

Course: SKOM12  
Term: Spring 2021  
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# **Authentic Communication as a Strategic Communication Tool for Social and Cultural Integration among Immigrants in Sweden**

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Master's Thesis



# Abstract

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Strategic communication as an integrating discipline addresses social phenomenon as migration. When people relocate, they experience physical and mental stress, and seek guidance, questioning their sense of belonging. Authentic communication based on feminist values aims to build long-lasting relations and reach social inclusion by conducting more sensitive communication. This thesis explores the strategic use of authentic communication. This study argues that authentic communication based on care, trust, and commitment is aimed to increase the sense of belong among its participants, thus becomes a strategic communication tool for social integration. The qualitative study includes 10 interviews with Arab female immigrant communicators in Sweden to understand their authenticity and authentic practices through investigating their self-awareness, values, beliefs, and their communication strategies. The study is situated within the Feminism focus on understanding women's lives, and concerns to increase their visibility. The Authentic Leadership theory in this research discusses the importance of understanding identity and expressing personal experience to build one's authenticity where this experience can be transported. The results showed that sharing authentic experience became guidance for both communicators and the audience to rediscover their identities. It also revealed that integrating norms of both home and host societies into communicators' lives motivated them for a deeper self-reflection. The results showed that staying true to themselves and transparent to the audience assisted communicators to define cultural confusions and eliminate them.

**Keywords:** authentic communication, migration, social inclusion, public relations, Feminism, Authentic Leadership theory

**Word count:** 16 850

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# 1. Introduction

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## 1.1 Background

Migration has always been seen as a social issue (Sharaby & Lipkin, 2018). The feminization of migration has become a significant global phenomenon (Hoffman & Papoutsaki, 2019). According to Hoffman and Papoutsaki (2019), almost half of the migrant population today is comprised of women. Hence, migration remains one of the most important social phenomena to research. Women move homes for many reasons such as looking for a better and safer place to live, better working conditions, study, family reunification, etc. (Hoffman & Papoutsaki, 2019). Even though migration can be seen as an empowering tool for women, several challenges regarding employment opportunities, working qualifications and experience, and gender inequality are met on a way to social and economic integration (Hoffman & Papoutsaki, 2019). Berry (1997) defines integration as an interest in maintaining one's original culture combined with the interest in participating in major social group culture. The experiences of well-settled migrant women result in overcoming challenges, greater social mobility, and enhanced motivation (Hoffman & Papoutsaki, 2019). Migration becomes a more complex phenomenon to research as the development of technologies and international networking influence integration processes (Hoffman & Papoutsaki, 2019).

Migration has its evolution process in Sweden. Swedish society has recently become a complex ground of different cultural identities. The reason for Sweden becoming an attractive destination is connected to Sweden having one of the most generous migration laws among the EU countries, but also Refugee Crisis in 2015 impacted migration flows in Sweden. The highest number of immigrants who arrived in Sweden happened in the year 2016 (Statista, 2021a). In the period from 2010 to 2015, the majority of immigrants who arrived in Sweden were refugees (Statista, 2021b). In 2020, the high number of immigrants living in Sweden was from Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Morocco, and Egypt (Statista, 2021c). In 2020, the previous number was increased by people migrating from Syria, Iran, and Iraq (Statista, 2021d). As gender increases challenges for women facing migration (Hoffman & Papoutsaki, 2019), Sweden becomes a country that represents a very high human development rate with a very low gender inequality index (UNDP, 2015). During the period of 2015 and 2019, the country

reached equality in men and women achievements regarding the secondary level of education, labor market, health, and empowerment (UNDP, 2015; Statista, 2021e). Thus, migrating to Sweden can be seen as a prospect for female immigrants to receive an opportunity for self-fulfillment.

## **1.2 Research Problem**

In 2019, the risk of social exclusion among non-EU citizens was recorded as one of the highest in Sweden among all EU states and reached 57% (Eurostat, 2021). The previous studies are focused on seeing developing immigrants' entrepreneurship skills as a way to avoid social exclusion and reach social integration. According to Abbasian and Bildt (2009), entrepreneurship through women empowerment is a way to overcome integration challenges and social and cultural exclusion. Although, the reasons for female immigrants, who met such challenges in Sweden, were deskilling and discriminating regarding unrecognized qualifications and job experiences (Abbasian & Bildt, 2009).

According to Styhre (2014), social problems are constructed within a specific locale and are culturally determined; cultural patterns of behavior are created by differences in the value systems. From this angle, communication can become a key aspect in overcoming social and cultural challenges as well as migrants' integration (Alencar, 2018; Hoffman & Papoutsaki, 2019). As communication continuously helps to reveal the self and construct the perception of the self, it continuously leads to integrating one's identity in the host society (Theunissen & Noordin, 2012; Vecchi & Zelinsky, 2016; Sha, 2018; Ni et al, 2018). Authentic communication as a strategic integration tool can help to effectively understand and communicate the authentic self, thus is important to consider. Authenticity as a communication concept should be the ground for strategic communication (Molleda, 2010). Although, authentic communication as a strategic communication tool for social integration is under-researched.

## **1.3 Justification**

Authenticity is defined by Molleda and Jian (2013) as an art of storytelling that requires transparency, openness, and commitment. For an individual being self-aware of one's identity meaning being true to oneself, thus it means communicating the authentic self (Ladkin & Taylor, 2010). From this perspective, authentic communication becomes an important

asset for the social and cultural integration of an individual as it increases the sense of belonging (Molleda, 2010; Bailey et al, 2020), helps to overcome psychological distress (Gardner et al, 2005; Vecci & Zelinsky, 2016; Bailey et al, 2020), boosts well-being (Hoffman & Papoutsaki, 2019), and enhances individual's motivation (Valero et al, 2019) to integrate.

