

The impact of YouTube in empowering Algerian young women

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Abstract

Social media studies have shown that the use of social applications affects different aspects of individual lives. This paper explores the impact of social media on the way Algerian young women construct their experiences in the virtual sphere, by following famous young female YouTubers and influencers in their early twenties on YouTube. A thematic analysis of selected videos of the Algerian YouTuber Amira Riaa would shed light on the ways Algerian young women use social media mainly YouTube to be present online and develop themselves by following, interacting, and relating to this famous female model's real experiences in the virtual world. The analysis has shown that YouTube, consequently, represents a virtual space where these young Algerian women's interest in consuming social media has transcended to being entertained by watching other women's lives on this virtual platform, and a space where they can identify and relate to Algerian YouTube content creators' experiences and opinions and be empowered psychologically.

Keywords: Empowerment; psychological; women; YouTube.

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1. Introduction

In a globalized era, the use of social media powered by the internet and communication technologies has influenced world order. Change, consequently, is inevitable on different levels; a macro-level concerning institutions, economies or communities, and societies as a whole, and on a micro level concerning individuals (Attia et al., 2011; Chen, 2012; Foran et al., 2008; Kuchment, 2014; Lopes, 2014; Schroeder, 2018; Alshurideh et al., 2023). A growing number of researches about social media as a topic of interest have covered many fields because of its ubiquitous and influential nature. Internet consumption and the innovation of communication technologies like social media outlets such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and others facilitate communication, social interaction, and information dissemination (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Social Media Research Group, 2016) and also entertainment (Chen, 2012; Stald, 2008). In a digital age, social media represent, mainly to those of young age, a public sphere to learn and the cradle of change (Castells, 2000; Cilliers, 2021).

Young consumers of social media in the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) of different ages and gender are described as hungry for change. This phenomenon has been spotted since the events of the Arab Spring where young people from different Arab countries have participated in a revolutionary path to change their social, political, and economic status in the organizational or nonorganizational manner for one common aim and is to stand up for their violated rights and become the makers of their destiny. Social media platforms embody lively environments for users to express their opinions, enunciate their identities, and empower themselves against unwanted governments (Armstrong, 2015; Beck, 2013; Howard & Hussain, 2013; Salanova, 2012).

In the HuffPost UK blog *“Can Social Media Empower Women?”*, Tomlin (2012) shed light on reports of the one year after 2011 demonstrating the eminent role of Arab women whose number grew importantly after the uprisings (Tomlin, 2012). Women in the Arab world have shown political awareness participated both online and offline and contributed to the process of change in their communities. Studies have shown that when some Arab women have chosen and still choose not to take the wave of change, others are fully aware of their responsibility to take the lead and bring about change for themselves and others. Using social media gave them a voice to form groups online and offline to sustain each other put pressure on higher institutions and gain their abolished rights (Al-Maimani, 2021; Newsom & Lengel 2012; Odine, 2013; Varghese, 2011). Social media has aided awareness and learning among all age groups especially the older generation which had more limits to information in earlier years of their lives (Morrison & McCutcheon 2019; Deagon et al., 2021). Therefore, media literacy is necessary for the access and exchange of this information (Satar et al., 2023; Cabero Almenara et al., 2023). Odine (2013), in her paper *“The Role of Social Media in the Empowerment of Women”*, called for the important role that the right to education and access to information, as well as social media literacy, can play a tremendous role to pave the way for women of different backgrounds and age rates to reinforce their powers all time. She affirms that:

“Women must be actively engaged in acquiring technological skills to take advantage of social media, integrating the likes of Facebook, Twitter, and almighty Internet with devices such as smartphones, iPads, laptops, and desktop computers. The impetus for the empowerment of women could not have come at a more opportune period in history. Social media have been born when governments, despite their desire, are disempowered to control or regulate social media. Women’s rights groups and advocates would only have themselves to blame if information tailored to concerned causes is not professionally conceptualized, packaged, and disseminated. Information will also enlighten those who are dogmatic to the status quo, eradicate ignorance and stereotypes, and present new challenges for governments and their leaders to accord women their rightful place in society”.

