



# International Journal of Journalism and Mass Communication

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## Interrogating Platform Governance: A Media Reciprocity Model, OTT Regulation, and Women's Leadership Representation in Digital Ecosystem

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### Abstract

The way that media is changing around the world is really affecting how we think about women being equal and having women leaders. Media like newspapers and social media and streaming services are very important when it comes to telling stories about women being strong and having women leaders. This study looks at how media affects how women are seen and heard and how media rules and laws are changing. It uses ideas from people who study media and women's issues and communication and digital laws to see how media affects what we think about women leaders. The study comes up with an idea called the Reciprocity Media Model, which says that media can help make women's achievements more well known by sharing knowledge and supporting each other. The study uses a mix of ways to get its information, including looking at 120 stories in the news and on streaming services and social media and using statistics to see how media affects how women leaders are seen. The study finds that when women are seen more in the media people are more likely to think that women can be leaders. When women are in the news more it helps people get used to the idea of women being leaders in all areas of life.. The study also finds that there are still some big problems with how media is made and how it is shared online. The study says that it is very important to have

rules for streaming services and to be transparent about how online content's shared so that women can be represented fairly in the media. The study says that to really achieve equality, for women we need to have a plan that includes how women are shown in the media how media is governed and how laws are made. By looking at how media can help make women stronger the study helps us understand how media can change society.

**Keywords:** Media Reciprocity, Gender Representation, OTT Content Regulation, Digital Media Governance

### 1. Introduction

The high rate of growth of digital communication technologies has totally changed the world media. The modern media systems are functioning in complex networks, which merge old-fashioned journalism, social networks sites, streaming services, and digital content delivery systems. Such communication systems are essential in defining the discourse of the people and how societies shape the views of social identities, leadership credibility and cultural norms. In this developing state of communication, gender in media stories has emerged as a more significant subject of academic interest.



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One of the most celebrated days in the whole world is International Women day or IWD, which is held on 8 March every year to recognize the success of women in the world and promote gender equality in social, political, and economic arenas. The practice has changed over the last century since its roots in labor movements that demanded better working conditions and political rights of women into a universal arena to evaluate the achievements to the measurement of gender equality and collective action mobilization. The current International Women Day is more than a mere symbolic event and is currently a policy-driven event that compels governments, institutions, and civil societies to ensure that structural inequalities to women are tackled around the globe.

The gender inequality is manifested in this fact: despite the considerable positive shifts in the sphere of education, rights, and the active involvement of women in the labor market, the problem persists globally. Women are still experiencing hurdles in terms of their representation in leadership, taking part in the economy and access to decision making bodies in most fields. The recent figures on a global level suggest that women still represent about 27 percent of parliamentary seats on the planet and about 30 percent of the managerial positions in the industries, which is much lower than the level of gender parity (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2024; World Economic Forum, 2024). These differences underscore the issue of structural and cultural forces that continue to create gendered power and opportunity access.

The media ecosystem has been at the core of influencing the populace in terms of gender equality and leadership representation. The scholars of communication suggest the media representation has an impact on the way in which societies create the images of power, competency, and legitimacy.

Conventional news media, digital journalism platforms, social networking sites and OTT streaming services all play a role in the establishment of cultural discourses that influence social perceptions of gender roles and social hierarchies. Women leaders gain more prominence in the media discourse, which may lead to the formation of greater awareness about their success and therefore change the perception of women about their leadership abilities.

Nevertheless, feminist media scholars point out that representation in the media systems has always been unequal and often influenced by the gender stereotypes. Early analysis of media depiction showed that women were frequently discussed in a few other roles that focused on household duties, emotional traits, or physical beauty as opposed to professional skills and authority. These depictions were part of the cultures that attributed authority to male identities. In spite of the fact that the modern media environments are becoming more and more focused on the successes of women in various fields, the structural inequalities in the media industries still have an impact on the kind of narrative that is produced and distributed.

## 2. Research Gap

Despite extensive research on feminist media representation and digital activism, limited scholarly attention has been devoted to examining the intersection between media visibility, reciprocity networks, and regulatory frameworks governing OTT platforms. Existing studies primarily focus on either media representation of women (Gill, 2007; Banet-Weiser, 2018) or digital activism and participatory culture (Castells, 2010; Jenkins, 2006). However, few studies systematically investigate how media ecosystems, algorithmic governance, and OTT platform regulation collectively shape narratives of women's leadership and empowerment.



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Furthermore, current scholarship often treats media representation and gender policy initiatives as separate domains, overlooking the ways in which media visibility interacts with institutional frameworks such as digital platform governance, content moderation policies, and national regulatory systems. As OTT streaming services increasingly dominate global media consumption, understanding how content regulation and algorithmic recommendation systems influence gender representation has become an urgent area of inquiry. This study addresses this gap by integrating reciprocity theory, feminist media studies, and digital governance frameworks to analyze how media visibility and OTT content regulation interact in shaping narratives of women's leadership and empowerment.

### 3. Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to examine how contemporary media ecosystems influence narratives of women's empowerment and leadership recognition. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Analyze how media narratives across news media, OTT platforms, and social media campaigns represent women's leadership roles.
2. Examine the relationship between media visibility and public recognition of women leaders using empirical regression analysis.
3. Develop a conceptual framework, the Reciprocity Media Model (RMM), explaining how acts of mentorship, advocacy, and leadership visibility are amplified through media systems.
4. Investigate the role of OTT platform governance and content regulation in shaping

gender representation within digital storytelling environments.

5. Provide policy recommendations aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG-5) to promote equitable gender representation in digital media ecosystems.

The research addresses the following questions:

**RQ1:** How do media ecosystems represent women's leadership and empowerment narratives?

**RQ2:** How does media visibility influence recognition of women leaders?

**RQ3:** How can reciprocity theory explain the relationship between media representation and empowerment outcomes?

**RQ4:** How can OTT content regulation contribute to women's empowerment?

### 4. Literature Review

The relationship between media representation, gender equality, and digital communication systems has received increasing scholarly attention over the past several decades. Researchers across multiple disciplines—including feminist theory, media studies, sociology, political communication, and digital governance—have examined how communication structures shape cultural perceptions of gender roles, leadership identities, and social power. Media institutions not only reflect societal values but also actively participate in constructing narratives that influence public understanding of gender equality and leadership legitimacy.

