

Insiders Versus Outsiders: A Comparative Study of Female Politician's Social Media use

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Abstract: In the past, the media had a tendency to neglect women's issues, thereby restricting their visibility concerning development endeavours and political representation. However, this is changing due to technological advancements. Social media offers female politicians access to millions of users, freedom to interact directly with the electorate, bypass gatekeepers and opportunities for self-promotion. This research aims to investigate female politicians' social media use during their legislative terms with a focus on their self-presentation and the policy issues they support. The study involves content analysis of six female politicians from countries with a much lower female representation than their regional counterparts; three from Kenya and three from Hungary who have the highest number of followers on Twitter and Facebook respectively. The data was collected over a three-month period. The visuals were coded using 3 variables based on the *insider* and *outsider* perspective (Gulati 2004) while the text was coded in accordance with the 21 policy agendas defined by the Comparative Agendas Project codebook (Baumgartner 2019). The results indicate that a majority of female politicians in both countries, in the ruling parties presented themselves as *insiders* while those in the opposition presented themselves as *outsiders*. The insiders were majorly characterized by wearing of formal clothing, an important element of statesmanship, that portrays them as ideal candidates. In addition, the insiders' social media use was characterized by original content while outsiders reshared articles and retweets. Both Kenyan and Hungarian female politicians addressed women related policy issues. There were however some differences in social media use and self-presentation between the female politicians of the two countries such as the sharing of personal information and family pictures. The limitation of this study is that it does not fully represent the views and use of social media of all female politicians in Kenya and Hungary.

Keywords: Female politician, Self-presentation, Social media, Insider/outsider, Policy

1. Introduction

The media plays a crucial role in moulding and influencing people's perception, behaviour and attitudes (Kamau, 2010). Traditionally the media has generally ignored women and their issues have been underrepresented with only 21% of the content of the news focusing on women (Oxfam 2006). Female politicians have struggled over the years to gain visibility in the media due to the perpetration of gender stereotypes of women as victims, sex objects or their inability to address issues of national development (Omtatah 2008). Feminine stereotypes, also known as communal qualities (Mattan and Small 2021) view women as nurturing, compassionate and caring (Prentice and Carranza 2002). However, masculine stereotypes view men as assertive, confident and ambitious, these agentic qualities are associated with good and effective leadership (Mattan and Small 2021). Their appearance: clothing, hair, shoes and purses draw more attention than other weightier issues (Carroll 1994; Falk 2010; Siegel 2009; Watson 2006). With the above in mind, social media therefore is an important tool for female politicians as it offers them access to millions of users, an opportunity to connect and interact directly with the electorate and as a tool for self-presentation (Crawford 2009; Hoffmann et al, 2015; Williams and Gulati 2012). Social media allows politicians to bypass gatekeepers and communicate news that would otherwise not have been aired in traditional news outlets (Bor 2013; Baum and Groelin 2008; Chen 2011; Seidman 2013). While there is research on the gender differences in politicians' online biographies and tone and content of tweets in the United States (Lee 2013; Evans and Clark 2015), political candidates visual presentation on Facebook and Instagram across the United Kingdom, United States of America, Canada, Austria, France, Germany and Norway (Steffan 2020) and gender based stereotypes on twitter and biographies on websites among Canadian and American politicians respectively (Mattan and Small 2021; Lee 2013) there is limited research on female politicians and most especially during their legislative terms (Lee 2013). This research aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. How do female politicians use social media?

RQ2. What self-presentation styles do female politicians use on their social media pages?

RQ3. Do female politicians address and promote women related policy issues on their social media pages during their legislative terms?

The study aims at answering the above research questions using case studies of six female politicians in Hungary and Kenya, three from each country who have the largest following on Facebook and Twitter respectively. The number of women in parliament in Hungary and Kenya are at 13% and 23% respectively which is below the regional averages of 31% for Europe and 32% for East Africa (IPU Parline 2023). According to Nemzeti Média és Hírközlési Hatóság (NMHH 2018) 89% of Hungarian internet users are Facebook users, this makes Facebook the most popular social media platform in Hungary (Medve 2023), and it is also used for public debates (Donath 2021). Although the number of Facebook users in Kenya is currently at 10.8 million, political debates mostly take place on Twitter which has 1.35 million users (Kemp 2022; Napoleon Cat 2023). This is further evidenced by a survey that ranked Kenya as the second most active country on Twitter in Africa with over 2 million tweets (Rubadiri 2012).