1.1. Literature review

1.1.1. Psychological Empowerment

Successful women are stepping out in the spotlight as leading figures who managed to take the ladder of success in all possible domains both in developing and developed countries across the world. Yet, still, in the

twenty-first century, research in psychology, sociology, and other fields shows that the continuous calling for women's empowerment is still ongoing. The harvest of all the extensive efforts of human rights activists, organizations, scholars, and politicians to fight patriarchal ill-treatment, lack of educational opportunities, economic marginalization, and even oppressive racial attitudes, religious doctrines, and cultural rituals still haven't reached an end (Mandal, 2013). Gaining women full power seems to be tardy since there is still much work to do to empower more of them who still face unlimited challenges and obstacles out there in their world.

The concept of empowerment, despite its various connotations; where it initially implies that it is a social process where someone helps someone to get control over their life, also refers to a personal cognitive reflection and awareness by the individual to change a particular situation in their lives (Pietilä-Litendahl & Uusiautti, 2014). Zimmermann (1995) in his paper *“Psychological Empowerment: Issues and Illustrations”* refers to it as psychological empowerment and explains that it:

“integrates perceptions of personal control, a proactive approach to life, and a critical understanding of the sociopolitical environment... includes beliefs that goals can be achieved, awareness about resources and factors that hinder or enhance one's efforts to achieve those goals, and efforts to fulfill the goals”.

Arab Women, before the movements of change and unlike women in developed countries, were and still are subjected to political, socio-cultural as well as religious restrictions. In a study conducted in Oman, Varghese (2011) addressed several social, economic, and political issues to measure and assess Omani women's empowerment. Using a mixed-method approach has demonstrated that taking control over domestic matters grants them control but not to a sufficient extent to challenge patriarchal power. However, despite their awareness of some political matters, their actions were limited. In this vein, the study raised some suggestions to improve women's rights and duties (Varghese, 2011). In Algeria, Professor and lecturer of Social Sciences Ghiat (2019) shed light on the role of personal traits that help Algerian women to cease and succeed in entrepreneurial opportunities and challenge male domination of economic positions. Despite the restrictive norms, negative attitudes, and stereotypes that are still widespread in Algeria, Algerian women have shown competency and leadership qualities to gain a certain economic power (Ghiat, 2019).

In a study entitled: *“Online versus Offline World: A Thematic Analysis of Arab Women's Empowerment via Social Media”*, Al-Maimani (2021) investigated the impact of social media mainly Twitter on Arab women's empowerment. The study revealed that this virtual platform offers a sphere to exist by expressing their opinions and engaging in talks about their real-life constraints about religion, culture, and politics. Though this online empowerment was realized through engagement with fake names and hidden identities in fear of social judgment, it spotted light on the psychological turmoil of women in the MENA region as a result of all the constraints that exist in patriarchal communities. The study, therefore; has emphasized important components that revolve mainly around women's psychological freedom of mind before the freedom of expression; to be fully aware of what hinders their advancement and get involved in spreading awareness about their rights in their communities (Al-Maimani, 2021).

Women voicing themselves or being voiced by other advocators to reach guidance takes place in real particular locations or the virtual space. Now, with access to social media and its ubiquity, women have more chances to search and find assistance and help. Youth, including young women of different backgrounds and age rates, use Social Media such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube to build their identities and form a sense of independence by gathering information and views from different sources through exploration and commitment processes via these platforms; and to join communities with similar interests to fulfill particular needs or simply get advice to curb their enthusiasm or try to identify themselves (Manago, 2015).

1.1.2. *YouTube and Social Influence*

Whether social media platforms are used for communication, socialization, or entertainment, the nature of users of social media has changed too. Users, at first, used to be passive consumers, at the beginning of the emergence of the Web (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) but with the ideological and technological advent and update of social media applications, they have shifted to become producers of content. Social media applications

offered them a space to create content to share and discuss with each other online and offline.

In the virtual world of social media platforms like YouTube, participants tend to share in their communities different stories about themselves or the world around them. In a study titled: *“The key is not to forget to be awesome: identifying narratives in an online community”* conducted by Escobar et al., (2014) found out how stories created by YouTubers can affect online interaction and engagement with their followers and reinforce the connection of their community and grant its continuity. In fact, in their paper, YouTube was described as *“a birthplace of communities”* and a sphere where they can exist stating that:

“Another popular reason for sharing stories was because “They make an impact”, a code used whenever participants shared stories because they were about making some kind of impact in the world, which makes them worth telling. This code is similar to that of “They are awesome”, which also refers to the fact that these stories should be shared. They express the sentiment that these stories are worth sharing because of how influential they are” (Escobar et al., 2014).