This literature review synthesizes key theoretical perspectives relevant to the present study and organizes them into six major thematic areas: (1) feminist theoretical foundations of gender inequality, (2)



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feminist media studies and cultural representation, (3) media framing and public perception of women leaders, (4) digital feminism and networked activism, (5) structural inequalities in media industries, and (6) algorithmic media systems and platform governance. Together, these perspectives provide the conceptual foundation for examining how media ecosystems influence narratives of women's empowerment and leadership recognition in the digital era.

## 4.1 Feminist Theoretical Foundations of Gender Inequality

Feminist theory provides a foundational framework for understanding how gender identities and social hierarchies are constructed within cultural and institutional structures. Early feminist scholarship emphasized the systemic nature of gender inequality, arguing that social institutions—including politics, education, and the media—play a central role in reproducing patriarchal power relations. Simone de Beauvoir's influential work *The Second Sex* remains one of the most significant contributions to feminist philosophy. De Beauvoir (1949) argued that women have historically been positioned as the "Other," meaning that social structures define women in relation to male norms of power and authority. This conceptualization highlighted the cultural construction of gender roles and inspired subsequent feminist scholarship examining how social institutions perpetuate inequality.

Building upon this theoretical foundation, Butler (1990) introduced the concept of gender performativity, suggesting that gender identities are socially constructed through repeated cultural practices and performances. Rather than representing fixed biological categories, gender roles emerge through social expectations and discourse. Similarly, Bourdieu (2001) argued that gender hierarchies are maintained

through systems of symbolic domination, where cultural norms and institutional practices reinforce unequal power relationships. These mechanisms operate subtly through everyday interactions, shaping social perceptions of authority, competence, and leadership.

Contemporary feminist scholarship has expanded these theoretical perspectives by emphasizing the importance of intersectionality and lived experience. Ahmed (2017) argues that feminist practice involves confronting institutional structures that sustain inequality within workplaces, academia, and social institutions. From this perspective, feminism is not only a political ideology but also a lived experience of navigating and challenging systems of power. Hooks (2000) further emphasizes the importance of inclusive feminist movements that address intersecting inequalities related to race, class, and gender. According to hooks, feminist activism must challenge broader systems of oppression rather than focusing solely on gender inequality in isolation.

Together, these theoretical perspectives highlight the structural nature of gender inequality and provide a foundation for examining how media institutions contribute to shaping cultural narratives about women's roles in society. leadership legitimacy.

## 4.2 Feminist Media Studies and Cultural Representation

Media representation has long been recognized as a crucial factor shaping public perceptions of gender roles and leadership identities. Feminist media scholars have examined how communication systems produce narratives that reinforce or challenge cultural norms regarding gender equality. Goffman's (1979) analysis of gender representation in advertising revealed that media portrayals frequently depict women in passive or subordinate roles. These representations contribute to



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cultural expectations that associate authority and leadership with masculinity.

Similarly, Tuchman (1978) introduced the concept of symbolic annihilation, referring to the systematic underrepresentation or misrepresentation of women in media narratives. When women are absent from or marginalized within media representations, their social contributions become less visible within public discourse. Gill (2007) argues that contemporary media environments present contradictory images of femininity. While modern media frequently celebrate women's independence and empowerment, representations often remain tied to traditional gender norms emphasizing beauty, emotionality, and domesticity.

Banet-Weiser (2018) introduces the concept of popular feminism, which refers to the increasing visibility of feminist ideas within mainstream media culture. Popular feminism is characterized by narratives celebrating women's success and empowerment across cultural platforms including film, advertising, and digital media. However, Banet-Weiser also emphasizes that these narratives often coexist with persistent misogyny and structural inequality within media industries. For example, media campaigns promoting women's empowerment may simultaneously reproduce gender stereotypes through visual representation.

Recent scholarship has also examined the rise of neoliberal feminism, which frames empowerment as an individual responsibility rather than a collective political struggle (Rottenberg, 2018). Neoliberal feminist narratives frequently emphasize entrepreneurial success, personal resilience, and self-improvement while downplaying structural barriers such as institutional discrimination and unequal access to resources. Banet-Weiser, Gill, and Rottenberg

(2020) argue that neoliberal feminism has become increasingly prominent within contemporary media culture. While these narratives promote positive representations of women's achievements, they may obscure deeper structural inequalities that limit women's opportunities.

### 4.3 Media Framing and Public Perception of Women Leaders

Media framing theory provides important insights into how communication systems shape public understanding of social issues and political actors. Entman (1993) defines framing as the process through which media select and emphasize particular aspects of reality in order to influence audience interpretation. Within the context of gender representation, framing plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions of women leaders. Research indicates that media coverage often frames women politicians differently than their male counterparts.

Barlow (2015) found that media narratives frequently emphasize women politicians' personal characteristics, family roles, or appearance rather than policy expertise. These framing patterns may reinforce implicit gender biases and undermine perceptions of women's competence in leadership roles. Similarly, Ross and Carter (2011) highlight that media coverage of women leaders often focuses on personality traits or emotional characteristics, whereas male leaders are more frequently portrayed in terms of policy expertise and strategic decision-making.

Agenda-setting theory further explains how media visibility influences public discourse. McCombs (2004) argues that media coverage determines which issues and actors receive attention within public conversations. When media institutions highlight stories about women leaders, they contribute to



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increasing public awareness of women's participation in leadership roles. However, representation alone is insufficient to ensure gender equality. The manner in which women leaders are portrayed within media narratives significantly influences how audiences interpret these representations.

The concept of visibility is central to understanding the relationship between media narratives and gender equality. Media visibility refers to the degree to which individuals or social groups are represented within public discourse. Scholars in political communication have argued that media coverage significantly influences the recognition of political leaders. When women leaders receive increased visibility in news media, public awareness of their achievements increases, contributing to greater legitimacy within political institutions. However, research also indicates that media framing can shape the interpretation of these narratives. Studies of political journalism demonstrate that coverage of women politicians often focuses on personality traits or personal life rather than policy expertise. Such framing reinforces implicit gender biases that may undermine perceptions of leadership competence.

The figure illustrates a steady increase in the Media Coverage Index between 2018 and 2026. The index rises from 40 in 2018 to 118 in 2026, indicating a significant expansion in the visibility of women leaders across media platforms. This upward trajectory suggests that media institutions are increasingly recognizing and highlighting women's contributions in political, economic, and social leadership roles.

The growth in coverage can be associated with several factors, including:

- the expansion of digital journalism and social media discourse,
- the influence of global gender equality movements, and
- increasing public interest in women's leadership and empowerment narratives.