The paper is structured as follows; the literature review focuses on female politician's social media use, politicians' self-presentation and lastly female politicians in Kenya and Hungary. This is then followed by the method, results and discussion, conclusion and limitations of the study.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Female Politicians' Social Media use

In a survey undertaken by Women in Parliament (2016) to assess social media use by female politicians from 107 countries, results revealed that 61% of all respondents engaged on social media on average less than once a day in each of the following activities: publicizing events and activities, communicating policy positions, sharing new stories, responding to comments, revealing personal information and reviewing comments (WIP 2016). The results also revealed that only one in every four respondents stated they were very knowledgeable on how to effectively use social media (WIP 2016). Knowledge of social media is helpful in recognizing opportunities that could be beneficial such as linking their personal websites to their social media (Zavattaro 2016). This gives the electorate a chance to assess their accomplishments, upcoming activities, their position on certain policies and offer their time and resources to support them (Zavattaro 2016). Results also showed that female politicians were more active during the campaign period, and they reduced or even stopped posting on social media once they obtained a seat in parliament (WIP 2016). Additionally, interactivity has the potential to create stronger bonds with the electorate, growing loyalty and transforming passive supporters into active supporters (McGregor et al, 2016). However, studies have also revealed that politicians tend to use social media as a one-way broadcasting channel (Nulty et al, 2016; Haleva-Amir 2011). Additionally, one of the greatest challenges to consistent posting and interactivity has been the lack of financial resources to update content and engage with the audiences (Molnár 2021).

2.2 Politicians' Self-Presentation

Self-presentation refers to how an individual endeavours to construct a desired persona in their social interactions (Steffan 2020). Goffman (1959) stated that social interaction resembled a theatre stage which had both the front stage and the backstage. The front stage signifies what an individual portrays to the audience while the back stage is what is hidden from the audience (Goffman 1959). The theory of self-presentation has been applied in face-to-face communication (Fenno 1978), websites (Gulati 2004; Lilleker and Koc-Michalska, 2013; Stanyer 2008) and impression management on social media (Jackson and Lilleker 2011). Fenno (1978) investigated how congressmen from the United States presented themselves, they used the *home style* when interacting with the electorate and used the *Washington Style* while on Capitol Hill. In his study on websites, Gulati (2004) found that there were two kinds of presentation styles by politicians: the *Washington Insiders* and *Washington Outsiders*. *Washington insiders* were portrayed in official settings, dressed in formal attire and had a national theme which included the use of congress seals and symbols of Washington D.C in their images (Gulati 2004). However, *Washington outsiders* were portrayed in local settings, with community sports teams, dressed in casual clothing and often shown meeting with civilians (Gulati 2004). Lastly, Stanyer (2008) found that members of the House of Representatives in the United States shared their private lives more than the members of parliament from Britain.

2.3 Female Politicians in Kenya

During pre-colonial times in Kenya, power was primarily held by men as the African culture was largely patriarchal (Kamau 2010). Although women in Kenya played a role in the fight for independence such as leading peaceful protests, armed resistance (Carrier et al, 2016; Kabira 2012) and leading negotiations that led to independence (Kamau 2010) they were excluded from holding political positions in the first parliament between 1963 and 1969 (Bosire 2017). The introduction of multipartyism and the National women's convention held in

1992 was instrumental in the rise of the number of women in parliament (Bouka et al, 2019). Kenya's 2010 constitution also introduced two provisions in a bid to increase women participation in politics. It created a women's representative seat in each of the 47 counties in Kenya and the two-thirds principle which has only been executed in the County Assemblies but not in the National Assembly. Although these efforts have helped improve the number of women in politics, female politicians continue to face various challenges such as gender-based violence, patriarchal parties, lack of funding for political campaigns, corruption in the nomination process of political parties and socio-cultural presentation of women as subordinate to men (Kabira and Kameri-Mbote 2013; Kamau 2010; Bouka et al, 2019). The elections held in August 2022 showed an improvement in the number of women elected to the National Assembly. There are seven female governors, three female senators and 26 female members of parliament (Tu 2022). However, Kenya is ranked in the 99th position in the world with only 23% of women in parliament which is lower than the regional average of 32% (IPU Parline 2023).

