



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the
Netherlands

WE4L
Women Empowered for Leadership

Hivos
people unlimited

Opening up spaces for
women leaders'
participation in Malawi:
The role of
Social Media

Centre for Civil Society Strengthening (CCSS)

GLOSSARY ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CCSS	Centre for Civil Society Strengthening
CMD	Centre for Multiparty Democracy
DPP	Democratic Progressive Party
ETCA	Electronic Transactions & Cybersecurity Act, 2016
GGJDC	Gender Governance Justice Development Centre
IEC	Information Education and Communication
KII	Key Informant Interview
MBC	Malawi Broadcasting Corporation
MCP	Malawi Congress Party
MP	Member of Parliament
MOGCDSW	Ministry of Gender Children Disability Social Welfare
NEC	National Executive Committee
PP	People's Party
SMS	Short Message Service
UDF	United Democratic Front
UNW	United Nations Women
UTM	United Transformation Movement
WEAL	Women Empowered for Leadership
WOLREC	Women Legal Resources Centre

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This report presents the findings of Hivos Southern Africa commissioned **research on the effectiveness of social media as a tool of opening up spaces for women leaders' participation in Malawi.**

In Malawi, leadership remains male-dominated and women's representation in the National Assembly at 23% (for example, women occupy 45 seats in parliament, out of the 193 seats). At local government level, women representation is at 14% (women occupy 67 seats in Local councils, out of the 460 seats)



Globally, and locally, women face various challenges which hinder their active participation in politics, which include; violence, corruption, intimidation, hatred and character assassination. A substantial number of women are unable to handle the pressures that result from these challenges. Furthermore, women leaders are often discouraged by members of their society, due to deeply entrenched cultural gender norms and beliefs. A critical lack of political will also plays a significant role as party leadership continuously fails to introduce and/or implement policies that promote the active participation of women in political leadership positions. The multi-stakeholder postmortem meeting held following the 2019 election in Malawi, also revealed that the current political party system does not favour the election of women. This was signalled by the high number of independent candidates who participated in the 2019 elections (117 out of 309 contestants). This point was further illustrated by the few number of women who held high leadership positions within political parties.

The importance of having women in leadership and decision making positions cannot be underestimated. Firstly, women constitute the rapidly expanding population (52%), and an Afro barometer (2014) study revealed that if particular social norms are demystified, voters can be voting for women leaders. Secondly, women's political participation presents an opportunity to represent the views of a larger group at the Ward and Constituency level, as they tend to interact more frequently with the wider community, in comparison to their male counterparts. Thirdly, having more women in women leadership positions, presents an opportunity to expose injustices, as women tend to speak up more than men when it comes to social injustices. Fourthly, women in leadership presents an opportunity for continued peace, as women tend to promote unity, and have been noted to be good mediators. Fifthly, women leaders present an opportunity to fight corruption, as women tend to be less inclined towards engaging in corrupt activities, unlike their male counterparts. Sixthly, women leaders can also influence central government policy decisions to favor the welfare and rights of women and children, if given more leadership and decision making positions.

Several scholars have defined social media. Dollarhide (2019) defines social media it as a computer based technology that facilitates exchange of ideas and information through electronic communication. She continues by sharing that though the primary purpose is about connecting with family, friends and acquaintances these platforms also allow engagement with new people online. She cites Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn as the most popular social media platforms. Similarly, Hopkins (2017) agrees with Dollarhide (2019) definition that it is computer a based technology that allows creation and exchange of a user generated

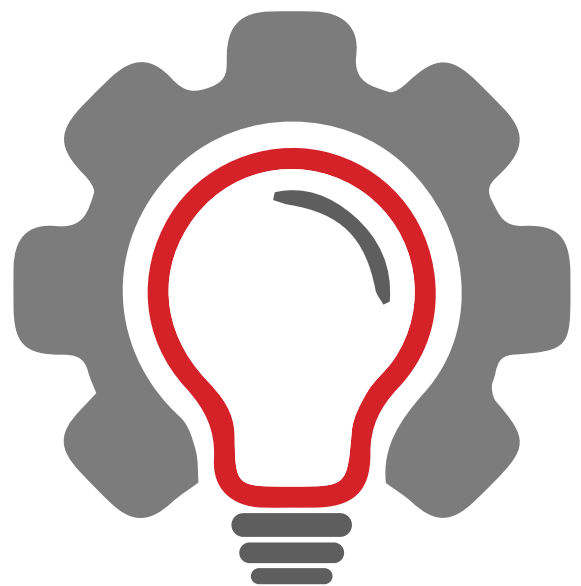
content. The above definitions point to the fact that social media is a platform that facilitates exchange of information not only of friends but a network of connections where useful information, chats, videos, voice notes, pictures with an audience that the user cannot easily contact all the time. Just as it is globally defined, Malawians are also using social media to facilitate exchange of ideas and information. The difference as this document will indicate is that locally the limitations to internet penetration is due to gaps in personal knowledge of online media tools and high internet costs.

In this digital era, the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) tools, such as social media platforms, have proven to be key instruments for the advancement of women in a variety of important ways. In 1995, the Beijing Platform for Action recognized and predicted the media's "potential to make a far greater contribution to the advancement of women" (pages 27 and 46). The use of digital technological tools for women's empowerment is also recognized in goal 5 of the SDGs4. Social media, through platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp, micro blogs like Twitter, and video and photo sharing platforms like YouTube and Instagram, are providing women with powerful tools for their advancement, politically, economically and socially. Women Empowered for Leadership (WE4L) commissioned a research study to assess the effectiveness of social media as a tool of opening up spaces for women leaders' participation in Malawi with a specific focus on gathering information on the trends, possible case studies and projected future trends of social/online media, and its use by women who are aspiring for leadership or currently in leadership, as well as how it's used to support or derail them. The paper also looked at social/online media sentiment on women leaders and how it influences public perception of women in leadership positions in Malawi. Finally, it also analyzed social/online media versus traditional media to determine the added value of investing in social and online media to further the objectives of the programme. The research was undertaken between May and June 2020.

Methodology

This research primarily depended on qualitative methods and approaches. A Key Informant Interview (KII) tool and case study guide was designed and used in capturing the required data to meet the research objectives.

The Key Informant Interviews were conducted with women leaders, voters, service providers, and partner staff of Women Empowered for Leadership (WE4L), MHUB, UN Women, and the Ministry of Gender, Social Welfare and Community Development. The research was highly enriched by secondary data that was extracted from both project documents and other relevant sources to this study. Document review was done in two ways; firstly, during the inception report development stage, and then after collection of primary data. This guided the development of the checklist, and assisted in the validation of the information gathered during primary data collection.



Findings

Malawi has 2.2 million internet users and 540,000 active social media users. It is perceived that content shared on the worldwide web has the potential to reach over two million people. This study notes that there are nearly 8.57 million mobile subscribers in the country, meaning that the usage of bulk sms has the potential to take campaign messages to large percentage of voters. 96 percent of population listens to the radio including the state-owned Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC), seven private broadcasters and 17 community stations.

