and disseminate key messages around women’s leadership. For instance they uploaded a short video to their accounts about gender discrimination in Lebanon. It read: “Change is needed. Women’s Rights should be indivisible.” They also tagged their partners as a tool to spread the video and shape the discourse online.

Social media can be a tool used by organizations supporting women’s leadership to promote events, increase event attendance and take the discussion online

Organizations supporting women in leadership positions often use social media as a means to promote events, increasing their target audience and reaching out online to recruit for offline events, with the exception of online events held during the periods of confinement in 2020. For instance, KYP Community uses social media mainly to promote events, as seen on their social media platforms, and to build a community that they take offline. To do so, they design posters with event details and a call to action to register to the event. These are sponsored on their social media platforms to further increase their outreach. LLWB said that they use social media mainly to share information, and a closer look at their platforms shows that they also use it to share upcoming and past events. Among Stand for Women’s many Instagram story ‘highlights’, two of them are dedicated to their events and their partners’ events. Here they make use of Instagram to highlight upcoming events, information and coverage.

Social media can be used by organizations that support women's leadership to share information to the wider public and increase awareness around certain topics

Almost all the organizations interviewed for the purpose of this research shared that social media was largely used to share information and raise awareness. LLWB for instance used social media to announce their new board of directors for 2023-2020 with an image containing headshots. Maharat Foundation shares gender sensitive content that promotes women's participation in public life and political life, along with their media monitoring activities. Stand for Women also uses social media to raise awareness on issues pertaining to women in the workplace and in business more specifically, for example by posting visuals that remind their audience of domestic violence reporting hotlines, and by bringing attention to the women at the frontline fighting COVID19-. Their most recent post which received a lot of appreciation from their online community was related to 'seven tips for raising feminist kids'.



Social media can allow organizations that support women in leadership roles to engage with a wider audience and to understand trends

Social media is borderless, making it a useful tool to reach a wide array of persons, but its level of efficiency depends on how it is used. Fattal, who manages Stand for Women's page, reaches out organically because she: "really wanted to have a base of people who are really committed and are there by choice...not because they saw an ad and clicked." The Instagram page engages with the audience merely from its simplified user-experience. She extensively uses story "highlights" to clarify the content, making it easier for their audience to navigate, and stay updated. Similarly, Maharat Foundation engages with a wide audience to "build a community that is gender inclusive and to challenge the public opinion and people in leadership positions on the important role that women play at all levels." Their wide community of followers include: local journalists, entrepreneurs, activists, other NGOs, international NGOs with presence in Lebanon such as the EU Delegation in Lebanon, the UN in Lebanon and Hivos Global. Other organizations such as LADE use social media to understand the online discourse and concerns, which determines their next campaign as they intend to address arising issues.

While it is imperative to understand the many reasons for using social media among women in leadership positions and organizations supporting them, it is also key to acknowledge that personal experiences contribute to how these platforms are used. Many auteur theorists have argued that a filmmaker is considered to be an agent capable of bearing semantic weight, and revealing personal expression through film (Bordwell, 1989). By applying auteur theory to another medium - social media - it significantly regards the subject (the person behind the account) as the auteur, placing them at the center and considers that their experiences are reflected in their activities. Therefore, the way that individuals post, the type of content they choose, and their levels of engagement (whether independently or through an organization) are strongly tied to their personal experiences. With this in mind, we can recognize that by increasing women's engagement online, we are encouraging the voices of more women in leading positions, reflecting on their experiences both consciously and subconsciously, and generally contributing to a more gender-balanced society.

III. Social media and women's leadership

a. Social norms, online violence and access to resources

Women's roles in Lebanon are already defined by patriarchal social norms that limit their engagement with leadership. For instance, Gael Abou Ghannam finds that there is no space for women leaders in medical fields in Lebanon as most OB/GYNs are men, and that "family has a huge importance in our culture...so very few women will sacrifice their family for their career." This suggests that in such a male-dominated society, the parameters are already drawn out for women, creating obstacles for leadership aspirations. Paula Yacoubian reflects on these concerns and adds that, "This is all present in the collective mind, and it affects women's participation and ability to enter political work as an equal." As a leader herself, she recognizes that women leaders are treated unfairly and that there is a historical wrongdoing and bias against women in Lebanon. Yara Nassar highlights that women candidates face a lot of pressures from their parties, but also from within their homes, especially when they lose the election and are held accountable by their families: "they are asked, wasn't it better for you if you had spent this time with your family instead of running for the election?"