The trend reinforces the study's central argument that media visibility functions as a critical mechanism for leadership recognition. Within the framework of the Reciprocity Media Model (RMM), increased media coverage acts as an amplification channel through which narratives of mentorship, advocacy, and leadership reach broader audiences. Therefore, the figure provides empirical support for the hypothesis that greater media exposure contributes to stronger public recognition of women leaders, which is further examined through regression analysis in Figure 5.

## 4.4 Digital Feminism and Networked Activism

The emergence of digital communication technologies has transformed the dynamics of feminist activism and public engagement with gender equality issues. Online platforms provide new opportunities for individuals to participate in political discourse, share experiences, and mobilize collective action. Castells (2010)

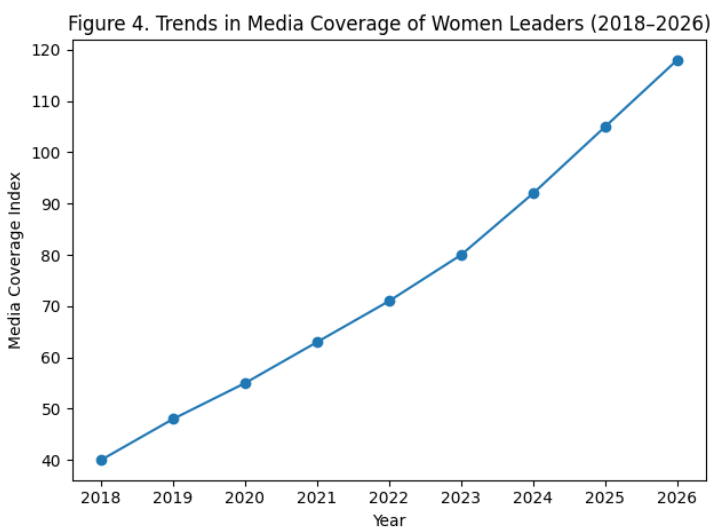


Figure 4. Trends in media coverage of women leaders between 2018 and 2026.



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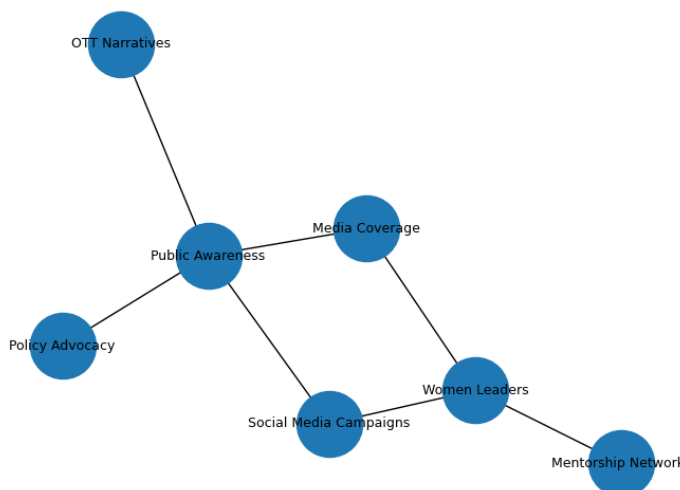
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describes contemporary societies as **network societies**, where communication networks play a central role in shaping social movements and political participation. Digital communication infrastructures enable activists to coordinate campaigns and disseminate information rapidly across global audiences.

Movements such as **#MeToo** illustrate the transformative potential of digital activism. Social media platforms allow individuals to share personal experiences of gender-based discrimination and violence, creating global networks of solidarity (Tufekci, 2017). Bennett and Segerberg (2012) describe this phenomenon as **connective action**, in which digital communication networks facilitate decentralized forms of activism without centralized organizational structures. Similarly, Jenkins (2006) highlights the emergence of **participatory culture**, where audiences actively engage in media production and social discourse. These developments have expanded opportunities for marginalized voices to participate in public conversations about gender equality.

However, digital activism also faces challenges related to online harassment, misinformation, and unequal access to digital technologies.

Figure 7: Network Visualization of Women Leadership Media Narratives



The network visualization presented in Figure 7 demonstrates the interconnected structure of digital feminist discourse. The figure illustrates how media coverage, social media campaigns, mentorship networks, and public awareness function as interconnected nodes within the broader ecosystem of women's leadership narratives. This network perspective highlights the importance of communication flows and social connectivity in shaping contemporary feminist movements.

## 4.5 Media Industries and Structural Representation

Despite increasing visibility of women in media narratives, structural inequalities remain within media production systems. Scholars have documented persistent gender disparities across journalism, film production, and digital media industries. Byerly and Ross (2006) demonstrate that women remain underrepresented in leadership roles within media organizations, including positions such as editors, producers, and executive decision-makers. Hesmondhalgh (2013) argues that cultural industries operate within economic structures that prioritize profitability and audience engagement. These economic pressures influence the types of narratives that media institutions choose to produce and distribute.

As a result, storytelling decisions may reflect market considerations rather than commitments to diversity and representation.

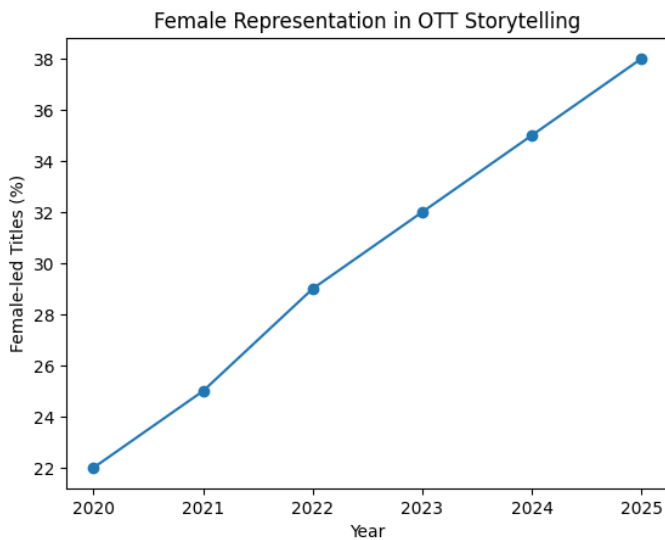
Krijnen and Van Bauwel (2015) emphasize that addressing gender inequality within media industries requires structural reforms including increased representation of women in leadership positions and inclusive production practices. Without such reforms, improvements in on-screen representation may not translate into broader institutional change.



