

WWW.SHARIKAWALAKEN.MEDIA



# THE ONLINE FEMINIST PLATFORM



## شريعة ولكن

www.SharikaWalaken.media

JUNE 2020

«Thank you for providing us  
with remarkable awarness-  
raising content»\*

«This is a platform which  
speaks on behalf  
of all women!  
Thank you for being a  
torch of Hope  
that encourages us to fight  
the patriarchal system  
in the country!» \*

## Introduction

Throughout the years, women have been struggling to voice out their demands of equality and the right to live in dignity. Since the beginning of their fight against the patriarchal system, global feminist movements were formed and the journey for attaining justice and equality began. Women all over the world were in continuous pursue of the various ways that would echo their demands and establish equality in power. Women's demands were taken to the streets through secret meetings, sit-ins, demonstrations, protest marches... and most recently through media.

The word media is the plural form of the Latin word "medium" which means mode or carrier. Today, more than ever, we live by this definition of media. In fact, it has become an essential mean of communication of certain ideas, beliefs, evolutions and revolutions that influenced and helped shape contemporary societies' opinions. Continuing to emphasize a stereotypical image of women, the feminist movement used this digital space and its tools to create an alternative discourse. Feminist activists established their very own feminist media and social media platforms that would in return influence the mainstream media, and contribute to shaping new cultural values and having them become a space for self-expression that allowed women to raise their voices.

« I felt in love  
with this page!» \*

\*All quotes are extracted from  
SWL's online platforms.

## Online feminist media as an important tool to advance women's rights

While women were and are still underrepresented in media generally, “digital media platforms encourage a more level playing field”, allowing for the voices of women from different backgrounds and countries, with or without traditional power, to be heard. Women’s rights activists acknowledged the significance and the direct impact that social media can have on drawing the attention of the public to their demands, struggles and the diverse issues that constitute dignified presence for them as equal citizens irrespective of their ethnicity, background, sex, gender, religion, and age. As the dependency on digital media grew, and while this medium provides a more private and a safer space, independent feminist media platforms and human rights activists began to use it as an influential tool to facilitate the advocacy process. Possessing a notable power to rapidly shape the attitudes and opinions of the public, online media became women’s haven in which they can easily transfer their offline activism to the online world, while collectively and globally linking their causes to one another. Independent feminist online media basically:



### Provided minorities and the vulnerable populations with platforms to defend their rights and voice their needs

Women's rights activists and organizations used social media to get their message out. The online feminist media platforms established a solid ground for the most vulnerable and marginalized groups in the society whose voices are usually unheard and left out. Women, girls, refugee women, migrant domestic workers, and LGBTQI+ communities are the society’s populations that usually suffer the most, even though they are the ones with the urgent and unmet basic needs. Yet, these groups are constantly discriminated at by the governments and the patriarchal systems, and deprived of attaining their rights. Online feminist media, provided an opportunity to communicate and exchange information in this regard; using different languages and tools of expression, by being the space to amplify the voices of the various minorities of the society. Not long ago did the LGBTQI+ community members have the courage to speak out openly in public, even in the most fanatic Islamic Arab countries. For instance, Malak El Kashef is one Trans\* woman activist who openly used the social media to tell the story of her transition and how she is currently challenging the status quo in Egypt. Despite harassment, bullying, rejection, threats of imprisonment, they still consider these spaces as the most effective to amplify their voices and connect them to each other.



Paved the way not only for the freedom of expression, but also allowed solidarity among all women and girls