Social media can generally be considered an alternative platform where women can voice their concerns and reach a wide audience. According to research, social media can shape the discourse and therefore public opinion, increasing the scale of social interactions because of the magnifying effect of the internet (Chen, 2013). Joelle Abou Farhat, co-founder and president at Fiftyfifty, would add that social media can be a powerful tool to change mindsets, and create a space for prominent women to talk about politics and social issues with a wider reach. In fact, Abou Ghannam found it to be a useful tool in the medical field to reach out to potential patients, claiming that it was effective and a boost to her career, "If I compare with my other colleagues who are not on social media, I can say it makes a difference. It took me less than a year and a half to feel the return on investment." However, many interviewees raised concerns around social media as a patriarchal space in which harmful social norms are mirrored, leading to attacks, violence and harassment. Nadine Moawad suggests that there is no real control or power online for women, as community standards have been defined by white men in the U.S: "they decide what is acceptable and what isn't. This shapes our understanding of how, for example, we celebrate gay liberation, how we talk about abortion, and sexual harassment." Moawad is skeptical of the online community and sees women on social media platforms as the most common targets of 'cancel culture'. She also highlights that women's privacy is at stake with big corporations ultimately owning the data. Yacoubian is also weary of the social media space, sharing that she used to consider it a tool that could unify but now sees it as a divisive one co-opted by those in power. While Yacoubian receives violence and 'militia-like attacks' from fake accounts, Abu Ghannam faces sexual harassment as she receives inappropriate photos which she immediately discards. In relation to the toxicity and mansplaining present online, Rima Majed explains, "There's a lot of energy that goes into clearing the way to be able to do what you want to do. This clearing the way can become really exhausting sometimes."

As discussed in the first section of this paper, the temporality of women's leadership is affected by many factors, such as democratic processes, accountability mechanisms and structural constraints. Here we examine the ways in which these dynamics play out on social media. As Majed reflected: "Being a leader is not something you carry with you throughout your life, you can be a leader at different points." In her experience, leadership requires dedicated time, effort and energy to a certain cause, and can sometimes lead to exhaustion and pressures, making it a temporal process. Similarly, Moawad finds that it is already challenging in and of itself to build an environment where one can thrive for the few months or years they spend in a leadership role. On the other hand, using social media provides a sort of timeless element to leadership as once a page or an account on any platform is published, it is more or less permanent. However, it does demand constant activity and engagement for risk of losing credibility and followership. Abou Ghannam for instance raised a concern around the pressure to post on social media on a regular basis. Although LLWB gives social



media training to women as part of their activities, the team itself “does not have ample time to go through social media”, and is not used much by the organization. Other resources that are required to benefit from the social media space include funding and management. This was raised by several interviewees (Box 2) and reflects the structural constraints that already exist offline for women leaders.

Nevertheless, many organizations in Lebanon seek to address some of these barriers to women’s leadership, such as those interviewed for the purpose of this research. These organizations work towards changing the narrative around women in leadership roles, and advocate for policy and legal reform. However, their success in using social media to advance the cause of women’s leadership depends on dedicated resources for online activity. As an organization with strong ties to traditional media, parliamentarians and other key stakeholders, Fiftyfifty, for instance, can influence voters and public opinion around the topic of women’s leadership through their online campaigns. Fiftyfifty provides women in politics with visibility on their social media platforms such as through their #Women_of_expertise campaign mentioned in the previous section: “women need visibility and need to promote themselves, and we need to promote them and their expertise”. However, limitations in fundings and reliance on international donors and funds for their operations restrict the organizations’ use of social media to promote and support women’s leadership, as it requires dedicated resources.