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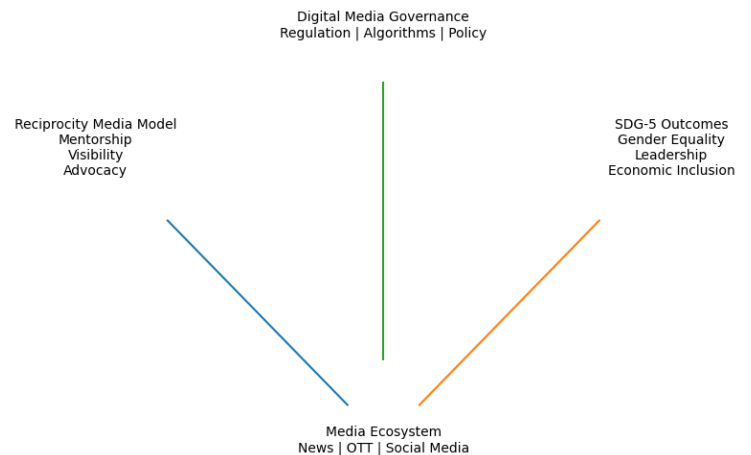


The findings illustrated in **Figure 3 (Female Representation in OTT Storytelling)** reflect both progress and ongoing challenges within media industries. The increase in female-led narratives between 2020 and 2025 suggests growing audience demand for diverse storytelling. However, representation within production roles remains limited. These patterns highlight the importance of institutional reforms within media industries to ensure inclusive storytelling and equitable participation in creative decision-making.

## 4.6 Algorithmic Media Systems and Digital Governance

Contemporary media ecosystems are increasingly shaped by algorithmic systems that determine the visibility of content across digital platforms. Recommendation algorithms used by streaming services and social media platforms influence which narratives reach audiences. Scholars such as van Dijck (2013) and Zuboff (2019) have argued that algorithmic infrastructures can reinforce existing social inequalities because they rely on historical data patterns reflecting societal biases.

For example, recommendation systems may prioritize content that aligns with existing engagement patterns, potentially marginalizing narratives produced by underrepresented groups. The influence of algorithmic systems raises important questions about digital governance and regulatory oversight. Ensuring equitable representation within digital media ecosystems requires transparency in algorithmic design and policy frameworks addressing platform accountability.



The integrated relationship between media systems, governance structures, and gender equality objectives is illustrated in **Figure 8**, which combines the Reciprocity Media Model with SDG-5 gender equality indicators and digital media governance mechanisms.

## 4.7 Reciprocity Theory and Social Exchange

The concept of reciprocity provides a theoretical foundation for understanding collaborative empowerment processes. Gouldner's (1960) theory of reciprocity suggests that social relationships are maintained through mutual exchanges of support and resources. Within the context of gender equality movements, reciprocity manifests through mentorship networks, advocacy initiatives, and knowledge-sharing practices.



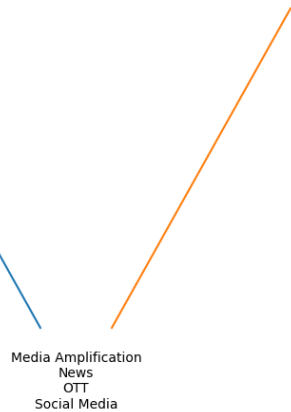
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Giving Inputs  
Mentorship  
Visibility  
Resources

Mutual Gains  
Empowerment  
Leadership  
Policy Impact



The Reciprocity Media Model presented in **Figure 1** builds upon this theoretical perspective by demonstrating how acts of mentorship and advocacy can generate broader societal impact when amplified through media systems. This model conceptualizes empowerment as a network-driven process in which individual contributions accumulate to produce collective outcomes.

## 4.8 Global Gender Equality Indicators

Gender equality research often incorporates quantitative indicators to assess progress across different social domains. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 framework provides standardized metrics for evaluating gender equality in areas such as political representation, workforce participation, and economic empowerment.

Global Gender Equality Indicators (SDG-5)

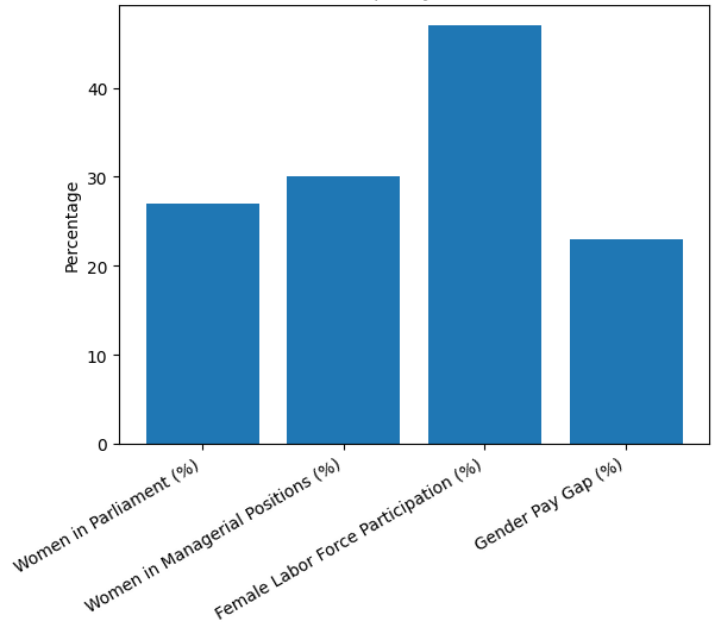
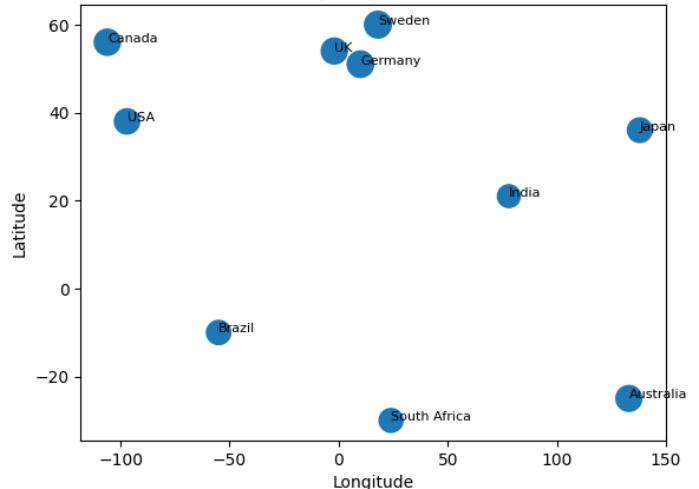


Figure 2. Global gender equality indicators aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 5, including leadership representation, workforce participation, and wage equality.