The study observes that Facebook and WhatsApp are the main social media platforms being used by women leaders to profile and really make them more visible to the voters.

The Rt. Hon. Speaker of Parliament indicated that she usually uses Text Messages/WhatsApp messages to share information. On the cost of data, she noted that: "it is very expensive. However, you can't do without it. Furthermore, the quality of the network can be incredibly bad, however even in those situations, you are still being charged".

The majority of followers on Facebook are men. Reception received on social media has been varied, especially in the run up to the May 2019 elections, as a number of the people on Facebook responding to posts were supporters of their rivals: "you think you will make it on an independent ticket, we have our candidate who is on a party ticket A, B, C and they would try to demotivate me and I would get messages on my identity as my page shows that I am Indian" "You think Malawi can go for an Indian?" "Do you think Malawi can vote for a Moslem or an Indian", shared one women leader from Zomba.

The study observed that the type of messages that are shared/accessed on social media by the women leaders can be categorized as follows:

- 1- vote seeking messages.
- 2- fund/resource mobilization messages.
- 3- social messages.
- 4- news/ information sharing.
- 5- whistleblowing/activism messages.

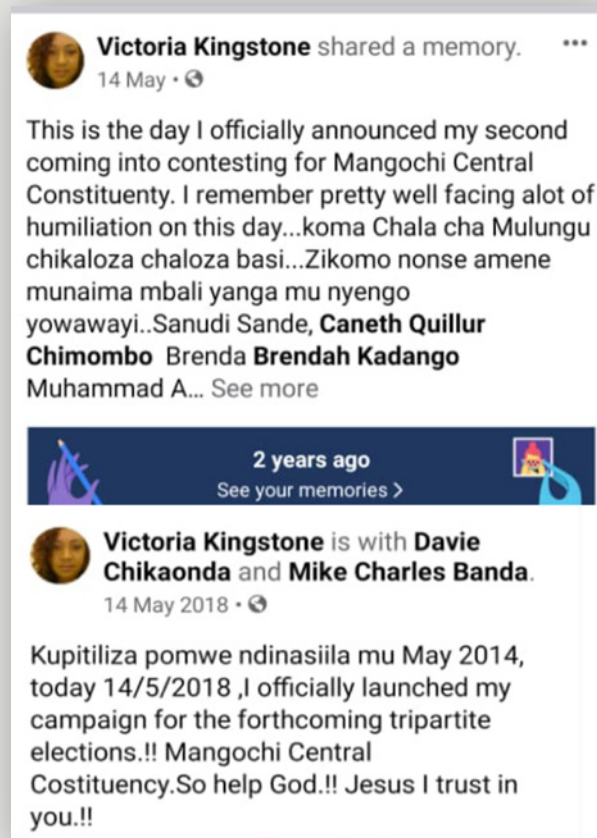


Figure 1: An example of how a woman leader in Mangochi used her post to profile her candidacy



Figure 2: An example of imaging from Blantyre woman leader

Social Media allows for influential people and opinion leaders abroad or in the cities to communicate with the people in the constituency, and influence their voter opinion. Using their name has amplified on who and what the women were offering.

With limited resources, a woman leader in Zomba shares posts that highlight the existing gaps in her local council such as in December 2019 when she shared a post about the looming hunger in her ward. She shared pictures and statistics of the area and in March 2020, the Muslim World League supported her with over 6,000 bags of maize which she distributed in her ward. Someone else responded positively to her post and donated some blankets.

The type of social media used by women leaders is dependent on a number of factors, including; cost, level of digital literacy, context of voters, among others. There has been a widespread realization that the majority of voters in Malawi are the youth, and are active on online platforms. Social media is used by women leaders to share information with their constituencies. One woman leader shared that she spent MK 20,000 (approximately USD 28) per month on sharing information with her supporters on what she is doing. Social media has proved to be a powerful vehicle for bringing women's rights issues to the attention of a wider public, galvanizing action on the streets of cities around the world, and encouraging policymakers to step up their commitments to gender equality. The study reveals that a majority of Malawian women leaders have limited digital literacy, coupled with high data tariffs and growing levels of cyber-bullying towards women, despite available protective legislation. "I am lucky that I come from the hospitality industry where I was once exposed to a training course digital marketing in the tourism industry," One seating MP from Mangochi explained.

Patriarchy has also manifested itself through online and social media platforms with women being on the receiving end of all sorts of insults. "Social Media can at times be demoralizing, and depressing" Fake News can be distracting. For example, following the 2020 Fresh Presidential Elections, messages were being shared that implied that the speaker had not granted UTM members permission to sit with MCP members on the government side in Parliament".



Figure 3: Example of a woman leader who managed to source donations through posts made on Facebook



Figure 4: An example of a woman leader in Mzimba profiling and imaging her candidacy

What commentators did not understand at the time, was that the Malawi Electoral Commission had officially written to her office stating that because MCP was the only party in the Tonse Alliance that was on the ballot paper during the Fresh Presidential Elections, they are the only party permitted to be seated on the government side. One woman leader observes that due to the fact that word spreads quickly on social media, it is sometimes difficult to control a story. Many of these stereotypes trace back to entrenched patriarchy, and highly personalized political systems that are difficult to change in the short term. Imaging and profiling of women leaders was done by 50-50 campaigners, which unfortunately missed an opportunity to profile the individual abilities and strengths of individual women leaders. The study felt this was indeed a lost opportunity, however, women leaders have limited knowledge on how they can maximize/amplify their profiles and enhance their visibility online. "We cannot ignore social media". "Social media can be used as a guide to direct you on what you are doing right, and what you are doing wrong. However, you need to be careful with how you use it, statements you make can be used against you", observed one-woman leader.

There seem to be sufficient legal frameworks for the protection of users on social media but the enforcement of these policies is not as proactive as it should be. The study observed several cases where rights had clearly been infringed, however, these cases have not been followed up or condemned by duty bearers (enforcement agencies). Furthermore, there are few reported incidences of such infringement.. The study notes that there is limited knowledge on how to report such cases.

The study further observes that the above narrations point to a lack of a strategy or mechanism, by both implementing agencies and women leaders, to counter online gender based violence (harassment, intimidation & abuse). This enhances the vulnerability of women leaders, which explains why many women choose to abandon the electoral race due to the psychological impact of online abuse that compromises their ability to compete. Voters tend to believe what they hear and read on social media, particularly if there are no efforts to quell the rumors perpetrated by their competitors.

Furthermore, the lack of knowledge on existing legislation like the Electronic Transactions & Cybersecurity Act, 2016 (ETCA) has also compounded the situation with most women not aware of the legal remedies available to them when their rights have been infringed upon.