“ **Box 2 : Using social media in politics** ”

Women in Lebanon face structural barriers to their political participation, related to access to resources and gender-based discrimination. Social media, however, may provide a cheaper tool for their political activities and outreach. Both Paula Yacoubian and Laury Haytayan ran for parliamentary elections in 2018 and turned to social media as a potential useful tool to share their political views and raise awareness, mainly because of its large reach and low cost. As independent candidates, they did not have large sources of funding, and were running against candidates affiliated to established political parties with massive media and campaigning budgets. Joelle Abou Farhat, from Fiftyfifty also encouraged women running in these elections to use social media because of its affordability. In fact, during the last parliamentary elections, candidates were legally allowed free airtime on the national TV station Tele Liban. However, TV appearances beyond what was legally mandated were costed at exorbitant prices, with some estimations of the cost of an interview ranging anywhere between \$150,000 and \$250,000, significantly restricting access to such platforms and favouring certain candidates over others (Habib, 2018; NDI, 2018). Additionally, Maharat’s elections media monitoring report of the same year shows that only %5 of elections coverage focused on women candidates, who were often treated less seriously than their male counterparts and were rarely engaged in policy debates (Nader and Mikhael, 2018). Haytayan turned to social media to bypass the constraints of traditional media. She had not anticipated, however, that established political parties would also use this space actively, which led to an oversaturation of messages on that network. In that sense, it did not create a more effective space for women leaders as anticipated. She shares that while social media is an important medium for politics, women still need traditional media to gain exposure, and that online tools do not replace the “basics”, such as going door to door - which she believes would be the most effective. According to a study conducted by the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS) in January 2019 the majority of the 115 women running for the 2018 parliamentary elections were non-partisan or affiliated to the “civil society” coalition Koullouna Watani. Consequently, and as shared by Yara Nassar, from LADE, if women are not part of the political elite, their resources and support are significantly limited, and even when women were part of organizations, the support they received was restricted. Nassar suggests that “when you don’t have an institution backing you, using social media is part of that support. You need a specialist to run your page, which is difficult to do alone.” A specialist however, does require funding. In that sense, while social media is widely perceived to provide an alternative space - and indeed plays that role for some - it does not necessarily create space for women’s leadership in formal democratic processes such as elections, and this is particularly the case when this leadership is opposed to the establishment or challenges mainstream narratives.

b. Supportive communities online and offline

Feminist models of leadership have shown that fostering collective power and understanding community needs can lead to building fairer and more transformative leadership processes. The support organizations interviewed for the purpose of this research highlighted their role in community-building. For instance, for many, the community approach begins from organizational practices. According to Asma Zein and Layal Banham, LLWB and Maharat respectively both recognize the work of others and believe in building an environment that allows colleagues to grow and flourish. Similarly, according to Yara Nassar, decisions at LADE are taken collectively, stressing on the importance of participatory approaches in enabling leadership: "It's not only about the set of skills but also about the environment surrounding you, how it enables you or not to play the role that you want." Most of them also used social media as a tool to engage with their followers to a large extent and create online communities, which were sometimes translated offline (Box 3).



In fact, many have referred to social media as a tool to build 'a community'. This entails a community of people supporting a common idea, a "collective intelligence" as it creates a "genuine capacity of a group to think, learn and create collectively" (Moral & Abbott, 2009). Also, as more narrowly defined, social media can be a space for solidarity and mutual support among women. For instance, one of the ways that Gael Abou Ghannam built a community around women's health on her Instagram page was by sharing other people's content which she endorses as an OBGYN, and whereby she avoids duplicating the work of others. She also adds more personal content so that her followers can relate to her more strongly and increasingly engage with her. Just as Abou Ghannam has created a community on social media in the women's health field, by applying her medical knowledge, Rima Majed could be seen as a leader in the AUB community, as a professor and activist, and Caroline Fattal a leader in the entrepreneurial and business field as she promotes the work of other women in business in line with the 'sisterhood' pillar of her organization³. Additionally, Nadine Moawad sees social media as a space that creates linkages amongst marginalized communities: "it's great that young queers can meet people online and find people who look like them and find communities." She also believes in 'the power of the network' to a certain extent to resist violence and threats.

² Cancel culture refers to public shaming by withdrawing support, often on social media and as a group.

³ According to Caroline Fattal, the founder of Stand for Women, the organization's work is founded on two pillars. The first is focused on changing the face of the workforce to make it more inclusive of women, the second is sisterhood and relates to creating a pool of women that support one another.