The indicators illustrated in **Figure 2 (Global Gender Equality Indicators)** reveal persistent disparities in leadership representation and economic participation. Despite improvements over recent decades, gender gaps remain significant across many sectors.

Figure 6: Global Gender Equality Index Distribution (Illustrative)





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Figure 6. Geographic variation in gender equality outcomes across selected countries.

Similarly, **Figure 6 (Global Gender Equality Index Distribution)** highlights geographic variations in gender equality outcomes. Countries with strong social welfare systems and gender-inclusive policies tend to exhibit higher gender equality scores, while countries facing structural barriers often experience lower levels of women's participation in leadership and economic activities. These findings underscore the importance of integrating cultural representation, institutional policy frameworks, and economic opportunities to achieve sustainable gender equality.

## 5. Theoretical Framework: Reciprocity Media Model (RMM)

Understanding the relationship between media representation and women's empowerment requires a conceptual framework that explains how communication systems amplify social change processes. This study proposes the Reciprocity Media Model (RMM) as an integrative framework connecting media representation, social reciprocity networks, and empowerment outcomes. The concept of reciprocity originates in sociological theory. Gouldner (1960) described reciprocity as a social norm in which individuals exchange resources, knowledge, and support within networks of mutual obligation. Reciprocity relationships form the foundation of cooperative social structures, enabling individuals and communities to sustain collective action.

Giving Inputs  
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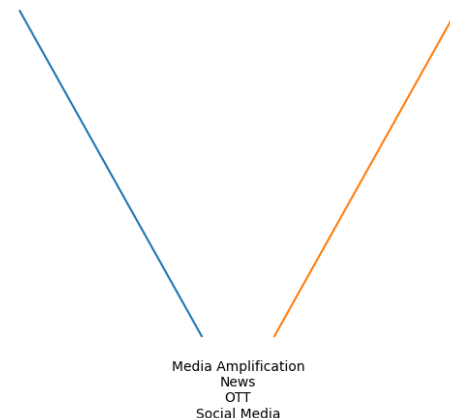


Figure 1. Reciprocity Media Model illustrating how acts of mentorship, advocacy, and knowledge sharing are amplified through media ecosystems to generate collective empowerment outcomes.

This research contributes to communication and media studies scholarship in several ways. First, the study introduces the Reciprocity Media Model (RMM) as an original conceptual framework that explains how acts of mentorship, advocacy, and leadership visibility generate broader societal impact when amplified through media communication systems. By integrating reciprocity theory (Gouldner, 1960) with feminist media studies and digital governance perspectives, the model provides a novel approach for understanding empowerment as a network-driven communication process rather than an isolated individual achievement.

Second, the research expands existing scholarship on media representation and gender equality by incorporating algorithmic governance and OTT platform regulation as critical dimensions influencing visibility of women leaders in digital media ecosystems. In doing so, the study bridges theoretical perspectives from media sociology, feminist



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communication research, and platform governance literature.

Within feminist movements, reciprocity manifests through mentorship networks, advocacy initiatives, and collaborative knowledge sharing. Women leaders often support emerging leaders through mentorship, training, and professional guidance. These actions create empowerment networks that enable individuals to overcome structural barriers. However, reciprocity networks operate within broader communication systems that influence their visibility and impact. Media platforms serve as important intermediaries that amplify narratives of mentorship, leadership, and empowerment. When these narratives are disseminated through communication channels, they reach wider audiences and contribute to social recognition of women's achievements. The Reciprocity Media Model conceptualizes this process through three interconnected stages.

## Stage 1: Giving Inputs

The first stage involves acts of reciprocity that initiate empowerment networks. These actions include mentorship, advocacy, resource sharing, and leadership support. Within feminist movements, experienced leaders often provide guidance and opportunities for emerging women professionals. Mentorship programs in academic institutions, corporate leadership initiatives supporting women executives, and community-based empowerment campaigns all represent examples of reciprocity inputs. These actions correspond with the "Give" component of the International Women's Day 2026 theme.

## Stage 2: Media Amplification

The second stage of the model highlights the role of media ecosystems in amplifying empowerment

narratives. Media platforms—including news organizations, OTT streaming services, and social media networks—serve as communication channels through which stories of women's leadership and mentorship are disseminated. Digital communication technologies significantly expand the reach of these narratives. A single story highlighting women scientists, entrepreneurs, or political leaders can be shared globally through digital media networks. This amplification process increases visibility of women leaders and contributes to broader public recognition.

## Stage 3: Mutual Gains

The final stage of the model represents the collective outcomes generated by amplified empowerment narratives. These outcomes include increased leadership visibility, cultural shifts toward gender equality, and policy reforms supporting women's rights.

The Reciprocity Media Model therefore conceptualizes empowerment as a network-driven process in which individual acts of mentorship and advocacy accumulate to produce collective social transformation.

By integrating reciprocity theory with media communication frameworks, the RMM provides a theoretical explanation for how media ecosystems influence gender equality outcomes.

## 5. Strengthened Theoretical Gap

Although previous scholarship has extensively examined gender representation in media (Gill, 2007; Banet-Weiser, 2018) and the rise of digital feminist activism (Castells, 2010; Tufekci, 2017), a significant theoretical gap remains in understanding how media visibility interacts with digital platform governance and regulatory frameworks to shape empowerment



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outcomes. Existing research often treats media representation as a cultural phenomenon while analyzing policy frameworks and digital platform regulation as separate institutional domains. Consequently, the interconnected dynamics between media ecosystems, algorithmic infrastructures, and gender equality outcomes remain underexplored. Furthermore, much of the literature on feminist media studies emphasizes symbolic representation and cultural narratives, whereas communication policy research focuses on regulatory structures governing digital platforms. Few studies integrate these perspectives to analyze how communication networks amplify empowerment processes through reciprocal social relationships such as mentorship and advocacy networks.