Recommendations

The role of social media continues to grow every day, and will most likely play a big role in future elections and it is based on the findings which point to the role of candidates, implementing partners including development partners and voters. The study makes the following recommendations. Detailed recommendations have also been provided in the main report.





Implementing partners:

- 1.** Implementing partners of the 50-50 campaign should partner with service providers to popularize legal provisions available in safeguarding and protecting cyber bullying as provided in the Electronic Transactions & Cybersecurity Act, 2016 (ETCA), and voters should be given dedicated toll-free lines for reporting cyberbullying. Voters should act as watch dogs -proactive in condemning any form of online violence against women. Implementing partners and advocates for gender equality should come up with generic uniform content for marketing a woman leader using online platforms. This could be a practical way of fighting patriarchy, and more importantly, fostering a culture of fighting negative masculinities. Trainings for women leaders on how to use social media as a marketing tool can also be taken up and delivered by implementing partners. Strategic partners can include MHUB1;
- 2.** Implementing partners should consider developing a strategy or mechanism to counter online gender based violence (harassment, intimidation & abuse). Special messages or programs specially countering cyber bullying should be developed and supported during the campaign period.



Women leaders :

- 1.** Women leaders should consider learning more on how to utilize WhatsApp and Facebook which are the most common social mediums Malawians are using. Training around this area can be ideal and important addition especially in the wake of Covid19- pandemic, where rallies may not be attractive option as they may be seen as potential hazards. Posters and cards can also be ideal for short, precise, direct and hard hitting messaging to the voters.
- 2.** Women leaders should cultivate a culture of researching to explore what fellow women are doing within the region and/or globally, to then adopt the best practices for their context. Self-learning from peers is a powerful method of learning.
- 3.** Women leaders should invest resources in managing their own online platforms. The study notes that traffic is high on online platforms during working hours 9 am to 4 pm. Evidence shows that people often use office internet or employer's data, and women leaders in future can utilize this insight to strategically target and make an impression on voters.
- 4.** Beyond social media, women leaders should consider using Short Message Service (sms) platforms as they have more reach than online media apps which require internet or a smart phone.
- 5.** Women leaders should not only use social media for marketing, but also in their representative and oversight roles as members of parliament and councilors. Women leaders should use social media for social activism, and ensure that they engage with the people in their communities, beyond rallies.



Women leaders' sponsors :

1. There is need for development partners/funders to consider supporting implementing partners with more funding to enable them to develop and implement digital strategies. They should be able to support roll out of packages that target low tech audiences with bulk sms which often manage to reach the wider audience/voters.



Men as gatekeepers :

1. Explore increasing the role of men in supporting the fight against patriarchy. Explore identifying HeforShe champions in all implementing areas to support in the fight. It is these testimonies that can be uploaded in social media platforms for others to emulate. Gatekeepers (religious/traditional leaders) should be encouraged to discuss issues surrounding masculinity, relationships and sexuality and importance of women in leadership.



1.0 Programme Background

Hivos in collaboration with its partners is implementing a five year (2016-2020) Women Empowered for Leadership (WE4L) programme in Southern Africa (Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe) and Middle East (Jordan and Lebanon). This Programme seeks to promote women's leadership at the political, public administration levels and within civic organizations. Focus is at the sub-national level where decisions are made and policies are implemented that directly affect people's day-to-day life. Moreover, it allows for women's leadership skills to grow and mature. The main catalyzing forces in this Programme are women's organizations and (aspiring) women leaders.

The goal of the WE4L is "collaborating for increased and effective participation by women in politics and public administration." The activities include use of modern communications tools and platforms in profiling women leaders, as well as researching about women who step up to participate in public leadership platforms. Social media has grown exponentially in the last decade rendering traditional information and data gathering methods close to obsolete. It has however become evident that social media has become a key tool in making or breaking leadership careers. It is this use of social media and its direct and indirect effects on women and their participation in leadership that this consultancy seeks to unpack for discussion.

For this reason, WE4L commissioned a research study to gather information on the trends, possible case studies and projected future trends of social/online media and its use by women who are aspiring for leadership or currently in leadership as well as how it's used to support or derail them. The paper also looked at social/online media sentiment on women leaders and how it influences public perception of women in leadership positions in Malawi. It also analyzed social/online media versus traditional media to determine the added value of investing in social and online media to further the objectives of the programme.

1.1 Objectives and Scope of the Research

Objective of the Review

The following are objectives of the research.

1. The role of social media uses in making or breaking women leaders' careers
2. The direct and indirect effects of social media use on women leaders career progression
3. The impact of social media in promoting the 50/50 gender representation agenda
4. The effectiveness of using social media as a tool for activism by women leaders
5. The impact of online gender based violence (harassment, intimidation & abuse) on women leaders



2.0 Research Approach and Methodology

2.1 Technical approach

The research adopted a highly participatory approach involving key stakeholders especially women leaders both at national and local level. Targeted meetings with women leaders, service providers, and voters were held to articulate key research issues. This included; the review of tools after submission of the inception report. The Key Informant Interviews were highly interactive and facilitated dialogue on learning points.

2.2 Scope

The research covered all WE4L partners and also selected women leaders outside the earmarked districts as some of the WE4L districts are rural and the women leaders there do not have access to social media. Districts outside WE4L coverage included: Chikwawa, Mangochi, Mchinji, Ntcheu, Mwanza, Mulanje, Dedza and Salima. Nevertheless, the selection of women leaders was purposive based: access to online/social media tools.

2.3 Study population

The study population consisted of women beneficiaries of the WE4L programme and the general 50-50 campaign who contested both at local and national elections respectively. The research team interfaced with staff of WORLEC (1), Towvirane (1), GGJDC (1) MHUB (1), UN Women (1). To benefit from the voting population, voters who use online media and reside in women leaders' constituencies/wards were also purposively included as part of the respondents. A total of 31 women leaders were interfaced with. A list of the respondents interviewed is attached as Annex 1.

2.4 Document reviews

The research was highly enriched by secondary data that was extracted from both project documents and other relevant sources to this study. Key documents reviewed included inter alia: project documents, 50-50 campaign reports and other critical grey literature in possession of the key stakeholders and implementing partners. Document review was done in two ways; firstly during the inception report development stage and then after collection of primary data. This guided development of the checklist and validated information gathered during primary data collection.

2.5 Field collection methods and tools

This research primarily depended on qualitative methods and approaches. A KII tool and case study guide was designed and assisted in capturing the required data and meet the research objectives. The tool examined access, use, experience, influence and impact among others.

The key information interviews were conducted with women leaders, voters, service providers, and staff of WE4L, MHUB, UN women, and the Ministry of Gender, Children, Social Welfare and Disability.

2.6 Case study documentation

The case study guides was designed to help the researcher capture compelling stories. The selection of the candidate to participate in the case study was purposively done. Some of the considerations taken were; number of followers on Facebook, uniqueness of the approach (e.g. including fundraising for resources). Verbal consent was sought from the respondents and all ethical guidelines (use of picture and their story in the report) were executed.