Different names like social media influencers, Micro-celebrities, or non-traditional celebrities are used to describe YouTubers as content creators on YouTube. Nouri (2018) in his paper: *“The Power of Influence: Traditional Celebrity vs Social Media Influencer”* explained that the rise of the *“New social media Stars”*; who represent content creators mainly on YouTube, create varied and relevant content and provide feedback about different topics of day-to-day life ranging from fashion, cooking and even purchasing habits, etc. to spending their own leisure time. The time of traditional mainstream stars and icons in sports, music, acting, etc. is being challenged by ordinary individuals uploading personal yet influential content on social media users. These new influencers have a greater impact on their followers for they tend to imitate what their favorite social media stars do based on trust (Nouri, 2018).

According to psychologist Eric Erikson, individuals at their early stage form their identities relying on their parents and then their teachers who serve as a model of reference and a source of trust, knowledge, and information to develop certain autonomy, but it is through peer socialization that young people start to recognize their identities and develop more (Kay, 2019). On YouTube, research examined the way youth identify with their favorite YouTuber and establish a relationship built on closeness and bonding. Characteristics of content creation of the YouTubers' videos rely on authenticity and recognition which result in a sense of community. YouTubers appear to be an agent and a mediator of youth's socialization processes and their quest for the self (Vollenbroek et al., 2014). In a mixed method study based on content analysis of YouTubers' videos, focus groups, and in-depth interviews of young people, Balleys et al., (2020) provided some hints about how young people's evaluation of the content of YouTubers' videos were strongly interlinked with perceived authenticity of the YouTubers; this perceived authenticity was promoted via an intimate confessional style that fosters their close and connected relationships (Balleys et al., 2020).

In a qualitative content analysis of Norwegian female beauty and lifestyle YouTubers, Torjesen (2021) found that content creation of this type has 17 practices like vlogs, hauls, Q&A, storytime, challenges, etc. These genres serve three communicative functions: instructional, confessional, and informative. This analysis has also demonstrated that a genre most commonly achieves one communicative function: it can be versatile and encompasses two functions. In the case of Q&A which has a confessional function can also be instructional depending on the questions of the audience. He, therefore, illustrated that:

By using a highly informal and conversational style of verbal speech and offering the viewer insight into their personal lives, the confessional function enables YouTubers to be perceived as the audience's personal friend, big sister, or role model. The informational function relates primarily to videos in which YouTubers take on the role of an expert, critic, or reviewer, whilst the instructional function is most prominent in tutorial-based genres featuring audiovisual demonstrations and guides that audiences can emulate” (Torjesen, 2021).

1.2. Purpose of study

Studies have demonstrated that women have become more active users of social media and contributed to the development of many aspects of their lives be it psychological, social, economic, or political in the MENA region in general and in Algeria in particular. The present study focuses on exploring the role of Algerian

content creators on YouTube in empowering Algerian young women psychologically. The research questions are:

- 1-What are the topics of interest that Algerian young women seek to know from their favorite YouTuber Amira Riaa?
- 2- Can YouTube videos like Q&A's empower Algerian young women psychologically??

The result of this study will be beneficial to: first, the Algerian female YouTubers who must consider their role as a model for young women as well as influential agents in the society who have the potential to influence others' opinions, perspectives, and even vision and behavior. The present findings will also encourage educators, scholars, and even political leaders to study the demands and orientations of these young women and figure out how they can assist at various levels be it psychological, educational, social, and even economic and political.