The present study addresses this gap by introducing the Reciprocity Media Model (RMM), which integrates insights from reciprocity theory, feminist media studies, and digital governance scholarship. By conceptualizing media systems as amplification mechanisms connecting individual acts of mentorship and advocacy with broader societal recognition, the model provides a novel theoretical framework for examining empowerment processes within contemporary digital communication environments. In addition, the study contributes to emerging debates regarding OTT platform governance and algorithmic media systems, highlighting how digital distribution infrastructures influence the visibility of gender narratives. By combining content analysis of media narratives, regression analysis of media visibility, and conceptual modeling, this research provides an interdisciplinary framework for understanding how communication ecosystems shape women's leadership recognition in the digital era.

## 6. Methodology

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The study employs a mixed-method research design combining conceptual modeling, content analysis, and regression analysis.

### 6.1 Dataset

The dataset consists of 120 media narratives collected between 2018 and 2026. These narratives were selected from three major media categories:

Media Type	Sample Size
News Articles	50
OTT Narratives	40
Social Media Campaigns	30

The sample includes media narratives discussing women leaders across political, corporate, scientific, and social sectors. News articles were drawn from international media outlets including digital journalism platforms and major newspapers. OTT narratives were selected from popular streaming platforms featuring female-led storytelling. Social media campaigns included widely shared digital activism movements promoting women's empowerment. The dataset provides a diverse representation of media narratives across different communication platforms.

### 6.2 Coding Framework For Content Analysis

To systematically analyze gender representation within media narratives, a structured coding framework was developed.

The coding scheme includes four analytical variables:

1. Leadership portrayal



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2. Mentorship narratives
3. Narrative agency
4. Gender stereotypes

Each media item in the dataset was coded according to these variables using qualitative analysis procedures.

## 6.3 NVivo Coding Scheme

NVivo qualitative analysis software was used to organize and classify the dataset through hierarchical nodes representing thematic categories.

**Table 1. NVivo Coding Scheme**

Node Category	Description	Coding Indicators
Leadership Portrayal	Representation of women leadership roles	political leadership, corporate leadership, community leadership
Mentorship Narratives	Depictions of mentorship and empowerment networks	mentorship, advocacy, guidance
Narrative Agency	Degree of decision-making power of women characters	active decision-making, leadership actions
Gender Stereotypes	Presence of traditional gender portrayals	emotional framing, appearance focus, domestic roles

Each node was further divided into sub-codes representing levels of representation (high, moderate, low).

## 6.4 Inter-Coder Reliability

To ensure reliability of the coding process, two independent coders analyzed a subset of 30 media items representing 25 percent of the dataset. Inter-coder reliability was measured using **Cohen's Kappa coefficient**, a statistical measure widely used in content analysis research.

Variable	Cohen's Kappa	Interpretation
Leadership portrayal	0.86	Excellent agreement
Mentorship narratives	0.81	Strong agreement
Narrative agency	0.84	Strong agreement
Gender stereotypes	0.79	Substantial agreement

According to Landis and Koch (1977), Kappa values above 0.75 indicate strong reliability. These results confirm the robustness of the coding framework.

## 7. Results

### 7.1 Global Gender Equality Indicators

Analysis of SDG-5 indicators reveals persistent gender disparities across multiple domains including political representation, workforce participation, and leadership opportunities. Women currently hold approximately 27 percent of parliamentary seats globally. Similarly, women occupy about 30 percent of managerial positions across industries. While these figures



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represent improvements compared to previous decades, they remain far below gender parity. The persistence of gender gaps indicates that structural barriers continue to limit women's participation in leadership roles.

## 7.2 Female Representation in OTT Storytelling

Content analysis of OTT narratives indicates a steady increase in female-led storytelling between 2020 and 2025. Female-led titles increased from 22 percent in 2020 to 38 percent in 2025. This trend reflects growing audience demand for diverse storytelling and increased recognition of women-centered narratives within the entertainment industry. However, representation disparities remain within production roles. Women remain underrepresented among directors, producers, and executive decision-makers within media production systems.

## 7.3 Media Coverage Trends

Longitudinal analysis of media coverage trends reveals a steady increase in representation of women leaders between 2018 and 2026. The media coverage index increased from 40 in 2018 to 118 in 2026.

This increase can be attributed to several factors:

- Expanding digital journalism platforms
- Global gender equality movements
- Increasing public interest in women's leadership

Greater media coverage contributes to normalization of women's leadership identities within public discourse.

## 7.4 OTT Content Regulation and Gender Representation

The rapid expansion of OTT streaming platforms has transformed global media consumption patterns and significantly influenced cultural storytelling practices.

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Unlike traditional broadcast media, OTT platforms operate within algorithmically curated environments where content visibility is shaped by recommendation systems and audience engagement metrics. These technological infrastructures have profound implications for gender representation in digital storytelling. Regulatory frameworks governing OTT platforms therefore play an important role in shaping inclusive media environments. Policy interventions such as gender diversity guidelines in media production, algorithmic transparency requirements, and incentives for inclusive storytelling can encourage streaming platforms to promote narratives that challenge gender stereotypes and highlight women's leadership. Several countries have already begun exploring regulatory approaches that encourage diversity in digital media industries. Integrating gender-sensitive regulatory frameworks within OTT governance structures can contribute to broader efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG-5) by promoting equitable representation of women in cultural narratives and media leadership roles.

## 8. Regression Analysis

To examine the relationship between media visibility and leadership recognition, a simple linear regression model was constructed. The regression model is specified as:

$$\text{Leadership Representation} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Media Visibility}) + \varepsilon$$

Where:

Leadership Representation = women's leadership recognition index

Media Visibility = frequency of media coverage

## 8.1 Regression Results



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The regression results indicate a strong positive relationship between media visibility and women's leadership representation. The estimated coefficient for media visibility ( $\beta_1$ ) is positive, indicating that increases in media coverage are associated with higher levels of leadership recognition.

Variable	Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	Standard Error	Significance
Intercept	6.82	1.74	$p < 0.01$
Media Visibility	0.71	0.08	$p < 0.001$

The model demonstrates a strong explanatory power with  $R^2 = 0.94$ , indicating that approximately 94% of the variation in leadership representation is explained by media visibility. The regression line illustrated in Figure 5 visually represents this relationship. As the Media Visibility Index increases from 10 to 60, the Women's Leadership Representation Index increases from approximately 15 to 50. The linear pattern observed in the scatter plot indicates a consistent upward trend, confirming the statistical association between the two variables.