2.7 Data analysis

The research was qualitative and the data analysis mainly involved categorising content generated from KII and case studies into themes. Triangulation focused on comparing information from different sources such as documentation and interviews on the same subject to corroborate and check reliability of the evidence.

2.8 Limitations to research findings

It was difficult to get appointments with women leaders, service providers due to the uncertainty of when the Malawi 2020 Fresh Presidential Elections would actually occur. The initial date was set for 2 July 2020 and then it was changed to 23rd July 2020. Critical respondents were actively involved in campaigning for their political parties and did not respond to repeated reminders. However, the study managed to secure the appointments for selected women leaders after the elections had taken place on 23rd June 2020.



3.0 Findings

3.1 Introduction

This section covers relevant literature on online/social media especially focusing on women leaders.

3.2 Literature review

Globally, Loiseau and Nowack (2015) argue that social media has proved to be a powerful vehicle for bringing women's rights issues to the attention of a wider public, galvanising action on the streets of cities around the world and encouraging policymakers to step up commitments to gender equality. They cite recent cases in Turkey and India which reflect the potential of social media to bridge the gap that often separates grassroots women's activism from policy-making processes. The explosion of social media and unprecedented use by women of new technologies represents important opportunities to bring gender equality and women's rights issues to the forefront of both policy making and media attention.

Loiseau and Nowack (2015) go on to identify three areas where social media has enabled women's political activism. Firstly, they say Hashtag activism bringing women's issues to the forefront of political agendas: Hashtag activism has helped to mobilise public attention on women's rights, increasing the visibility of issues that are under-reported in mainstream media. For example in 2013, the #BringBackOurGirls campaign reached over 1 million tweets, helping to raise awareness of both national and international actors of the need to help rescue the abducted Nigerian schoolgirls. Secondly, they share that tackling violence against women through social media tools: Social media tools have helped female victims to share their experiences of violence with other victims, creating a space to exchange knowledge and information on their rights, legal processes and welfare services. In 2010, HarassMap was launched in Egypt as an online mapping tool to allow victims to anonymously report cases of sexual harassment directly from their mobile phone. Thirdly, they share that it assists in public accountability towards gender equality: Social media has been increasingly used by women's grassroots organizations to call for greater public accountability towards gender equality.

At continental level, StatCounterGlobal2 stars who track the usage share of search engines, browsers and operating systems, including mobile, from over 10 billion monthly page views present social media statistics for Malawi- April 2020 reveal popular social media platforms in Malawi is Facebook (46.12 %). Followed by Pinterest (24.98 %) and Twitter at %19.43. Instagram, and others (e.g.YouTube) are not popularly used.

On national level, the Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA) estimates that Malawi has 2.2 million internet users and 540,000 active social media users. Indeed, pushing any content on the worldwide web has the potential to reach over two million people. According to Chimwemwe Manyozo86.2 ,(2020) 1 percent of urban households in urban areas and 47.8 percent rural homesteads in Malawi, have a mobile phone. He further stresses that there are nearly 8.57 million mobile subscribers in the country, meaning bulk sms has the potential to take campaign messages to this audience. 96 percent of the population listens to the radio, including the state-owned Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC), seven private broadcasters and 17 community stations.

One of the challenges of social media during elections is dissemination of “fake news” (i.e. misinformation) Despite low internet penetration in Malawi, around 14% of fake news on online platforms is still relevant, due to the fact that people discuss and spread fake news offline. Online social media in Malawi is part of online content regulated under the Electronic Transactions & Cybersecurity Act, 2016 (ETCA). The ETCA1 has placed legal liability for fake news to:

- Editors of posts and this includes even users who posts on interactive platforms are liable (if the editors belong to the social platforms then the platform is liable i.e. Nyasatimes but for user generated social platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp it is the “user” who is liable.
- Platform providers who are classified as hosts only bear liability if :
 - they are informed of an infringing post but did not take it down,
 - they monitor their online content

The ETCA has also placed obligation on online service providers. These are classified as hosts and have the following obligations:

- Maintain & preserve data that identifies any person who posts on their platform
- Produce such info if requested by the law enforcement.
- Inform subscribers of technical means of restricting access (Access)
- Provide editors of online content means to comply with identification requirement (hosting)
- Provide easily accessible and visible system for reporting of infringing content (Hosting)
- Report promptly to competent authority of existence of illegal content

The law has classified liability in two forms namely; civil and criminal:

a. Civil Action

- Any person infringed by fake news can take up civil action against any person who posted and the platform provider (host) are under an obligation to disclose details of the person who post when presented with a court warrant.
- The ETCA also mandates the courts to recognize any electronic evidence in court proceedings.

b. Criminal Action

- If the fake news contains anything that carries criminal liability the Police or the State can also institute criminal proceedings based on any applicable law and MACRA where possible will render technical assistance to law enforcement.



Literature on online and social media usage in Malawi reveals that limited usage is due to high data tariffs. The latest monitor on internet affordability reveals that Malawi has one of the most expensive internet charges at USD27.41 (Camen Ang2020 ,1), ironically Malawi is one of the world's poorest countries. The other top five countries with expensive mobile data also include Benin (USD 27.22), Chad (USD23.33), Yemen (USD15.98) and Botswana (USD13.98). ICT Research Africa indicates that East Africa is the region that has the cheapest Internet access in the continent and Tanzania is on top with USD 8.5, then Rwanda (USD 8.6), Kenya (USD 9.6), Uganda (10.76), and Burundi USD (11.9).

Malawi, according to the World Bank, ranks in 167th place out of 176 countries in the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) ICT Development Index. In reality, due to lack of control and access of resources by Malawian women this can also be cited as one of the major hindrances to women's active participation in politics.



4.0 Findings from the Field

4.1 Introduction

This section covers the findings based on respondents' insights on social media as a tool for opening up spaces for women leaders' participation in Malawi.

4.2 The role of social media uses in making or breaking women leaders' careers

Social media impact has proved to be a powerful instrument in bringing women's rights issues to the attention of the wider public, galvanizing support for women leaders and encouraging policymakers to step up commitments to gender equality. On the other hand, it has also been noted that it has been used to destroy women leaders' career. A woman leader in Nkhatabay summed up this in the following; "Too much machination, men have more money than women so they give out money to selected supporters to say good things about male candidacy and paint a bad image of the female competitors".

4.3 Access

The study observed that most women leaders interacted with are active on Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter, and that their accounts have existed well before they decided to run for political office. The study also noted that the type of social media used depends on various reasons including connectivity costs, techno savvy and context of voters among others.



“ On Whatsapp I am limited to those in my contacts unlike Facebook which goes beyond friends”, one woman leader shared her preference for Facebook to other online mediums.

The study also noted that most of the women leaders are managing the accounts by themselves:

“I do not have anyone helping me to manage my Facebook account”, said one woman leader in Mzimba

There was also a cross section of respondents who shared that their pages are managed by a third party:

“It is youths within my constituency who developed ‘Friends of Catherine Gotani Hara’ Facebook account,” said Malawi’s speaker of Parliament.