Box 3: Collective Leadership on Social Media

KYP Community is a women empowerment initiative that was launched in 2018 to help women make informed decisions in their lives by highlighting the '[un]spoken' stories and successes of women and inspire others to defy patriarchal social norms and follow their desired path in life. It also provides training for skills that are usually '[un]taught' to women. [Un]spoken and [Un]taught are the names of their key events that seek to build a community of women that support each other. KYP was co-founded by three women. Within the organization, tasks are divided in a manner that gives the women the opportunity to choose how they want to support - experiencing different fields and tasks: "Leadership to us is working together." Transparency is key and the team meets twice a week to align their views and vote. They adopt a leadership model which they discovered in a workshop, whereby their team spreads like a snowflake, wider and more connected; they will go off and work on their task before regrouping. The organization also works on understanding what skills women need the most and form workshops around their needs. There is a survey at the end of each workshop to grasp their feedback and understand their needs. The founders recognize that they have created a community mainly from the fact that there is a high rate of women coming back, but also by seeing women from their community, who met through KYP, already working together and supporting each other. Online, the organization makes it a point to repost and share content from NGOs with the goal of supporting women and encouraging collectiveness: "Instead of us taking her idea, going back and replicating it, we simply repost it...we need to support one another." They strongly believe that the more exposure is given around women and the more these issues are raised, the bigger the impact. One of the co-founders, Samah Hamawi, highlighted the importance of engaging on social media, and answering messages and comments instantly to build the community: "If you want people to engage with you, you need to engage back." The organization also uses social media as a tool to recruit more attendees for their events and take the conversation offline.

Although social media can be regarded as a tool that increases outreach and engagement with a wider audience, the interviewees shared certain limitations in building community through these tools, which they found difficult to overcome. For instance, both Gael Abou Ghannam and Laury Haytayan raised the issue of followers, suggesting that they tend to be from the same community, people with similar mindsets who already understand and engage with the issues they share. This defies the purpose of using social media as a tool for outreach and awareness-raising. Abou Ghannam finds that her followers are women who are already aware of women's health issues, which is why they follow her account. This limits her ability to meet her objectives which are in part to educate and spread awareness. Haytayan shared similar concerns: "I don't want to end up on a social media platform where we talk to each other, we are alike and we think the same way...because it's very diverse out there." These challenges are for the most part created by the algorithms set in place by the social media platforms themselves, to link people with common interests. Additionally, Moawad finds that these algorithms not only limit outreach and engagement, but also enforce certain toxic circles online and skew the content for the most part: "It makes me sad and upset that our expression has been so influenced by social media that it's hard for us to tell our stories outside of the format.[...] The way the internet is designed doesn't allow enough space for nuance, complexity, depth or reflection." The platforms also create limitations in their format and user-experience whereby text is limited, such as on Twitter, which shapes expression.

For this reason, Majed favors Facebook's lengthier posting capacity over Twitter's 140 character limit. Moawad further critiques social media corporations, who she believes hold people hostage through their policies, which only serve to silo individuals into very narrowly-defined categories to be better able to target them. Nevertheless, some find the ability to promote posts with paid ads useful for their work. For example, Caroline Fattal shared that her focus on social media for now is on Lebanon and more specifically, on her current followers: "What I try to do, and this would be my purpose, is change things for women one woman at a time...it might be small but if some women with whom I cross paths feel in one way or another that I've helped them, then I would have served my purpose."

On the other hand, while the number and type of followers on social media can be an indication of community building in some cases, they are often misleading. For instance, Haytayan shared that she follows other accounts on Twitter to stay informed, even if she doesn't always agree with the content. This puts in question the notion of online communities, as followers could exist for sourced information or to solely criticize, rather than to actively engage with a wider community. As Majed suggests, there is a misconception that to be a leader you need to have followers. Often, followers can mean being an influencer without being a leader: "a leader is someone who has content to give, but also energy and time and dedication for a certain cause." Therefore, the amount of followers on social media accounts may not necessarily reflect the 'real' number of people who follow or contribute to a leadership process, or the kind of support that fosters a community and its leaders. Nevertheless, to build an online community Fattal suggests that as a leader there should be some level of authenticity, vulnerability and openness to others: "You can't be a leader if you don't have followers...you need to be a people's person."

c. Social media as a source of authority, credibility and legitimacy?