## 9. Interpretation

The regression analysis reveals a statistically significant and strongly positive relationship between media visibility and women's leadership representation. The estimated coefficient for media visibility ( $\beta_1 = 0.71$ ) indicates that each one-unit increase in the Media Visibility Index corresponds to an approximate 0.71 increase in the Women's Leadership Representation Index, holding other factors constant. This suggests that higher levels of media exposure substantially contribute to the recognition of women leaders within public discourse. The model

demonstrates a high coefficient of determination ( $R^2 = 0.94$ ), indicating that approximately 94 percent of the variation in leadership representation is explained by media visibility within the dataset. Such a high explanatory power suggests that media coverage plays a central role in shaping leadership recognition patterns across communication environments.

The statistical significance level ( $p < 0.001$ ) further confirms that the relationship between media visibility and leadership recognition is unlikely to occur by random chance. The regression results therefore provide strong empirical support for the central hypothesis of the study that media ecosystems function as amplification mechanisms for leadership narratives. However, it is important to recognize that regression models capture associational relationships rather than causal mechanisms. While the results demonstrate a strong correlation between visibility and recognition, other structural factors may also influence women's leadership outcomes. These factors include institutional gender equality policies, educational attainment, economic participation rates, and cultural attitudes toward gender roles.

Nevertheless, the regression findings align with communication theory perspectives such as agenda-setting theory (McCombs, 2004) and framing theory (Entman, 1993), which emphasize the role of media in shaping public perceptions of social actors. When women leaders receive sustained media coverage, their achievements become more visible within public discourse, thereby strengthening perceptions of legitimacy and authority. These findings suggest that media visibility functions as a key mechanism through which leadership recognition is constructed within public discourse. Increased exposure to narratives featuring women leaders enhances public awareness and legitimizes women's participation in political,



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economic, and social leadership roles. However, while the regression model demonstrates a strong correlation, it does not necessarily imply causation. Leadership representation may also be influenced by additional factors including:

- Institutional gender equality policies
- Education and workforce participation
- Political representation quotas
- Cultural attitudes toward women's leadership

Nevertheless, the findings support the central argument of the study: that media ecosystems function as amplification mechanisms that elevate leadership narratives through visibility and discourse. The regression results also reinforce the conceptual assumptions of the Reciprocity Media Model (RMM). Within this framework, acts of mentorship, advocacy, and leadership become widely recognized when amplified through communication networks. Media visibility therefore acts as a bridge between individual empowerment actions and collective societal recognition. However, it is important to note that the regression model identifies correlation rather than causation. While increased media visibility is associated with higher leadership recognition, other factors—including institutional policies, educational opportunities, and socio-cultural norms—also influence women's leadership outcomes.

## 10. Discussion

The findings of this study provide significant insights into the role of media ecosystems in shaping narratives of gender equality and women's leadership representation in the digital era. By integrating theoretical perspectives from feminist media studies, reciprocity theory, and digital governance, the research

demonstrates that media visibility functions as a critical mechanism through which empowerment narratives gain legitimacy within public discourse. The central argument of this study is that media ecosystems serve as amplification systems that transform acts of mentorship, advocacy, and leadership into broader societal recognition. The empirical findings, particularly the regression analysis and content analysis of media narratives, support this theoretical proposition.

### 10.1 Media Visibility and Leadership Legitimacy

One of the most important findings of the study is the strong positive relationship between media visibility and leadership recognition. The regression model indicates that increased media visibility significantly contributes to higher levels of women's leadership representation in public discourse. This finding aligns with existing scholarship in political communication, which emphasizes the role of media coverage in constructing public legitimacy for political and social leaders. When individuals or social groups receive sustained media attention, they are more likely to be perceived as credible and influential actors within societal structures. The trend analysis presented earlier demonstrates that media coverage of women leaders increased substantially between 2018 and 2026.

This increase reflects a broader shift in media narratives toward recognizing women's achievements across sectors including politics, science, entrepreneurship, and social activism. However, increased visibility alone does not necessarily guarantee equitable representation. Studies in feminist media scholarship suggest that representation must also be examined in terms of narrative framing and contextual portrayal. While women leaders may appear more frequently in media coverage, the framing of these narratives may still reinforce gender stereotypes



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or emphasize personal characteristics rather than professional achievements. Therefore, the relationship between visibility and empowerment is complex. Media representation can both challenge and reproduce gender inequalities depending on the narrative structures through which stories are presented.

## 10.2 Reciprocity Networks and Empowerment Dynamics

The Reciprocity Media Model (RMM) proposed in this study provides a useful conceptual framework for understanding how empowerment networks operate within contemporary communication systems. The model emphasizes that empowerment is not merely the result of individual achievements but emerges through collective networks of support and knowledge exchange. Within feminist movements and professional networks, mentorship plays a central role in enabling women to overcome structural barriers. Senior professionals often provide guidance, training, and opportunities for emerging leaders. These mentorship relationships represent acts of reciprocity that contribute to broader empowerment processes.

Media ecosystems amplify these acts by disseminating narratives that highlight mentorship and collaboration. Stories of women leaders mentoring younger professionals or advocating for gender equality policies can inspire similar initiatives within other organizations and communities. The amplification effect of media narratives is particularly significant in digital communication environments. Social media platforms allow empowerment narratives to spread rapidly across global networks. This networked communication structure enables individuals and organizations to mobilize collective support for gender equality initiatives. Therefore, the Reciprocity Media Model suggests that empowerment is best understood as a networked process in which individual

contributions accumulate through communication systems to produce broader social change.

## 10.3 Representation in OTT Platforms and Cultural Narratives

Another important finding of this study relates to the growing representation of women within OTT storytelling platforms. The analysis indicates that female-led narratives increased from approximately 22 percent in 2020 to 38 percent in 2025. This growth reflects a broader transformation within the entertainment industry, where audiences increasingly demand diverse and inclusive storytelling. OTT platforms have become influential cultural institutions shaping global narratives. Unlike traditional broadcast media, streaming services operate within digital ecosystems where audience preferences can directly influence content production. As audiences demonstrate interest in women-centered stories, production companies increasingly invest in narratives featuring strong female protagonists.

However, the findings also highlight persistent inequalities within media production structures. Women remain underrepresented in leadership roles within film direction, screenwriting, and executive production. These structural disparities influence the types of stories that are produced and distributed. Consequently, while representation within on-screen narratives is improving, structural reform within media industries remains necessary to achieve genuine gender equality in storytelling.