The digital media world and feminist online media platforms has opened a new frontier for women's rights activists and organizations. Nearly two decades back, women resorted to the internet to create an even more inclusive revolution on the patriarchal system, one where they can better and more influentially organize their righteous offline movement and build solidarity among each other. Patriarchal governments, systems, and families usually perceive women and girls as second class citizens and those who need voices to speak on their behalf. With the rise of media, and especially online activism through social media platforms, women and girls sought a free from restrictions and limitations space to speak their minds and suggest new ideas for their activism, and an arena where they can explicitly fight for their rights as opposed to the oppression in the offline world. Fighting years of discrimination and elimination, and in spite of all the obstacles, women's rights groups managed to create online channels and spaces to generate more opportunities for women and girls to stand in solidarity with one another and mobilize the public opinion to push for reforms in policies or condemn violence or crimes against women. For instance, the worldwide solidarity on the Palestinian girl's death- Israa Gharib- who got murdered by her father and brother because of a picture she posted on Instagram, pressured the Palestinian authority to immediately take action and arrest the murderers. Another local issue that would have gone unnoticed hadn't it been for the solidarity of women's rights movement, was that of the Lebanese harasser during October 17 Revolution. The reporting of several cases of harassment and the anger that was taken out to the social media platforms obliged the government to arrest the harasser, who's still imprisoned waiting for a verdict, in spite the absence of a Lebanese law that criminalizes harassment. It is very crucial to mention that some of the most successful movements and campaigns started on social media and continued the work on the ground in favor of women and girls. Moreover, digital media world did not only voice out women's rights, but also encouraged young girls to become activists and lead the future feminist movement where the wide dissemination of feminism and feminist activism via mainstream and digital media was a "significant discursive resource for young feminists' understanding of self and others as feminists". Online networks and communities allowed these young girls to challenge the injustices of the society by beginning conversations surrounding change while being anonymous when needed.





## Challenged the stereotypical women's image promoted by traditional media.

Stereotypical portrayals of women remained in the traditional media, limiting women to certain roles through advertisements, TV shows, news.... Even in media, women's image and the role that they play are influenced by existing social and cultural norms. However, feminist digital media, made it possible to have access to information about gender-based violence, news on abuse cases and crimes committed against women, awareness on the violence suffered by migrant domestic workers... and many other topics. Thus, these platforms ensured a much-needed representation of women, giving them a voice, highlighting their achievements, helping integrate new values such as equality and equity, while allowing the biggest number of women to connect and speak openly about issues that were initially considered taboo like ownership over their bodies or sexual life, or defying the beauty standards imposed on them by the society and to accept themselves as they are. Furthermore, feminist social media platforms shed light on women of achievements in science, law, engineering ...; jobs that were thought to be only for men



## Increased accessibility and the ability of feminists to communicate with thousands of women and girls through various types of content

One of the most important aspects of digital media platforms is that it increased the accessibility and the ability of women's rights activists and organizations to communicate with thousands of women and girls. It became an influential channel that not only delivers messages and raises awareness, but an easy to access medium where women and girls get information about the services and the means of protection from GBV, especially during times of crisis, in addition to being an easier channel for reporting such cases. Women and girls, being present on all of the social media platforms that disseminate information; i.e. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, irrespectively, urged feminist media to adapt their content to be accessible, easy to understand and shareable by all. New information and media tools (graphics, short videos, GIFs...) are used to spread knowledge whereby none of the minorities or the vulnerable populations are excluded.



**WWW.SHARIKAWALAKEN.MEDIA<sup>1</sup>**

Sharika Wa Laken was the first feminist electronic news website in the Middle East which aims at raising awareness on women's rights and causes such as those related to citizenship rights where women can't pass their nationality to their non-Lebanese children, fighting child marriage, protecting girls from cyber-crimes.... Starting out as a radio program in 2012 and continuing along a two-year period of time, Sharika Wa Laken duly moved to the online sphere to serve as a platform that promotes feminism, highlights women's issues, documents their stories and ensures that girls and women have access to accurate and abundance of information. It further works to ensure that they are equipped with appropriate feminist knowledge and resources that can facilitate overcoming the society's existing and imposed inequalities and engaging them as agents of change in the struggle for a community free of patriarchy.

Moving from the traditional media sphere as a radio program<sup>2</sup> to the online sphere, SWL is 100% lead by a team of feminists who are experts in gender, media and women's rights issues and who come from different backgrounds. These women possess highly adaptive and technical skills that make them always ready for active and proactive planning to ensure addressing and covering women's causes. This dedicated team of women works around the clock to:



<sup>1</sup>Sharika Wa Laken (Arabic for: A Partner, But Not Yet Equal") is Fe-Male's first initiative in the online sphere.