2.4 Female Politicians in Hungary

Women in Hungary received the comprehensive right to vote in 1945 and their numbers continued to grow until 1980 when almost one third of MPs (members of parliament) were female politicians. Hungary could then have been regarded as vanguard among Scandinavian countries that were and still are considered the forefront of gender equality (Koncz 2014). However, in 1985, mainly because of the modernization of the electoral system, the number of female MPs started to decrease due to the introduction of the dual candidate electoral system where the electorate had a greater influence on parliament composition.

In the IPU Parline (2023) ranking, Hungary is the 150th with 13.1% female MPs, while the regional average for Europe is 31%. According to Dahlerup (1988) in order for female politicians to succeed in parliament, their number needs to reach the *critical mass* of 30%, otherwise they are believed to be underrepresented. The current state of the Hungarian parliament can be described by the frequently used term *men's club* or *old boys' network* and an institution where *masculinization* (Craske 2003) takes place. Women and men's strengths lie in different competences, abilities and life experiences; therefore, the ratio of their presence can shape decision-making (Kelemen 2010). This phenomenon has been coined as "*politics of presence*" by Philips (1998: 65) and it declares that without the presence of women, the proper representation of women's interests and related issues cannot be imagined. Another struggle for female MPs is that they must meet a double standard: fulfil the role as a woman and meet the expectations of women as the holder of the given role (Kelemen 2010).

3. Method

This research involves a content analysis of six female politicians' social media platforms, three from Hungary and three from Kenya. Content analysis is considered a scientific tool that can increase our understanding of social phenomena through providing new insight (Krippendorff 2018). In assessing social media use by female politicians, we have restricted this study to address the following through deductive content analysis; consistency in posting and content type (image, text, video, article). To answer our research question on self-presentation we adopted Gulati's (2004) insider versus outsider perspective. Lastly, to assess whether female politicians address and promote women related policy issues during their legislative terms we adopted the CAP codebook (Baumgartner 2019). According to Evans and Clark (2016) environment, education, health and social welfare are considered as women related policy issues.

3.1 Sampling of Female Politicians

We identified three Kenyan and three Hungarian female politicians who had the largest number of followers on Twitter and Facebook respectively during the period starting from September and ending in November of 2022. These female politicians were vying for parliamentary seats in the last election held in April 2022 for Hungary and August 2022 for Kenya. Below is the list of female politicians selected for this study:

- Millicent Omanga (MO) Kenyan politician, 878,800 Twitter followers. She recently lost the elections for the Nairobi County women representative seat to Esther Passaris.
- Esther Passaris (EP) Kenyan politician, 741,300 Twitter followers. She is currently the Nairobi County women representative and a member of the *Orange Democratic Movement*.
- Susan Kihika (SK) Kenyan politician, 722,500 Twitter followers. She is the first female governor of Nakuru County and a member of the *United Democratic Alliance* party.
- Dóra Dúró (DD) Hungarian politician, 298,000 Facebook followers. She is an MP affiliated with *Our Homeland Movement*.

- Judit Varga (JV) Hungarian politician, 172,000 Facebook followers. She is an MP affiliated with the political party *Fidesz*.
- Tímea Szabó (TSz) Hungarian politician, 167,000 Facebook followers. She is an MP affiliated with *Dialogue for Hungary*.

3.2 Sampling of Posts

Sampling of posts was done manually from September 2022 till November 2022 which resulted in 721 tweets gathered from the Kenyan female politicians and 656 Facebook posts collected from the Hungarian female politicians.