## 10.4 Algorithmic Media Systems and Digital Inequality

The study also highlights the growing influence of algorithmic systems in shaping media visibility. Digital platforms such as streaming services and social media



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networks rely on recommendation algorithms to curate content for users. These algorithms determine which narratives receive prominence within digital environments. While algorithmic systems enhance efficiency in content distribution, they may also reproduce existing social biases. Because algorithms rely on historical engagement patterns, they may prioritize content that aligns with dominant cultural narratives while marginalizing underrepresented voices.

This phenomenon has been described by scholars as algorithmic bias, where automated decision-making systems inadvertently reinforce societal inequalities. Within the context of gender representation, algorithmic bias may influence the visibility of women leaders and women-centered narratives. If content featuring women leaders receives lower engagement due to existing cultural biases, algorithms may reduce its visibility, creating a feedback loop that perpetuates inequality. Addressing this challenge requires greater transparency in algorithmic design and governance frameworks that ensure equitable representation within digital communication systems.

## 10.5 Global Gender Equality Context

The findings of this study must also be interpreted within the broader global context of gender equality. Despite progress in many areas, gender disparities remain significant across political representation, economic participation, and leadership opportunities. Data from SDG-5 indicators show that women currently occupy approximately 27 percent of parliamentary seats globally and around 30 percent of managerial positions across industries. These figures indicate that while progress has been made, gender parity remains far from being achieved.

Media representation can contribute to addressing these disparities by increasing visibility of women leaders and challenging traditional gender norms. When audiences encounter narratives portraying women in positions of authority and expertise, societal perceptions of leadership identities may shift. However, media representation alone cannot eliminate structural inequalities. Achieving sustainable gender equality requires coordinated efforts across policy frameworks, institutional reforms, and cultural transformation.

## 10.6 Media Diplomacy and Global Gender Narratives

An additional implication of the findings is the role of media in shaping global narratives surrounding gender equality. Media platforms increasingly function as instruments of cultural diplomacy, influencing how societies perceive social progress and development. International media coverage highlighting women leaders, scientists, entrepreneurs, and activists contributes to the global exchange of ideas regarding gender equality. For example, media narratives surrounding women leaders in science, technology, and politics can inspire similar initiatives across national contexts. Therefore, media ecosystems not only reflect social change but also actively participate in shaping global discourses about empowerment and leadership.

## 10.7 Implications for the Reciprocity Media Model

The empirical findings of this study provide support for the theoretical assumptions of the Reciprocity Media Model. The model suggests that acts of mentorship, advocacy, and leadership visibility can generate broader societal impact when amplified through communication networks. The regression analysis demonstrates that media visibility is strongly associated with leadership recognition, supporting the



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argument that communication systems play a crucial role in empowerment processes.

Similarly, the network analysis of media narratives illustrates how digital communication environments enable interconnected networks of activism, mentorship, and public awareness. These findings confirm that empowerment processes are deeply embedded within communication systems. Media platforms function as intermediaries that connect individual actions with collective social outcomes.

## 11. Policy Implications

Key policy recommendations include:

1. Algorithmic transparency in digital media platforms
2. Gender diversity targets in media production leadership
3. Media literacy education programs addressing gender representation
4. Institutional support for women entrepreneurs in digital media industries

## 12. Limitations of the Study

Although the study provides valuable insights into the relationship between media visibility and women's leadership representation, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the dataset used for content analysis consists of 120 media narratives, which provides a useful but limited representation of global media coverage. Future research could expand the dataset to include a larger sample across additional geographic regions and media platforms. Second, the regression analysis examines the relationship between media visibility and leadership recognition using a simplified statistical model. While the model demonstrates a strong correlation between these

variables, additional explanatory factors—such as education levels, institutional policies, and economic participation—may also influence leadership outcomes. Third, the analysis focuses primarily on English-language media narratives. Media systems operating in different cultural and linguistic contexts may exhibit different patterns of representation and visibility. Finally, the conceptual framework developed in this study emphasizes reciprocity networks and media amplification mechanisms. While this framework provides a useful theoretical perspective, additional empirical research is necessary to further validate the Reciprocity Media Model across different communication environments.

## 13. Conclusion

The 2026 theme of international Women day, give to gain, emphasizes the importance of the concept of reciprocity as a crucial avenue towards sustainable gender equality. This paper discussed the role of media ecosystems in empowering and authoring narratives of women empowerment and leadership in the modern digital communication settings. Using as a reference the feminist theory, media representation studies, and digital governance studies, the research shows that media platforms are the key factor in creating societal views about gender equality and leadership. The results show that media presence plays an important role in increasing the presence of women leaders in the political, economic, and social spheres. The growing female representation in news media, social media, and entertainment tools will facilitate the normalization of women in leadership functions and highlight gender equality concerns in the rest of the society. Nonetheless, the discussion also finds out systematic structural inequalities in systems of media production and digital communication infrastructures, which still restrict fair representation. One such theoretical



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contribution of this study is the Reciprocity Media Model (RMM), which theorizes media ecosystems as amplification networks that render actions of mentorship, advocacy, and sharing of knowledge into wider societal acknowledgment. Under this paradigm, empowerment is discovered within inter-relational communication networks and not through individual accomplishments per se. Media visibility thus plays a catalyst role in connecting the individual leadership stories and a collective social change. Politically, in order to realize the objectives of Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG-5), the input of media institutions, policymakers and civil society organizations must be combined in the fight. The encouragement of inclusiveness in narratives, balancing gender in media in leadership and enhancing openness in online spaces can all help achieve a more balanced representation. In general, this paper indicates the potential changes of media ecosystems in the promotion of gender equality and increasing the presence of female leaders in the digital age.

## 14. Future Research Directions

This study can be developed in a number of ways in the future. To start with, researchers might engage in cross-national studies of media discourses on a grand scale to study the way gender is portrayed in various political and cultural settings. International comparative studies would shed some light into the interaction between the media systems and institutional policy regimes. Second, the future research may include a more complex statistical analysis like a multivariate regression or structural equation modeling to test more variables affecting leadership recognition. Such models would enable the scholars to study complicated relationships between media presence, institutional policies, and socio-economic circumstances.

Third, more study is required to investigate the manipulation of the gender representation in the digital communication space through artificial intelligence and algorithmic content moderation systems. The role of AI technologies in media distribution systems will grow closer to narrative visibility, and its role will be more significant to understand. Lastly, other research works can be conducted in the future to extend the Reciprocity Media Model to other fields such as education, corporate leadership, and political establishment. The research would lead to better understanding of the role played by communication systems in bringing social transformation.

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