“When busy or tied up, I ask my nephew who is a journalist to assist me with loading of activities on my page,” said another woman leader.

4.4 Use

The study observed that the type of messages that are sent/accessed on social media by the women leaders can be categorized as follows: 1- vote seeking messages, 2- fund/resource mobilization messages 3- social messages 4- news/ information sharing 5- whistleblowing/activism messages. Beside and below are samples of selected postings by some of the women leaders:

The study noted that a majority of the women leaders running on political party tickets used WhatsApp to access all important party messages and policy, as they are accessible through their WhatsApp forums. Even for those running on an independent ticket, the study leadrnt that WhatsApp was highly used to access information their candidature information as it through the groups they affiliated to they could be informed on new developments from the electoral body, 50-50 campaign updates and competitors information:

“Using online platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp, I was telling voters to like my messages and to tell their relatives to vote for me” –Respondent in Mzimba said.

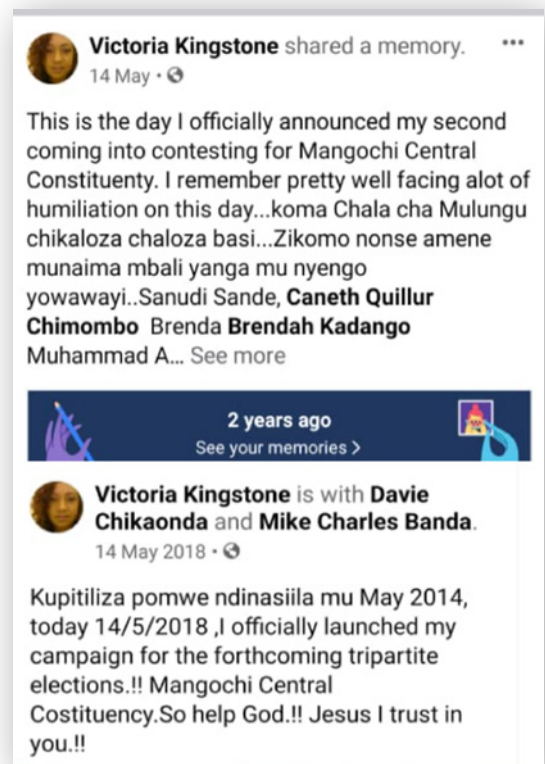


Figure 5: Example of how a women Leader in Blantyre profiled herself using Facebook

“I had access to Facebook and WhatsApp social media platforms but I used Facebook to post what I was doing in my ward”, shared a woman leader based in Blantyre.

“I used WhatsApp to send messages to voters and chiefs updating them of upcoming rallies and meetings” shared woman leader from Chitipa who also admitted to solely using WhatsApp because she does not know how to operate the other platforms such as Facebook, and most people in Chitipa area use WhatsApp.

“With Whatsapp I am limited to my contacts unlike Facebook whose posts can be boosted to go beyond your contacts”, Mzimba woman leader sharing her preference with Facebook to other online mediums.

“A lot of people know me because of social media and the community radio. I got recognition I needed through these platforms” shared a woman leader from Mzimba.

“I was active on both Facebook and WhatsApp (50%) and these platforms assisted me to reach the most remote areas I failed to physically visit”, Shared a woman leader from Mangochi. “Social media is very effective, in terms of coverage and spread of messages to a wide range of area especially where resources are limited”, the woman leader from Mangochi further pointed out.

“Social media ndi chida cha mphamvu chomwe chingathandizire azimayi kuti apite patsogolo mundale (Social media is a very powerful tool which assists women to advance further in politics) “Zinthu ngati facebook, zimakuthandizira kuti uthenga wako upite kwa anthu ambiri mu kanthawi yochepa” (Things like Facebook assists me to share my message with many people within the shortest possible time), A woman leader from Lilongwe Shared.

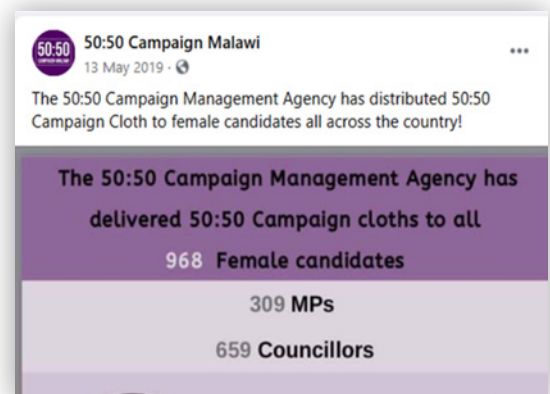


Figure 6: An example of some of the messaging from 50-50 campaign implementers



"I was also able to communicate with our party president Dr. Joyce Banda through WhatsApp and I had access to most of the electoral related information which was posted in different WhatsApp forums I am in"
 , shared a woman leader from Chitipa.



" Masiku ano anthu ambiri samapita mmisonkhano ya ndale (Nowadays, many people do not attend political rallies physically) and they would want to follow what is happening through social platforms like Facebook and the majority in my ward being vendors, ndinadziwa kuti sinthawi zonse angamasiye (I realised it's not all times that they will patronise my rallies) so if I do not post on social media it means my other voters who are in majority will not know what I'm doing", A woman leader in Blantyre Limbe shared.



For the WE4L programme, it was challenging as there were dealing with councillors who mostly do not have android phones , whose wards are located in rural areas. There was an attempt by the program to establish a website which had pictures and stories of the information for the activities the women leaders were undercarrying.



"Social media helps those whose constituencies are in urban areas and they have a high advantage of having access and using these platforms to easily reach their voters with different campaign messages unlike us contesting in rural areas", shared a woman leader from a rural constituency.



4.5 Experiences

The study has observed that most candidates have not had any training in using online platforms. The study learnt that most of the women leaders are learning or copying from peer inputs' in order to improve their own posts on social media. One women leader had this to share:



"I started following what the incumbent MP for Mangochi Central Hon. Victoria Kingstone was doing on her Facebook".



And when the study engaged Hon. Kingstone to learn the secret to her successful use of social media she had this to say:

“I am lucky that I come from the hospitality industry where I was once exposed to a training course called digital marketing in the tourism industry”
she explained.
“ I have been told to open a Facebook account but I don’t know how to do it”.

The quote sums up some limitations that women leaders are experiencing in the social media platforms they can capably use.

The study also observed that Hon. Kingstone self-sponsors her Facebook page and estimates to have been spending USD30 per month in the run up to the May 2019 elections. Following the elections, she is spending MK 20,000 (approximately USD28) per month on sharing information with the supporters on what she is doing. Another woman leader in Mangochi shared with the study on how she set out to reach her voters every evening (after 5 pm) with messages on what she was offering. She estimates to have used MK 60,000 (USD82) worth of airtime during the entire campaign period.