3.3 Coding

The collected posts were coded along eight variables: name of the female politician, date of tweet/post, content type (image, text, video, article), presence or absence of female politician on the image/video, present alone/with crowd/other politicians or family members on the image/video, camera perspective, type of clothing and policy issue. The Kenyan author coded Kenyan female politicians’ tweets while the Hungarian author coded Hungarian female politicians’ Facebook posts. This was followed by a random selection of 50% of the tweets and posts which were then coded by two external coders so as to test the inter-rater reliability. The percentage agreement for Kenyan tweets was 85% while in the case of the Hungarian sample the percentage agreement was 93%.

3.4 Results and Discussion

RQ1 investigates how female politicians use social media. To answer this question, we analysed the following variables: the number of tweets or posts each politician shared between September and November of 2022 and the type of content they posted. The results for each variable are summarized in Table 1 and explained in detail in the following paragraphs.

Table 1: Variable results

		Kenyan female politicians			Hungarian female politicians		
		MO	EP	SK	DD	JV	TSz
Number of	tweets	52	612	57	-	-	-
	fb posts	-	-	-	240	300	115
Content type	image	46%	63%	88%	47%	73%	50%
	text	50%	21%	10%	29%	14%	20%
	video	4%	16%	2%	11%	13%	25%
	article	-	-	-	12%	-	5%
Present on the content	yes	11%	9%	63%	27%	76%	50%
	alone	66%	11%	6%	58%	39,5%	41%
	with family	-	-	-	10%	0,5%	2%
	with politician(s)	17%	70%	22%	15%	36%	30%
	with general public	17%	19%	72%	17%	24%	27%
Camera perspective	face close up	-	2%	9%	6%	4%	7%
	half bodyshot	34%	53%	55%	56%	80%	62%
	full bodyshot	66%	41%	25%	15%	15%	7%
	long bodyshot)	-	2%	11%	-	-	-

		Kenyan female politicians			Hungarian female politicians		
		MO	EP	SK	DD	JV	TSz
Clothing	selfie	-	2%	3%	23%	1%	24%
	formal suits	-	9%	22%	26%	8%	26%
	formal clothing	17%	52%	67%	48%	83%	2%
	casual clothing	50%	13%	5,5%	26%	9%	72%
	informal clothing	33%	23%	5,5%	-	-	-

Kenyan female politicians tweeted as follows; MO tweeted 0.57 tweets in a day, SK tweeted 0.62 tweets in a day and EP tweeted 6.7 tweets in a day. On the other hand, Hungarian female politicians posted on Facebook as follows: TSz shared 1.2 posts in a day, DD had 2.6 posts in a day, and lastly JV had 3.2 posts in a day. These results indicate that these female politicians have a consistent social media presence as they post between one to six times per day except for two Kenyan female politicians MO and SK whose average daily tweets were below one daily. Previous studies had indicated that female politicians had a tendency to reduce or even stop posting on social media once they got into parliament (WIP 2016) however this is not the case in the findings of this study as the analysed politicians’ presence on social media have been consistent even while in parliament. Secondly, the most common content type on Facebook and Twitter were images, followed by text and video, except in the case of MO, whose tweets were predominantly text based. This shows that female politicians are aware of the affordances of these social media platforms and willing to use them to communicate with their constituents. Interestingly, on Facebook female politicians in the opposition also shared articles, while on Twitter EP used retweets to increase visibility with borrowed content. The frequency of posts also relies heavily on the resources available, the more funding one has the higher the chances of hiring a professional team to develop content. This is in line with the empirical results of the study conducted by Molnár (2021), which found that parties with smaller financial resources struggled with updating content on their social media pages and connecting with their audiences through feedback.