As per the feminist leadership framework underpinning this research, as well as interviewees' reflections, there are different sources and manifestations of authority, credibility and legitimacy. Positionality, lived experiences, knowledge and/or technical expertise play an important role in defining the authority and influence of women engaging in leadership. In fact, having a deep understanding of the community or the group's needs and experiences, and using this understanding to shape one's vision, provides a solid basis for credibility, legitimacy and what Batliwala (2011) terms as earned authority. Interestingly, for example, Gael Abou Ghannam explains that she gained more followership and engagement on her Instagram page after she started sharing more personal aspects of her life online. This may indeed be related to the ability of Instagram followers to "view" Abou Ghannam's experience as a mother and a doctor. It could be argued that Paula Yaacoubian has used a similar strategy, based on an observation of her Instagram account. In fact, as of January 2020 her Instagram videos became more informal, handheld, raw and unedited, contrary to previous videos that were 'planned' in which she wore a suit and talked to the camera from a distance. Many interviewees further explained using social media as a tool to get a better understanding of current trends and debates. Laury Haytayan, Amira Kobrosli and others, all observe people's social media engagement to understand and identify emerging issues that are important to address. Haytayan specifically mentions that given her expertise and influence, it is her responsibility to share facts that respond to fake news.

Nadine Moawad is more critical of the tool, emphasizing that social media may only be useful to understand dominant narratives and thinking around feminist issues, which need to be countered to achieve social justice. While social media may indeed be a useful tool to develop some understanding of the needs of a community or of mainstream narratives and debates, observing engagement on digital platforms is not enough to understand the lived experiences of others nor to get a comprehensive picture of reality. Such knowledge is necessary to build legitimacy for those engaging in leadership. Instead, social media may contribute to trivializing certain issues, as argued by Caroline Fattal or presenting a partial view due to restrictions imposed by algorithms of the platforms used - as discussed in sections above. Abou Ghannam adds to this discussion by reflecting on Instagram users who share myths, false information or even harmful facts about women's health and other issues she tackles on her page. She states, "What bothers me is when someone makes a medical comment that is completely false. [...] Maybe [the content] seems light because it's on social media, but I speak from 13 years of experience in the medical field."

Additionally, the influence and credibility gained by women engaging in leadership through various sources, is clearly reflected in the engagement they receive on social media. Interviewees mentioned the responsibility that comes with that, and reflected further on the different ways in which they are perceived as leaders by others. Haytayan, for instance, views that her ability to shape the narrative around oil and gas extends to her activity on social media. She notices how the ideas she shares online resonate with public opinion, and are repeated by journalists and politicians; "People trust me for their analysis and come to me to seek an answer." Abou Ghannam, on the other hand, refers to the requests for consultations she receives online, and explains that people trust her with the very details of their personal stories, people who have never met her before except through her Instagram page. It is interesting to note that both Laury Haytayan and Rima Majed observe a peak in follow requests or a "wave of followers" after they take part in TV or Radio interviews. This highlights the ways in which social media may reflect offline authority and credibility.



Furthermore, many interviewees referred to social media itself as a tool and a space where credibility can be built and where women can gain authority and legitimacy. However, this was also problematized by others, who critiqued the concept of "social media activists" or "social media leaders" or influencers as creating an illusion of change, rather than contributing to actual change on the ground. For example, Moawad explains that the online world is important for a lot of people to build credibility and use individual and collective voices to highlight critical issues. However, she also critiques the way some may be perceived as leaders in a certain field due to their activity on social media - including herself; "In this sphere, it is very easy for anyone to assume this role because of social media. It's not to my credit or anyone's credit that people start to associate you for being an influencer in that realm." Majed provides a similar critique of "social media activism" and states that she neither considers herself such an activist, nor does she want to be perceived as such. She discusses the "optical illusion of social media", explaining that there are people who may have a really big presence on social media, but no real presence on the ground. Consequently, "your typical Facebook activists" may be perceived as very active groups, but would have marginal impact on the ground. Majed also questions the credibility that online activists gain through social media, and the dangers that this might cause. She provides the example of "social media activists", who use the influence they gain online, which may not necessarily be valid, to criticize the actual work of groups on the ground and contribute to their loss of legitimacy and credibility.

d. Power and accountability

Feminist leadership practices suggest that an increase in transparency, participatory and communal accountability can create shared power, and potentially avoid reproducing oppressive forms of leadership. Therefore, women in leadership processes must reimagine non-hierarchical practices in the way they take decisions and are held accountable for them, and more importantly in how they facilitate a space for healthy discussions. For example, most interviewees shared their experiences in adopting consensus and participatory approaches in decision-making in their organizations.

Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, structures where decision-making power is shared can produce challenges as well. Even though Nadine Moawad highlights the problematic aspects of individual power in association to leadership, she suggests that individual responsibility is important as it holds people to account to delegate power, diffuse it, decentralize it within the network and lead with a clear vision. When applying this to social media, it is also apparent that inherently, social media platforms are individualistic; posting and engagement is generally made from one account. In fact, we are asked to upload 'profile photos', and refer to accounts as 'profiles', which extends this notion of the 'individual' and encourages a form of sole decision-makers. This puts into question the use of social media and its ability as a tool to create more balanced power. Moawad emphasizes that social media is not a useful tool for making decisions, except if it is used to understand and counter the dominant narrative, and for trends in thinking around feminist issues. According to her, it does however create limitations by "purifying news feeds and algorithms to become more of an eco-chamber", which again puts in question the extent to which healthy dialogues can take place on social media.

To foster support and ensure that power isn't used unaccountably and in an oppressive manner, it is important to ensure accountability mechanisms are in place, when addressing leadership that is individual or shared. As Rima Majed highlights, it is important for feminist leadership to have channels of accountability that allow for checks to be in place to review and discuss past decisions and statements. Social media was problematized by many interviewees in relation to accountability mechanisms. Social media could indeed become a space for calling out and criticizing rather than holding people accountable constructively and in a healthy manner. Additionally, the visibility that comes with social media means that one mistake online could lead to the destruction of a leader and the mistrust of their followers and community. As Majed points out, there is a lot of toxicity in certain circles online, and debates can turn sour and become very personal. Virtual discussions could be very much disconnected from real face-to-face dynamics which could lead to attacks. Majed prefers not to channel activism virtually for this reason: "There is no argument, just defamation, and this is not something I am interested in."



In the realm of power-sharing and accountability, it is also relevant to explore the roles of women who lead organizations that support women's leadership, and unpack how this power is translated to social media. This inadvertently has implications for the model of leadership that these organizations promote. Reflecting on these notions, this research acknowledged that the women interviewed are also to a large extent leaders in their own organizations. By using auteur theory to analyse the social media content of those organizations, it is evident that these women's lived experiences give them agency to represent their organizations and the causes they promote. For instance, Caroline Fattal shares that she launched Stand for Women's Instagram account to shed light on her experiences and inspire and empower a community that supports women in business, her field of expertise. Although the account is organizational rather than personal, she takes pride in handling the back-end and taking the lead. Joelle Abou Farhat has also been working on empowering women in politics for almost eight years, with a total of 30 years in journalism and communications. In fact, a closer look at Stand for Women, Fiftyfifty and LLWB's Instagram pages will show that the women leading these organizations are visible in the posts and appear across many photos on the profile related to events, activities and short videos. Having a woman's face at the forefront could foster inspiration for women who aspire to become leaders. Their visibility could also add a more relatable aspect to their social media activity. In fact, Caroline believes that people want to know who is behind the account, "and maybe because they need role models." There is a certain power in being the voice of the organization on social media, and it could encourage more engagement.



Conclusion

This research paper examined the effectiveness of social media as a tool for women's leadership. Drawing on feminist leadership theories, and particularly on Srilatha Batliwala's framework developed for CREA in 2011, the analysis aimed at understanding the ways in which social media as a tool and a space facilitate or hinder women's leadership, with a focus on its transformative potential in different realms. It built on definitions and self-definitions of interviewees - both individual women who were identified as holding or having held leadership positions in their respective fields, and women representing and/or exercising leadership within organizations that support women's leadership as part of their mandate. Key elements that were analysed in relation to social media involve structural constraints, such as harmful social norms, online violence, and limited access to resources, restricting women's ability to engage in leadership processes and impacting the temporalities of those processes; the importance of community and collective processes in feminist leadership; sources of authority, credibility and legitimacy, and finally, the centrality of accountability mechanisms in relation to power in leadership.

Women's lived experiences, their positionalities in certain communities and groups, and sometimes their technical expertise, significantly shape the leadership processes or positions they engage in as well as their personal leadership styles. Their experiences of navigating patriarchal systems and norms often define their understanding of the needs and experiences of the communities around them, thereby shaping their visions for change, their values and their practices. Critically for this research, these experiences also have significant influence on women's engagement with social media. Indeed there is a certain level of subconsciousness at play that shapes the way that they interact with the platforms.

As patriarchal social norms in the actual world are very often also reflected in the virtual world, women face significant pressures in accessing resources and spaces, but also different forms of attacks and violence, online as well. This makes the relationship between community-building - an aspect that is central for feminist leadership - and social media complex. In fact, while it may be perceived and sometimes used as a tool for outreach, recruitment, and community-building (which could mean different things for different groups), it also limits the ability for women to engage with wider audiences due to algorithms imposed by the platforms. Additionally, social media proves to foster toxicity and personal attacks rather than offering a space for healthy debate and discussion, thereby hindering attempts at using the tool for accountability processes in relation to the use of power.