2. Methods and materials

The present research is explorative and for this end, it relies on a qualitative approach. Dawson (2002) explains how qualitative research helps to: *“explore attitudes, behavior, and experience (Dawson, 2002).*

2.1. Data collection tool

This study relies on collecting and analyzing qualitative data from online videos uploaded by the young female Algerian YouTuber Amira Riaa. The choice of the YouTuber was made by purposive sampling based on the researcher's observation and the objectives to answer the questions of the study (Creswell & David 2018). This emphasizes the role of the researcher to investigate in her natural context with its specific cultural aspect and full understanding of Algerian slang. The young Algerian YouTuber was selected based on her public appearances on Algerian National television channels as a famous social media figure with several followers exceeding 500000 subscribers as well as her description profile as Table 1 shows. The selection of the Q&A videos allowed the researcher to analyze a pre-determined number of questions on different topics that reflect the followers' interests in particular topics along with the opportunity for the researcher to explore particular themes from the YouTuber's answers.

2.2. Data analysis

Once the collected data from videos were transcribed, they were then analyzed, decoded, and verified. The process relied on a thematic analysis which is a method used for qualitative research for *“identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes [your] data set in rich detail”.* (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

2.3. Ethical consideration

Following ethical concerns, the videos selected for analysis are for public consumption and were used solely for academic research without any intention of harm under the terms and conditions of use of the YouTube platform.

3. Results

The primary data collected from the website SocialBlade as shown in (Table 1) that the YouTuber Amira Riaa has a YouTube fandom base of around 1.43 million.

Table 1
YouTuber's Profile from SocialBlade

YouTube Channel	Date of creation	Age	Profile Description	Number of Subscribers on YouTube	Numbers of followers on Instagram
Amira Riaa Lifestyle	April 3 rd , 2017	27	YouTuber Blogger TV/Radio Host Owner of amirariaa collection	1.43 million	5 .4 million

Source: Social blade. (n.d.).

This latter’s account was created in 2017 and is still active to the present date when this study was being conducted. This YouTuber has an established follower base who is interested in her content. The YouTuber’s channel Amira Riaa Lifestyle provides various genres like vlogs, beauty and fashion hauls, challenge videos, etc. as Figure 1 below shows. The analysis revealed that these questions were open-ended questions with a small number of close-ended questions about demographics referring to age, full name, and origin. The three Q&A’s videos were uploaded on June 16th, 2017; January 8th, 2019; June 6th, 2020 respectively (Amira Riaa Lifestyle, 2017; 2019; 2020). All the videos had between twenty and thirty minutes and all started with the statement “I have requested you to ask me questions that you would like me to answer”.

Figure 1

A selection of captures was taken from Amira Riaa’s YouTube Channel.



3.2. YouTuber’s demographics

All the videos started with answering demographic questions. This type of question serves an informative function. The questions were: *how old are you? What is your full name? Which region you are exactly from? What’s your education level and specialty? Where do you live?* These kinds of questions usually are updated in videos as a result of the rising number of subscribers and to get to know the YouTuber better.

3.3. Venturing on YouTube and Business

One of the most recurring questions that Amira Riaa received, as she stated in her videos, was: “How did you have the idea to create a YouTube channel?” and “How did you think of starting your own business?” *Do you think you started in the business early and without experience, and why haven’t you given yourself time to get more training in the business before starting?* The idea of a young female venturing both online and offline seems challenging and at the same time intriguing for people including women, especially in Algerian society where young women are expected to be financially dependent on their parents and where exposure to social media can receive a lot of judgment. Amira Riaa’s answer explained that she, as a YouTuber, also follows other YouTubers in the Middle East and Europe. In addition, she explained how her previous journaling habit as self a self-reflection technique helped her in her life was similar to recording a video. She stated: “I used to journal at the end of the day in my room, alone ...and this helped me to overcome my shyness, and I found it similar to facing a camera, so nothing was different”. As for her business idea, she attributed it to the fact that she did not get the satisfaction her needs in the local market; therefore, she acted upon that explanation:

“I was looking for this type quality of scarves, but I never found the same ... Besides, my aunts are tailors so I am used to seeing fabric around, so with the money I saved during my job as a selling girl, I bought the fabric myself though I have been told by the traders that they were not for scarf making, but I bought it anyway and started it on my own. Then I asked the shop owner where I worked to get me a discount on renting a shop in the same mall, I was working in ... and I eventually ended up renting a place and opening my first shop in Beb-Ezzouar.”