Fe-Male is the go-to NGO when related to gender-sensitive media coverage. In 2018 it produced a related interactive training toolkit, and established a network of over 40 journalists trained to disseminate feminist knowledge ([www.fe-male.org](http://www.fe-male.org)) .

<sup>2</sup>SWL was the first feminist radio program in Lebanon, aiming to raise awareness through media, within the Lebanese society, on women's rights such as citizenship rights, social, gender and legal equality and the necessity to create a civil state. The program was broadcast for two and a half years on the Lebanese radio station Sawt El Shaab (Voice of People), accessing every house in the suburbs, rural and marginalized areas. From May 2012 until September 2014, girls, women, NGO representatives, journalists, lawyers, legislators, activists, members of civil society, and public figures were engaged in live discussions for 55 minutes around more than 100 topics related to women's rights.



**Cover the news**, achievements, and struggles of women regionally and locally. Sharika Wa Laken became a daily reference as well as an archive for anyone looking for all types of news related to women's rights and status in different sectors including, but not restricted to, economy, health, education, politics, laws, sports... All of SWL's media coverage is gender-sensitive, feminist and intersectional, and targets different stakeholders while prioritizing women and girls and including the most marginalized from refugee women, domestic workers, and LGBTQI+ communities. It highlights the most critical and unaddressed issues such as SRHR, GBV, SGBV, right to custody and citizenship...;

**Create and produce** solely innovative and exclusive feminist multimedia content (investigative reports, articles, videos, infographics, real-life stories, photo stories, caricatures, case studies...) which interactively reaches every woman and girl, speaks their language, sounds their needs and experiences and delivers the messages that reassure women's presence and protection in the online and offline spaces. In SWL, we believe in the importance and power of feminist knowledge and the right of every woman and girl to access it. Due to the pressing need for more Arabic content and context-related knowledge that complements that of the academic institutions; we tirelessly try to research, analyze and create content that is based on our own narratives as women living in this region. This approach serves as a transformative tool that allows us to own our voices, demands, and future;

**Campaign and advocate** for the different and urging women's causes in the country and regionally; through launching campaigns, leading on national and regional campaigns, and participating in urgent local campaigns. Over years, SWL contributed to pressuring decision makers to pass different laws in favor of women's rights, mobilize the public to support different issues related to women's rights and increase the solidarity with women survivors of different forms of GBV, women human rights defenders and journalists facing exploitation and violence. Our professional and impactful campaigning work allowed us to become a trusted platform where a number of women and girls feel safe to report cases of violence knowing that we will accordingly refer them to the relevant service providers and follow up closely on their case to ensure their protection and attainment of justice;

**Support and refer** women and girls throughout their struggles. During the past years, SWL did not only act as a feminist platform for producing and disseminating knowledge, but also as a trusted entity in which women and girls can resort to when in need for support. Our professional and impactful campaigning work, and our dedicated and passionate team allowed us to become a trusted platform where we receive tens of messages on weekly basis seeking assistance. Further to listening to the sufferings of these women, our team receives these messages, identifies the needs and/or the problems at hand, differentiates between them, and consequently refers them to one of our sister and partner organizations to provide them with the relevant service accordingly.

Furthermore, SWL is not merely a website, it is rather an engaging digital platform; a community that seeks to engage and reach women of all ages and backgrounds and to promote women's rights, not only in Lebanon, but also in the region, and to promote its work in a language that speaks to everyone. The adaptive nature of SWL's work and the capacities of its team to produce specialized content for each medium, allowed its presence on the different social media platforms, namely **Twitter**, **Instagram** and **Facebook**, with the latter having the largest engagement and reach numbers.