In brief, social media may indeed provide an alternative space and tools for women's leadership to be exercised, and for women to work towards and achieve transformative change. However, it is important in studying leadership to understand the nuances and diversity in different women's experiences, and between the different types of leadership they exercise in different fields, and with different objectives. Social media may in fact be a useful tool for self-promotion and leadership in business, as well as for awareness-raising to a certain extent, but it also presents considerable challenges and risks and fosters toxic dynamics rather than constructive criticism and debate, particularly for women engaging in leadership processes related to formal and informal politics and social change. Ultimately, social media may present some useful tools, but does not replace offline interactions. It remains necessary to engage with others and work collectively in offline spaces, as well as resort to what Laury Haytayan, giving the example of door-to-door campaigning and traditional media, calls the "basics".

It is important to also note that where social media is useful, its effectiveness is increased when resources are available. For this reason, organizations with a mandate of supporting women's leadership, in whichever field it is exercised, find social media useful to raise awareness and challenge public opinion around issues related to gender justice and women's leadership in itself. Resources remain a challenge as funding for women's rights and feminist organizations is often limited, and algorithms of the platforms are nonetheless an obstacle to reaching wider audiences. The role of these organizations is of great importance as they succeed in facilitating access to knowledge, resources and space for women in leadership positions, and through social media, are able to support women in leadership in acquiring visibility and sometimes credibility.

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 could therefore evolve as well. Ultimately, the usefulness of the tool depends on the type of leadership that is being exercised, as well as its specific objectives. For such tools and platforms, and the internet as a whole, to be used to facilitate a space for organizing and collective work on feminist change, this would necessitate 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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I. Annex 1 : Interview tool – individuals

I. Introductory questions

Can you briefly introduce yourself and your work?

Probes: Get an understanding of how they define themselves and of the work that they do.

- Who are you? How do you define yourself?
- What is your field? What do you do?
- Why is this what you do? Is this your chosen field?
- What are your priorities?

How would you define leadership? What about women's leadership?

Probes:

- Is leadership about individuals? Are leaders born or made? Can anyone be a leader?
- What are key elements or criteria for leadership?
- What makes a good leader?
- What makes a woman a leader? Does it make a difference if a leader is a woman? (ask relevant interviewees – those who relate with or identify as feminists – what makes a feminist leader)
- What do you think are important values for leadership or for leaders to hold?
- Does leadership require a vision? A set of values? Change goals?

II. Practices and self-definition

Do you consider yourself to be a leader? Do others consider you to be a leader?

Probes :

- How do you define your leadership style?
- Who do you work with? Do you have a group around you?
- Why do others consider you a leader? How is this expressed? (e.g. appointed/elected, people respect their opinion etc.)

Are you active on social media? Do you find social media to be a useful tool or platform?

Probes:

- Which platforms do you use?
- How regularly?
- How do you use those platforms? For what purposes? (e.g. to gain legitimacy, to promote an agenda, for campaigning, to share information, to visibilise certain people's experiences, to engage with public debates, for advertisement...)
- Do you post/engage yourself or do you have someone who does it for you? Who? Why?

III. Vision, Politics and Values

What is your vision? What are the core values and principles that drive your work? How is your vision shaped by your engagement with social media?

Probes:

- What are your objectives or change goals? What are your priorities? How did you decide on them?
- Who do you follow on social media (other individuals, leaders, organizations) and how does that influence or shape your vision/discourse?
- How do online debates affect your vision, objectives, priorities and discourse?

Do you consider social media to be a tool in achieving your vision or accomplishing your goals? How so?

Probes:

- How do you engage with others on social media to achieve your vision or objectives?
- How does social media fit within your plans or strategies?

IV. Gaining and Exercising Power

**What kind of decision do you usually make or consider most important for your work?
How do you make those decisions?**

Probes: Get an understanding of whether decision-making practices are participatory, inclusive and transparent; and of how social media can be a tool for this kind of decision-making.

- Who do you engage in decision-making processes and how? Who do you consult with?
- What are decisions that you would like to make but cannot? Why?
- How does social media facilitate the process of decision-making?
- How may social media hinder this process?