The study also noted that the cost of accessing social media platforms is a significant hinderance. Below are some of the feelings from the respondents:

“Social media is somewhat expensive especially when one is using videos and pictures”.

“Data is so expensive in our country and no wonder a lot of people don’t use social media for campaign”.

“A lot of female candidates do not have a Facebook account due to high cost of internet data”, shared a woman leader from Blantyre.



5.0 The direct and indirect effects of social media use on women leaders career progression

Influence

The study noted that social media has put a voice to the women leaders in Malawi. 2018 and 2019 was not the first time that women sought to run for office, but the use of social media, especially Facebook, has amplified women voices. Many women stories' have come to light because of social media coverage. Voters are able to appreciate the women's work through the use of social media platforms. The study observed that women leaders realized that the majority of their voters are youth, hence the need for online campaigning so that the voters could follow what the candidate was doing:

"Masiku ano anthu ambiri samapita mmisonkhano ya ndale (Nowadays people do not patronize political rallies) and they would want to follow what was happening through social platforms like Facebook and being vendors, *"ndinadziwa kuti sinthawi zonse angamasiye"* (they cannot leave their) business *"yawo ndikupita ku"* (and patronize a) rally so if I do not post my activities on social media it means my other voters who are in majority will not know what I'm doing and it will be a minus for me" one women leader explained.

The study observes that online platforms have complemented progression of women leader's careers. Social media has put a voice to the women leaders' contribution to national development discourse in Malawi:

"People of my area have touch screen phones because most youth as early 13 years old migrate to South Africa for greener pastures"

"I was contesting because of the underdevelopment in Mangochi Malombe-Maiwa Ward which the previous men leaders failed to develop", "unfortunately, most men do not consider women issues", the woman leader from Mangochi emphasized.

"Facebook is very ideal because you reach out to a lot of people and I used it for fundraising". "Facebook gave me a platform to network with my voters and politicians from other countries. For instance, last year I was invited to Zambia by a fellow councilor whom I befriended on Facebook to appreciate the developmental projects she is doing in her ward".

"In March 2020, an organisation supported me with over 6,000 bags of maize"

"Value hmmm I don't know", "but I got face masks (500), 150 packs of grain meal, paint, T-shirt, eeiissh Nzambiri (plenty of items)".

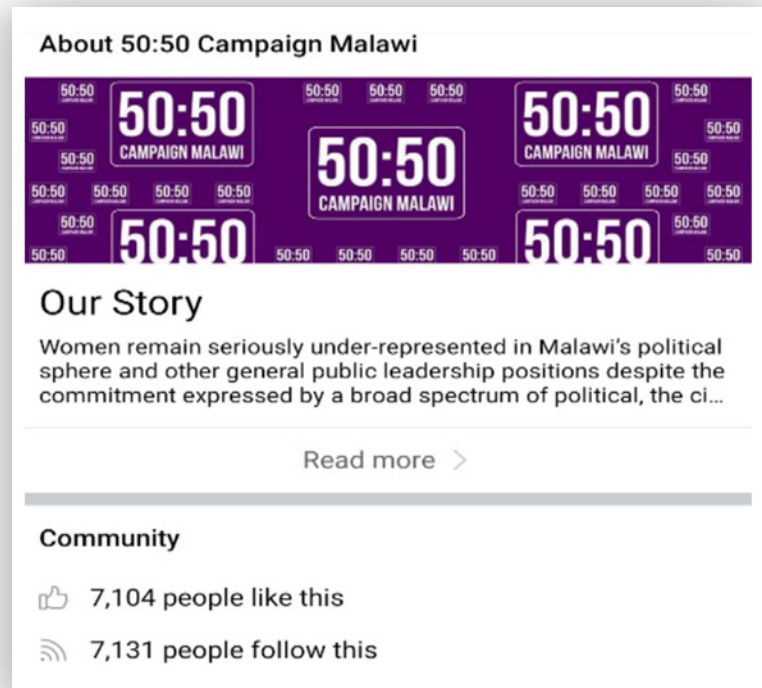


Figure 7: An example of coverage of a post where over 7,000 people liked and were followers

Based on what she posted on Facebook, a Blantyre Limbe woman leader shared that she was able to get massive funding from well-wishers which assisted her throughout the campaign period. ***“The contributions comprised of; utility vehicles and fuel, a trophy which came with balls, jerseys and prize money, airtime and different clothing materials including t-shirts and zitenje”***, Woman leader in Blantyre Limbe shared

Before being elected into office, one woman leader in Ntcheu district did not have an android phone so she used sms and phone calls to communicate with her supporters:

“WhatsApp ili bwino, zinthu zinaphweka panopa (WhatsApp is simple to use and has eased how I engage with voters)”, “I can easily share information to those that I want to engage now and it is cheap compared to the ordinary phone calls I used to use prior to the elections” Ntcheu woman leader said.



Figure 8: Example of the Trophy a woman leader received from a well wisher

Another good example of the coverage and patronage is also evidenced through 50-50 campaign page as illustrated below which has over seven thousand followers :



6.0 The impact of social media in promoting the 50/50 gender representation agenda

The study observes that the 50:50 Campaign Digital strategy had three main objectives;

- 1.** To advocate for the values and objectives of the 50:50 Campaign;
- 2.** To encourage and influence users to interact with 50:50 activities/products; and
- 3.** To boost the visibility of the 50 50 campaign. To achieve this, the primary goal was to allow users to discover and consume the content/messages.

The secondary goal was to facilitate ‘conversations’ in all circles of influence, with a bottom-up approach.

Box 2: Free Platforms on offer to women leaders

High Tech Solutions offers

- Website (www.50-50campaignmw.org)
- Facebook (www.facebook.com/5050campaignmal)
- Twitter (<https://twitter.com/5050campaignmw>)
- Database (www.database.50-50campaignmw.org)

Low Tech solution offers

- Interactive Voice Response - IVR
- Unstructured Supplementary Service Data - USSD
- SMS Dashboard
- Bulk SMS

The study noted that the 50:50 Campaign overall outreach had the following narratics:

Table 1: Interactions, engagement and impressions on women leaders for 50-50 campaign

Platform	Visitors	Interactions, engagements and impressions
Website	109,862 visitors	118,759
Facebook	7,019 page likes	454,999+155,625
Twitter	1809 followers	307,581 impressions
YouTube Channel	64 subscribers	4,253 views