## The Impact

Sharika Wa Laken's impact on the community level cannot go unnoticed. We constantly receive messages of satisfaction and reassurance of success from audiences in Lebanon and the Arab region, especially from minorities and vulnerable groups. Moreover, on the national level, SWL's campaigning efforts along with other partner women's rights organizations has had a striking impact on two main levels:

**Societal:** through covering women's issues and news, Sharika Wa Laken was able to influence and save the lives of some women whether through direct interventions, or advocacy and campaigning.



In April 2020 and during the crucial time of the global Coronavirus Pandemic, a famous Lebanese comedian, Wissam Saad, also known as Abou Talal, criticized women and young girls who dance while using the "TikTok" application, and compared them to porn stars. In his ten-minute show, **عمشان** Show, which airs during the prime time of a well-known national Lebanese TV station AlJadeed, and prior to the daily bulletin, Abu Talal explicitly justified and encouraged rape by using an offensive and abusive language against women and girls. It is estimated that not less than one million Lebanese people could have been watching the show. Sharika Wa Laken and all its social media platforms, namely Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, launched a nationwide reactive campaign to condemn the presenter and his show. Messages to either stop the show or publicly apologize for the offensive content were published, while mentioning the TV station and the presenter himself. In no time, the campaign went viral, and in less than 24 hours, mass participation, sharing, posting and reposting of the episode were recorded by activists, and both the TV channel and the host were pressured to publically apologize. The result was two official apologies right the next day: one by the TV channel during the prime time night bulletin and one by the presenter during the show, ten minutes prior to the bulletin.

02

Early in 2019, SWL was able to make a life changing effect on a woman survivor of GBV, an ex-wife of a very famous Lebanese singer. The wife reached out to Sharika Wa Laken and provided details of ill-treatment and deprivation of basic rights. After several posts exposing his violent and abusive acts, the high reach on the website and the social media platforms, and the amount of attacking comments on him, the singer and his lawyer were pressured and finally gave in to the wife's requests. She is now enjoying the custody of her two daughters and all her legal and financial rights; i.e. the right of a descent home for her and her daughters in addition to a fair share of allowance to attend to their needs. In this story, SWL, being a website of high reach and remarkable impact in the social media space, was the key pressuring tool.

03

In late 2018, Fe-Male, through Sharika Wa Laken, supported the production of a trafficking investigative report. Young journalist Jana Dheiby, with information provided by his youngest daughters (17 years old at the time of the investigation), set out to investigate the case of a father who was forcing his three daughters to practice prostitution after raping them at a very young age. With technical, legal and financial support for Jana to be able to not only carry the investigation, Sharika Wa Laken was able to lobby for the case and close it in favor of the girls where the high reach of the website and the buzz that the report made, led the Minister of Interior and Municipalities at that time, Raya El Hassan, to inform us that the Lebanese Internal Security Forces will interfere and handle the case. The father, later on, was jailed and the 17-year old girl was sent to a safe place, ensuring her return to school and her mother and sisters' protection.

**Legislative:** On the legislative level, Sharika Wa Laken was able, to reshape the perspective of those who are in power to react in favor of women, where most recently during the Corona virus pandemic, we were able, along with other women's rights organizations, to:

01

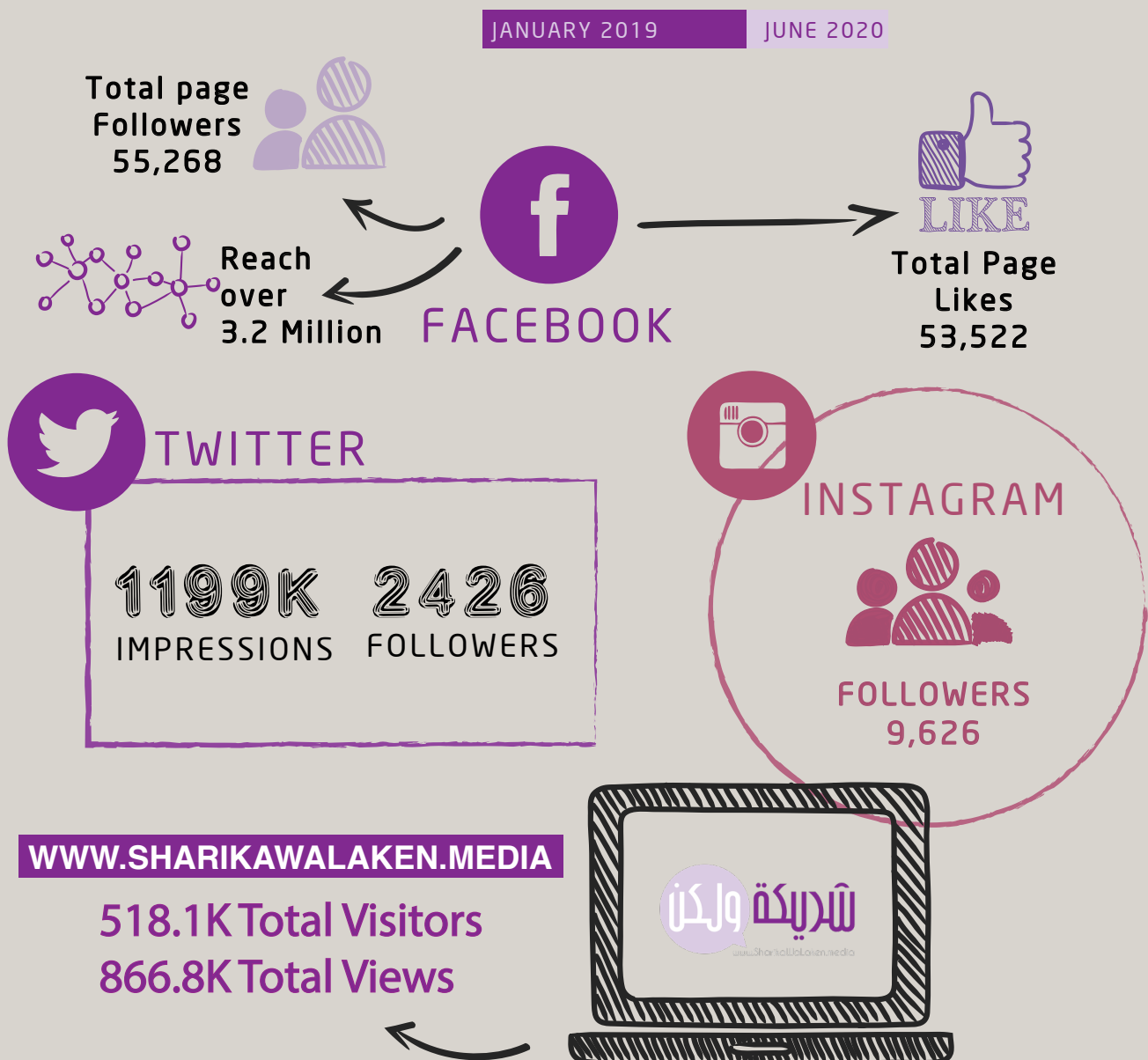
Get the Lebanese Judge Ghassan Ouwaitat, the Attorney General of the Court of Cassation to declare a generalization on the issue of domestic violence, requesting the opening of immediate records in all cases of domestic violence, even in the cases of non-witnessed crimes. In addition, the judge took into consideration the current conditions of the quarantine and eliminated the must of attendance of the victim, and having the lawyer or the judicial officer in charge of the investigation listen to the victim's testimony via video chat or any means deemed appropriate.



Get the Ministry of Labor to release a generalization warning employers of migrant domestic workers who attempt to buy or sell the worker online from taking legal measures against them for committing human trafficking crimes. This decision was taken by the Minister in light of our dedicated campaigning and advocacy work.

On another level, SWL's production of credible knowledge and data gave it the attribution of being a reference in all what's related to women and girls, especially in Lebanon. Mainly because of being the first online feminist media platform, and a pioneer in women's rights and causes, Sharika Wa Laken has had its share of influence on shaping the public's opinions in favor of the marginalized groups like migrant domestic workers, LGBTQI+ community and Syrian women refugees.

## Sharika Wa Laken impact in Numbers



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