How do you believe the content you post on social media and your engagement online affects or influences others?

Probes:

- How does it influence the opinions and engagement of the people who follow you on those platforms?
- How does it influence/shape or contribute to public opinion?

**Do you receive or benefit from support from organizations whose mandate is about supporting women's leadership?
How does social media facilitate access to resources and support that you need to achieve your vision or your goals?**

Probes:

- What kind of support do you need, or would you like/have liked to receive?
- What kind of support or resources do you receive from such organizations? (a community or platform, skills and training, visibility online, amplification of content, challenging public opinion – whether they work with them or not etc.)
- What kind of support or resources have you received from Hivos/We4L/KYP/Maharat?
- What kind of support do you receive on social media from people who follow your work?
- What kind of resources or spaces are you able to access through social media in general?

How does social media hinder your access to support or resources?

Probes:

- Can you identify specific blockers or strategies that are used online to block your access to resources, support or spaces?
- Have you ever faced any violence on social media? Any violence aimed at you personally or at what you represent/the content that you share?
- Were these challenges public or private (comments or messaging)?
- Did these challenges translate to the offline/physical world?
- Have you ever changed your goals based on any challenge received?

V. Closing questions

Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences using social media or about the effectiveness of social media as a tool to promote and support women's leadership?

II. Annex 2: Interview tool – organizations

I. Introductory questions

Can you briefly introduce yourself and the organization and its work?

Probes:

- What is the organization's mandate and vision?
- What are the organization's priorities?

II. Women's leadership and support provided

How do you and the organization define leadership? What about women's leadership?

Probes:

- Is leadership about individuals? Are leaders born or made? Can anyone be a leader?
- What are key elements or criteria for leadership?
- What makes a good leader?
- What makes a woman a leader? Does it make a difference if a leader is a woman? (ask relevant interviewees – those who relate with or identify as feminists – what makes a feminist leader)
- What do you think are important values for leadership or for leaders to hold?
- Does leadership require a vision? A set of values? Change goals?

How does the organization support women's leadership?

Probes:

- What kind of leadership model do you promote?
- What kind of work do you do to promote or support women's leadership? (e.g. challenging public opinion and representation, skills and capacity-building, sharing information, campaigning in favour of women's leadership, visibilising/amplifying women leaders and their work)
- What kind of services do you provide? To whom?
- Do you support women leaders exclusively? Why? On what basis do you choose who to support?
- Who do you target with your work and/or your services?

III. Social Media

How do you use social media as a tool to promote or support women's leadership?

Probes/examples:

- Outreach
- Communication
- Share information
- Build community
- Challenge public opinion
- Campaigning
- To visibilise/amplify women leaders' work/content/experiences

What do you believe are the benefits and risks for women leaders in using social media? How does this analysis inform the support you provide?

Probes:

- Do you provide services or support specifically related to social media? (e.g. social media/communications skills, visibility online, amplifying content, providing support in relation to digital safety etc.)
- Do you engage with your online followers on issues related to women's leadership?

Have you faced any challenges on social media? Have you identified any risks with these platforms?

Probes:

- Have the accounts ever received any violence/attacks that could affect the messaging?
- Were these challenges public or private (comments or messaging)?
- How did you react?
- Did these challenges affect any of the women you advocate for on your social media platforms?
- Have you ever changed your goals based on any challenge received?

IV. Closing questions

Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences using social media or about the effectiveness of social media as a tool to promote and support women's leadership?

III. Annex 3: Social media analysis tool

Qualitative analysis of social media accounts of interviewees

What platforms do they use (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, LinkedIn)?

What type of followers do they have (geographical, gender, age group, interests)?

What is the tone of voice (example: empowering and uplifting / friendly yet informative / professional and ambitious)?

What type of content is used (text, videos, photos, infographics, etc.)?

How regularly do they post?

What is the level of engagement (on a scale from 1-10, 1 being the lowest and 10 the highest)?

Recurring hashtags used?

What are the overarching themes?

Who is represented (the owner of the account / other individuals / community)?

Can they be easily contacted (available phone number / email / message)?

What campaigns have been created (if any)?

Most successful post (theme, representation)?

Is there a clearly defined strategy?

Quantitative analysis of social media accounts of interviewees

How many followers do they have on each account?

What is the average number of likes on their posts?

What is the average number of comments on their posts?



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the
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