RQ2 aimed at assessing how female politicians present themselves on their social media pages. To answer this question, we analysed the following variables: their presence or absence on the content, the camera perspective and their clothing. Four out of the six female politicians were mostly alone in the content that they shared, except for EP and SK, two Kenyan female politicians. A significant difference between the two countries was that Kenyan female politicians did not share images of their family members while Hungarian female politicians did. This is consistent with previous studies that found that congresswomen only shared images of their professional lives and gave low priority to stories about their children or spouses (Benoit et al, 2003; Lee 2013). Additionally, the most common camera perspective for a majority of these female politicians was the half body shot with the exception of MO who was captured in full body shots in a majority of her images. Selfies were more common for the Hungarian female politicians in the opposition than Kenyan female politicians. This may be an indicator of the lack of resources available to hire personnel to curate videos and take photographs which was previously observed with the resharing of articles and retweets. Lastly, clothing was categorized into four main types: formal suits, formal clothing, casual clothing and informal clothing. A majority of these female politicians wore formal suits and formal clothing with the exception of MO and TSz who mostly wore casual clothing. These results indicate that self-presentation based on clothing is related to their insider vis a vis outsider status, except for MO, a Kenyan female politician who is a member of the ruling party, an insider who chose to dress casually. A significant difference in clothing between the two countries is the absence of informal clothing among Hungarian female politicians which is present among Kenyan female politicians although in low percentages.

RQ3 investigated whether female politicians address and promote women related policy issues on their social media platforms. The five most common policy topics addressed by Kenyan female politicians were as follows: Law, crime and family issues, macroeconomics, government operations, health and environment. On the other hand, the five most common policy topics addressed by Hungarian female politicians were as follows: international affairs and foreign aid, education, government operations, health and social welfare. A summary of these results can be found in Figure 1.

Policy	Kenya	Hungary
Macroeconomics	39	17
Civil Rights, Minority Issues, and Civil Liberties	23	17
Health	30	40
Agriculture	17	0
Labor and Employment	5	16
Education	9	76
Environment	29	4
Energy	4	5
Immigration	1	4
Transportation	9	1
Law, Crime, and Family Issues	46	1
Social Welfare	15	31
community Development and Housing Issues	11	4
Banking, Finance, and Domestic Commerce	7	5
Defense	6	20
Space, Science, Technology, and Communications	0	0
Foreign Trade	16	1
International Affairs and Foreign Aid	13	123
Government Operations	34	47
Public Lands and Water Management	13	0
Non-policy related issues- events	141	102
Non-policy related issues-elections	248	115
Non-policy related issues- personal	5	27
Total	721	656

Figure 1: Policy issues

The results indicate that Hungarian female politicians addressed more women related policy issues (*education, health and social welfare*) as compared to Kenyan female politicians (*health and environment*). However, we suspect that these results are due to the prevailing issues in the countries during the period of this study and not necessarily based on their gender. Since the data collection was in the aftermath of covid-19, some of the health related policy issues were in connection with vaccination laws however, sexual reproductive health issues were also addressed. Secondly, regarding education, Hungary is going through an ongoing education crisis, there is very little financial and human resource in public schools. Thirdly, the social welfare law was modified which has potential dire consequences on the masses. On the other hand, Kenya is going through an environmental

crisis due to deforestation hence the emphasis on environmental related policy issues. These results are in line with Hemphill (2020) who found that female politicians are no longer simply addressing women related issues but also address prevailing issues affecting the public.

4. Conclusion

Underrepresentation of female politicians in the media has encouraged female political candidates to turn to social media as a potential platform for sharing their political agenda, connect with the electorate and as a channel for self-promotion. The present research investigated female politicians' social media use, self-presentation and policy issues addressed by Kenyan and Hungarian female politicians. Results show that the analysed female politicians are active on their platforms, they use varied content types and mostly present themselves in line with their insider vis a vis outsider status. Results suggest that female politicians address some policy issues that are considered women related, however, we suspect that this is due to the prevailing issues in their countries and not necessarily gender based. Limitation of this research is that the results cannot be generalized to a majority of female politicians. Future research should expand the study by carrying out longitudinal studies to track changes in female politicians' self-presentation and policy issues addressed during their campaign and legislative terms. The results can also be compared with those of their male counterparts to give a broader perspective on self-presentation and policy issues.

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