Source: 50-50 campaign Malawi 2019 final report

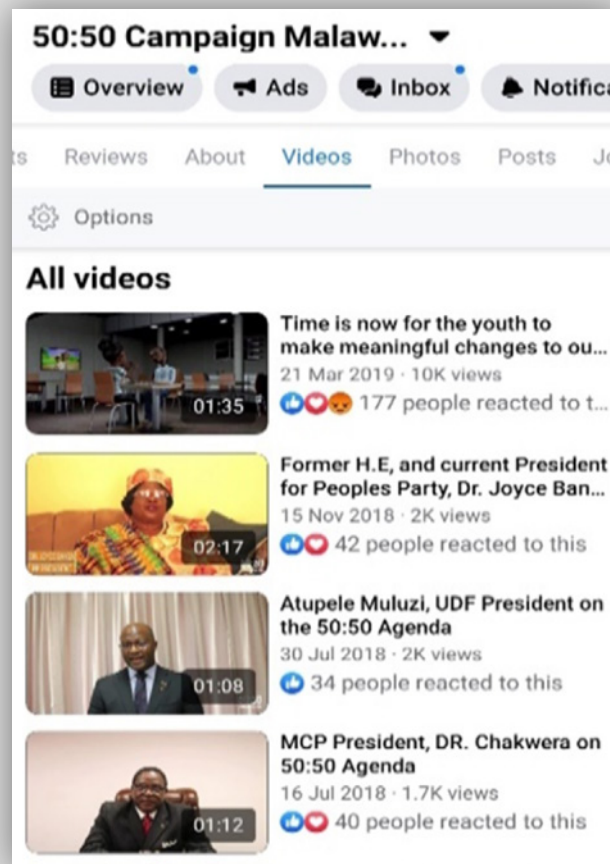


Figure 9: Videos like these attracted million viewers and positive feedback



7.0 The effectiveness of using social media as a tool for activism by women leaders

The study noted that for those women who used social media it was effective as the women were able to reach more voters with campaign messages through social media. Most of this activism was done by institutions other than the individual women leaders, which the study felt is a lost opportunity but continues to occur due to limited knowledge on the part of women leaders on how they can use it effectively. The 50:50 introduced the use of illustrations which was a new innovation in the increase of women in leadership campaign. The use of illustrations assisted in reaching out to different audiences, especially those with low literacy. This method was effective on the psyche of voters as part of embracing the campaign. The illustrations simplified the otherwise complex concepts of the campaign to enable stakeholders, especially voters, to grasp the messages and goals of the campaign. This was an effective way of reducing an information overload and communicating the salient issues in as simple a manner, as possible. This strategy was especially effective in capturing the young voters. During the 2019 TPE, there were 6,859,570 voters. There were 3,813,578 (56%) female voters. While 3,045,992 (44%) were male voters. There were 3,729,588 young voters (54.37%). Out of this group, 2,113,620 were young women voters. The illustrations were used in Information Education Communication materials including T-Shirts, newspaper inserts.



Figure 10: An example of Newspaper coverage Female candidates benefited from

Below are responses the study gathered on effectiveness:

“Social media is very effective, in terms of coverage and reach, especially where resources are also limiting”.

“It was very ideal because you could still communicate even if in a meeting or are travelling on a different errand from the ward”, “you do not need a lot of time to organize as it is directly”.

“Social media can serve as a motivator, allows you to have quick access to what is happening”.

Below are some of the examples of illustrations produced:





8.0 The impact of online gender based violence (harassment, intimidation & abuse) on women leaders

Social media in Malawi has made it very easy for the spread of fake news. Often times, the authors of such articles do not use their real identities, hence it becomes difficult to follow up on the situation. The study observed that cyberbullying mainly influenced by patriarchy: **“Social Media can at times be demoralizing, and depressing. Fake News can be distracting,”** one woman leader bemoaned. A woman leader in Nkhatabay had the following to share:.

“As a country, we still have a long way to go despite the presence of social media. Women are mostly pre-judged and taken as second class citizens” she lamented. **“Social media has somehow worsened things as people tend to generalize and compare women with what other women in powerful positions did or are doing, consequently making it hard for the potential ones to make it to the top”**, woman leader in Nkhatabay complained.



The study observed that men are so intimidated at the thought that women can be and do more. **“whenever I see cyberbullying or its revenge porn or bringing out issues that are not supposed to be there, I see a lot of patriarchy screaming”**, one respondent summed up. Women leaders who are not married also face the brunt of negative narrative. One candidate shared this:

“Being single I was subjected to all sorts of insults and I experienced fake news circulating on social media for 4 to 5 times in 2019 alone”. “Many said I am a prostitute “chifukwa chokuti sine okwatira anthu ambiri ankandinena kuti ndikatenga mpando ndizalanda azimuna and omwe ndimapikisana nawo amazinena izizi kwambiri mmisonkhano yawo” she shared (was called all sorts of names including prostitute because I am not married and many of my competitors speculated in their rally that if I win I end up snatching other people’s husband)”, She complained

This fake news affected her career in politics to an extent that she thought of just resigning from active politics at one point. However, a team from the CSO an organisation in the area (National Elections System Trust) would come to her rescue with encouraging words every time she complained to them of what her competitors were saying on their rallies. Their words of encouragement and counselling restored her strength and confidence, which enable her to move forward. **“ndimayamika kwambiri aNEST chifukwa chokhala nafe nthawi zonse munyengo ya campaign kupanda upangiri wawo ndithudi sibwenzi lero lino tikuyakhulana pa topic imeneyi”** (Am grateful to the efforts that the NGO in the area played in standing beside me whenever I was insulted and I share the experience).

Another women leader had the following to share:

“They would try to demotivate me and I would get messages on my identity as my page shows that I am Indian” “you think Malawi can vote for an Indian?” “Do you think Malawi can vote for a Moslem or an Indian”.

In countering these remarks she had a narrative that she replied back: *"I am an Indian because my mum and my dad were born in India but later settled in Malawi and I myself was born in Queen Elizabeth Hospital". "So to me I take myself as an indigenous Malawian who will die here". When it comes to her religion, she was frantic: "I will not lie even the Sheikhs criticize, 'you are a Muslim you are not supposed to be actively involved in politics". "I would defend myself by citing the Koran and sharing with them what happened in the history of Islam that we had Khadija who was a wife to the prophet, and if the prophet became famous and was engulfed with mercies, it was because of the wealth of Khadija. To me I had not seen any evidence that will stop me from politics because of religion but I want to be a council member to see things improving because that there is a gap" "I convinced them, in fact it's my fellow female Muslims who even said indeed ever since 1994 when we ushered in democracy in Malawi, it's rare to see female Muslims who take up political positions". "So they need to support me as joining politics is not about being Muslim and it's not forbidden". "Islam teaches us to be responsible to the vulnerable", she explained.*

Another woman leader also shared the following:

" Some residents of Malombe on several occasions posted messages that I am not educated and that am not from Mangochi-"Ndiobwera kuchokera ku Nsanje" (She is from Nsanje and not Mangochi) . She decided to take on the accusations by countering with her responses. She dispelled the rumours by sharing her story. Regarding her education, she shared that she was in that scenario because she came from a humble background, where the brother (bread winner) who brought her to Mangochi died whilst she was in primary school, leaving her to find means of survival through piece work. She continued by sharing that she would look to continuing with her education if the opportunity were to come up.