In her last Q&A video uploaded on June 26th, 2020, her answer to this recurrent question affirmed her previous statements as well as her persistence in her YouTube activity and business growth. She answered: *"YouTube is where I started and it's been a while now ...I like to share with you this because you are my second family", "I successfully launched my Amira Riaa collection for scarves and Hijabi clothes and I am so proud of it". I don't think I launched in the business early because I had the ideas so I needed to bring them out in the light and I already had goals... I made myself a vision board to remind myself where I want to be in one year, five years, ten... I even have a vision of myself in twenty years...can you believe it... And when you say I do' not have experience of course I haven't but I gained it over the years with trials and failures and the long exhausting road of starting a business in Algeria, you know how this works here! from taking approvals, signing papers, taxes, it is just unbelievable but now I know all that."*

3.4. Emotional and psychological well-being

Many questions targeted her emotions and psychological development as she grew up and learned from life lessons as well as her feelings about her surroundings. Questions like *"What was your feeling when you started YouTube? what was your parent's reaction? what life lessons have you learned on the road of your YouTube activity? "How did you know that this is what you wanted to do?", Did you have any betrayals and disappointments?* Amira Riaa clearly described the emotions that she felt, the reactions of others as well as her growth across the road through both her YouTube and business experiences. She said: *"Before YouTube, I was so shy, I was not a social person and I never liked to be around people", " recording videos and seeing the positive reaction from the audience helped me overcome my shyness", "I knew what I was doing and I felt that I listened to my inner voice", "I tried many things until I found out that this is it... this is my passion, you know; it's like when, as a kid, you join a club of swimming and then you feel like you don't want to do this, so you try to do football and you feel like this is what you want and you feel like you are on the clouds...So if there is one thing that I would like to advise you is to find your passion let me tell you that when you have a dream or so many dreams you set yourselves goals to achieve them and step by step you will get there, especially if you are passionate about", "I learned not to confide people and put trust in anyone even if you think they love you", "I get people who hate me, or try to put me down out of my life and I just move on"*

3.5. Social and Financial Challenges

The followers' questions covered the different constraints that Amira Riaa has faced, in her exposure on YouTube as well as her business start as mentioned before. Starting as one of the first and the fewest in Algerian social media, social reactions online and offline as well as financial constraints were numerous. Amira Riaa answered and falsified some opinions that she also heard on social media saying:

People say I succeeded in business because my father helped me with the money and blah. blah...No, he didn't, in fact before every idea of doing a project whether entering social media or my business opening his only statement was "Finish your study first!" ... but I understand his reaction, he is a father...The one who supported me and believed in my dreams was my mom... She was the one who convinced my father to let me take my first steps..." some people in my family and friends thought I wouldn't make it and laughed at me but I proved them wrong", "Opponents also were from the social media sphere, some people seem to like to undermine others and put them down, so they bombard you with comments carrying hatred speech and unnecessary negativity."

3.6. Perceptions about Gender and Social Roles

Questions that covered perceptions about gender issues and social roles also were raised in all the Q&A videos. Algeria, being an Arabic and Muslim society, is known as a collective society and has rules and boundaries that govern its people. The coming out of young women on social media exposing their lives was a new, challenging, and risky phenomenon, for a girl is not merely a representation of herself but of her family and surroundings in a society usually described as masculine and conservative. Female exposure on social media led to questioning concepts like manhood, marriage, and family's sacredness. The followers' questions about manhood revolved around: *"Does your husband support you in your decisions? Why doesn't he show up often in your videos?* Questions about early Marriage and parents' responsibility: *"Have your parents opposed*

your early marriage?”, *“How did you know your husband? How did you know he was the one? Do you regret marrying early?”* Motherhood and parenting: *“How are the feelings of motherhood? “Does your husband help you in parenting?”* Amira Rica's answers clarified how her vision of her own life challenged some stereotypes asserted her view to such opinions saying:

I would like to get my husband to show up in every post, but he doesn't like pictures », “He doesn't like to show up in my post, and people keep commenting that he doesn't have a say over me, or he doesn't love me, or he is being a coward or ashamed... No, it's not. it is just his choice », “My husband doesn't have a problem with me being present on social platforms.”, “People attack us because we share our lives with them, and they think we are foolish, immature, but we are sharing just a part of our lives, something that is very valuable for us », “I married at an early age because it was just THE time, we found love and we were ready...destiny brought us together, and I don't think it was early at least for me because we were young and mature, there are some couples who are older but so immature. Besides, I believe there is no right age for marriage it is just about finding the right person and awareness and maturity.” My husband is always there for me», «I am an individual with dreams», «A man can lift you or drag you down, a good husband is someone honest, loving, aware, compassionate, educated, knows the value of a woman, listens to you and supports you » would like to share everything with my followers but my son is still a baby, I would share his picture partially at least for now.», *“My maternity leave was exceptional I got back to posting and uploading videos right away, I don't like to keep my followers waiting »*

4. Discussion

Different Research, as previously demonstrated in the literature review, has shown that social media have an impact on empowering women in different aspects of their lives and in using different strategies. This present study tried to explore the impact of YouTube on Algerian young women. To attempt to answer the first question of this study: what topics do the Q&A videos reveal about the interests of Algerian young women? The findings showed that the questions which were raised and Amira Riaa's answers were categorized into Five themes which are: 1) The YouTuber's Demographics, 2) Venturing on YouTube and Business, 3) Emotional and Psychological Wellbeing, 4) Social and Financial Challenges, 5) Perceptions about Gender and Social roles. In answering her followers' questions, Amira Riaa adopted a confessional and informative style, especially regarding her social media and business experience and the feelings and lessons she faced along the way (Torjesen, 2021).

We can draw an analysis of the factors identified in the study conducted by Ghiat (2014); an Algerian Professor and a lecturer at the Department of Social Sciences at Oran University, who emphasized the role of women in identifying and confronting the factors leading to women's inferior status in Algeria. In interviews and observational visits to business settings of Algerian women managers and entrepreneurs, Ghiat (2014) found that those successful women faced socio-cultural as well as economic constraints. The study also demonstrated that while facing the opposition in their environment, emotional support from close relatives played a great role in their success. Algerian women's awareness of “psychological characters, occupational skills, and managerial abilities” helped them introduce a change in the course of their lives as well as change the vision and stereotypes in their environment (Ghiat, 2014).

In an attempt to answer the second question of this study: Can YouTube videos like Q&A's empower Algerian young women psychologically? Findings demonstrate that as the beauty and lifestyle channel of the twenty-seven Algerian YouTuber Amira Riaa has a wide base of subscribers exceeding one million subscribers on social media including the YouTube platform, as illustrated in the website SocialBlade (Table), influence is highly possible. The Q&A videos selected for analysis came as a reactive engagement for the YouTuber's quest that each Q&A video was made as a result of the questions that her followers needed to know. The present study's findings are consistent with the conclusions drawn from Escobar et al., (2014) research about the crystallizations of communities that are built in the virtual sphere based on interest and engagement. Such interaction illustrates that the YouTuber and her audience have built a tie where she responded to inform her eager audience to know information about her life and progress thus creating an “online community” (Escobar et al., 2014). This sense of community is strongly established and can empower women (Stavrositu & Sundar,

2012). Being entrepreneurially-minded and her business development which was and is still presented in social media as well as national and Middle Eastern media, and in real life, gained her fame and can potentially set a model of influence to other Algerian young women psychologically through her inspirational and motivational content on YouTube (Torjesen, 2021).

5. Conclusion

The findings from this study show that Amira Riaa as an Algerian female YouTuber plays a significant role in interacting with her followers and answering their quests regarding issues that interest them. Within the opinions and beliefs in the videos of this YouTuber lay valuable information, knowledge, and experiences addressed to young female Algerians similar and relevant to their real-life experiences and expectations. The results from this analysis demonstrate how videos made by a YouTube Content creator, namely Q&A's, carry out meaningful reference and can potentially impact their followers' opinions and perspectives.

Among the most obvious shortcomings is the limited choice of videos for the time limit of this study. Instead, the study aimed to explore a new trend in Algerian social media. Future research will benefit if content produced on the Algerian YouTube platform is more assessed. Future researches also need to go beyond the individual level or limited analysis in the study of empowerment. The analysis of the audience's perspectives through in-depth interviews with the audience or quantitative approaches may help to better understand how they can be psychologically empowered.

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