The study observes that the above narrations only reveal that there is no strategy or mechanism by both implementing agencies and women leaders to counter online gender based violence (harassment, intimidation & abuse). This enhances the vulnerability of women leaders, which explains why many women choose to abandon the electoral race due to the abuse that they face and the psychological impact of online abuse that compromises their ability to compete. Voters tend to believe what they hear and read on social media, particularly if there are no efforts to quell the rumors perpetrated by their competitors.



9.0 Analysis and Discussion

The study observes that Facebook and WhatsApp are the main platforms being used by women leaders. WhatsApp and Facebook were able to accelerate the profiles of women leaders, effectively enhancing their visibility among voters. Online platforms have amplified on who and what the women leaders were offering. Most of the women in leadership activism was done by 50-50 campaigners other than the individual women leaders which the study felt is a lost opportunity but it is happening like this because of limited personal knowledge on the part of women leaders on how they can exploit social media.

The type of social media used by women leaders is dependent on a number of factors, including; cost, level of digital literacy, context of voters, among others. There has been a common realization that the majority of voters in Malawi are youth, and are active on online platforms. " 2019 elections online messaging was widespread, effective and most women had won compared to other past elections", this quote from a woman leader in Nkhatabay nicely sums up the value addition of online platforms.

The cost of social media is a huge set back and hindrance to women's active political participation on online platforms, especially when issues of access and control of resources are a challenge due to patriarchy. In other words, the use of technology by women leaders is low. There is potential of growth, if there is adequate investment made for women leaders to utilize through their sponsored pages.

On managing fake news on social media, there is need for women leaders to have a strong team around them when pursuing politics. A team that provides a women leader with insight on what is important and provides verified sources. Female politicians need to build a social media team and a social media strategy for collecting, consolidating, disseminating, verifying information and building the brand as women in politics.

Investing in social media is a worthwhile investment, as it provides a candidate with a platform where online users around the world, can appreciate the work a woman leader is doing, which further opens opportunities to expand their reach, as well as funding opportunities. Several women leaders have testified that they found sponsors through their online posts. Women leaders have also benefited from well-wishers based on pictures they posted on their social media pages. The cost of telecommunication calls for dialogue with service providers, especially in the Covid19- pandemic era, to pledge their support to women in politics through fair data bundle pricing and usages. With a good social media strategy, women can also capitalize on minimal costs through usage of social media prime time analytics (when are certain people on Facebook, WhatsApp or Twitter? When is it important to come on social media?). Women can also invest in boosting their pages by paying some money to enhance organic (friends/ your followers) and inorganic (go as far to people who are not friends to see or be monitored for 48 hours) reach. Moving forward, there is need to invest in a well-tailored training for social media. Lastly, women leaders need to develop the habit of researching how fellow women elsewhere are using social media to profile themselves. Without doubt, online and social platforms are offering a window by promoting women leaders' election into office. Social media is a tool within the control of a woman leader seeking to occupy leadership and decision making positions. In this digital era, use of ICT tools such as social media outlets, has proven to be one of the tools for advancement of women in many different ways. The role of social media continues to grow every day and most importantly in future elections.



10.0 Recommendations

Below are detailed recommendations of the research



Implementing partners:

- 1.** To ensure better targeting, content and marketing of women leaders in the future, implementing partners should invest in orienting candidates on the usage of social media (platforms available, content design, social media strategy, loading timelines etc). Women leaders should be encouraged to take an interest to research and learn how their peers, both here and within the region, are positioning themselves using online platforms.
- 2.** Consider introducing a "Hashtag activism" to help mobilize public attention on women leaders, increasing the visibility of issues that are under-reported in mainstream media. The Hashtag can be in any of the widely spoken local language such as Chichewa, Chitumbuka, Yao, Sena and Ngoni so that it easily becomes a household name.

3. Implementing partners should consider improving their existing capacities to support online platform operations, and that of candidates. Areas worth investing time are times when voters are active on social media. What content is viable i.e. loading videos may not be ideal as most take time to download which is costly and as such voters are likely not to download instantly. If videos are used they should be short and concise clips with catchy content.

4. Implementing partners need to consider investing time to establish long term partnerships with telecommunications companies to help in developing bundle packages that are affordable and sustainable, especially in the wake of the covid19-. Government through Ministry of Gender Social Welfare and Community Development can be engaged to support in negotiating the affordable data bundle packages.

5. Implementing partners of the 50-50 campaign should partner with service providers to popularize the Electronic Transactions & Cybersecurity Act, 2016 (ETCA)

6. Voters should be given dedicated toll-free lines to report cyberbullying.

7. Implementing partners and advocates for gender equality need to develop generic uniform content for marketing a woman leader using online platforms. This could be a practical way to fight patriarchy, and foster a culture of fighting negative masculinities.



Women leaders :

1. Women leaders should learn more on how to fully utilize all WhatsApp and Facebook features, as there are the most common social mediums Malawians are using. Comprehensive training on the use of social media platforms is crucial, especially in the wake of Covid19- pandemic where large constituency gatherings are discouraged due to their likelihood of being epicenters of the virus. E-posters and e-cards can be ideal for short, precise, direct and hard hitting messaging to the voters. Some of the topics to be included should be safeguarding tools such as Think10 (an innovative safety planning tool for politically-active women, developed by NDI). Think10 safety planning tool provides women in politics guidance on how to enhance their personal security.

2. Women leaders should cultivate a habit of researching or exploring what fellow women are doing within the region on social media. Self-learning from peers is a powerful method of learning.

3. Women leaders should invest resources in managing their own online platforms. The study notes that traffic is high on online platforms during working hours, 9 am to 4 pm. Evidence shows that people often use office internet or employer's data. Women leaders in future can utilize this insight to strategically target voters.

4. Women leaders whose rights have been infringed upon should be encouraged to prompt the Police to institute criminal proceedings based on the applicable law. MACRA where possible will render technical assistance to law enforcement.

5. As part of embracing the 'hashtag activism', women leaders should be encouraged to coin the 'hashtag' that can easily be embraced by their voters. Women leaders should be encouraged to always quote the 'hashtag' introduced as part of marketing their candidacy.

6. Women should be given dedicated toll-free lines to report cyberbullying



Women leaders' sponsors :

1. There is need for development partners/funders to consider supporting the implementing partners with more funding to enable them to implement the digital strategy developed. They should be able to support roll-out packages that target low tech audiences through bulk sms, which often manage to reach the wider audience/voters of particular women leaders.



Men as gatekeepers :

1. Explore increasing the role of men in supporting the fight against patriarchy. Explore identifying HeforShe champions in all implementing areas to lead in the fight. It is these testimonies that can be shared on social media platforms for others to emulate. Gatekeepers should be encouraged to discuss issues surrounding masculinity, relationships and sexuality and importance of women in leadership.
2. Training of general public on gender mainstreaming and bringing out effects of online gender based violence.



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