This research focuses on Arab female immigrants' authenticity and authentic practices as a strategic tool for social integration. Immigrants from Arab countries represent one of the major immigrants' groups in Sweden (Statista, 2021c; Statista, 2021d). Arab female immigrants are one of the most vulnerable groups of immigrants, specifically (Abbasian & Bildt, 2009). Authentic communication can also effectively sustain strategic communication with a female ability to empathy, openness, and moral development (McConnell, 1996). The significant role of strategic communication in social integration can be seen as a holistic and purposeful approach to identify communication gaps, overcome social and cultural confusions, and create effective communication in Swedish society.

#### **1.4 Research Aim and Question**

The purpose of the study is to explore the role of strategic communication in immigrants' social and cultural integration. For this thesis, authenticity means the action of deep self-reflection and self-consciousness through which one can be authentic to his or herself. Therefore, authentic communication for this thesis means transparent communication based on trust (Molleda & Roberts, 2008) where authentic self is portrayed. More specifically, this research aims to analyze the role of authenticity in the communication of Arab female immigrant leaders (Hoffman & Papoutsaki, 2019) as it is the core value of strategic communication (Molleda, 2010). For this research, being an authentic leader means portraying both positive and negative experiences as well as being committed to helping one finding his or her authentic self (Gardner et al, 2005).

The research purpose will be achieved through investigating the participants' awareness of their authentic selves, their understanding of audience needs, communication goals, and their communication strategies. Arab female immigrant leaders, for this thesis, will be considered as communicators-entrepreneurs or communicators in the organization. The research also aims to increase the recognition of the phenomenon to facilitate a better understanding of the topic (Sandberg & Alvesson, 2011). Moreover, this strategic communication research has a goal to complement previous studies with an alternative perspective on social

integration as it has a lack of knowledge of the strategic communication role in migration processes.

*RQ:* How do female immigrant leaders use authentic communication for immigrants' social integration?

## **1.5 Delimitation**

The phenomenon under research is the authentic communication of Arab female immigrants. The communication strategies they conduct become a matter of interest as these strategies can affect immigrants' new identity construction and new behavior patterns; they can lead to inspiration and empowerment, and they can impact immigrants' social integration. Hence, this study focuses on investigating self-awareness, authenticity, and authentic communication strategies of Arab female immigrants. The perceived authenticity is out of the scope for this research, though. Moreover, for this research Arab female immigrants will be called immigrants as the research focuses on Arab women who migrated to Sweden, hence immigrated. At the same time, the word 'migrants' is used in this study as well as other authors refer to 'migration' as an overall phenomenon, hence it is also referred to as an overall phenomenon in this study.

## **1.6 Disposition**

The research consists of six chapters. It includes Introduction, Literature Review, Theory, Methodology, Results, Discussion and Conclusion with subheadings respectively.



## 2. Literature Review

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The literature review focuses on authentic communication and its significance as one of the cores and unique values for strategic communication. More specifically, it will focus on the authenticity and authentic communication of authentic female immigrant leaders. Situated in the field of strategic communication research, this study is complemented by psychology, sociology, political and migration studies, media and communication, and public relations.

The literature review discusses the importance of authentic identity portrayal as self-awareness (of one's values and beliefs), identity expression (both socially and culturally), and personal experience. These dimensions are categorized as key factors for an individual to build his/her authenticity. If one has a goal to raise awareness, increase understanding, encourage engagement and collaboration, and build long-lasting relationships, thus authenticity becomes central for one's communication process. Moreover, the literature review discusses authentic leaders' communication and their communication strategies as a tool to engage and encourage into social and cultural adaptation: how applied female authentic leadership communication assists immigrants to integrate into society. Specifically, authentic female immigrant leaders' pattern of behavior which can lead to empowerment is elaborated in this research (Hensbroek, 2010). Such leaders can be potentially seen as role models who create a sense of relation and connection through their authenticity and empowerment. This study argues that authentic communication of authentic female immigrant leaders can be seen as a strategic communication tool for immigrants' cultural and social integration.

### **2.1 Strategic Communication and Authentic Communication**

According to Molleda and Jian (2013), authenticity becomes a central phenomenon of many different fields as social science, political science, philosophy, public relations, and communication. In his work Molleda (2010) argues that the concept of authenticity should become a central construct of strategic communication.

According to Zerfass et al (2018), communication becomes strategic when it is “evaluated towards its organization and stakeholders’ goals” (p. 492); when it is obtaining the form of trust and becomes “an engaging and interactive process of meaning creation” (p. 489). Following such logic, Molleda (2010) discusses authenticity from the consumerist perspective and defines communication and authenticity as its foundations: claiming that “understanding and specifying these (communication and authenticity) is an important step in the process of understanding the negotiation of meaning” (p. 228).

Moreover, according to Molleda and Jian (2013), strategic communication itself is built on authenticity. Authenticity is a core value of public relations and determines the effectiveness of strategic communication and public relations (Molleda, 2010). From public relations perspective, authenticity building can be seen as a dynamic and interactive process where strategic public relations “function through telling sincere stories and building long-lasting relationships” (Molleda, 2010, p. 231); it is an integrative, cooperative tool that shapes meanings, and manages symbolic interaction among its participants (Zerfass & Huck, 2007). Thus, authenticity is essential for strategic communication and for gaining trust through strategic communication (Molleda & Roberts, 2008).

From strategic communication perspective authenticity can have a natural form (remained untouched by a human); original (being first of its kind); exceptional (exceptionally well-conducted); referential (to a memory, context, or inspiration); and influential form (motivating to a better way or a higher goal) (Molleda, 2010). Molleda (2010) also discusses moral authenticity as a form to achieve self-authentication through personal moral values. Ihlen and Heath (2019) suggest that authenticity is based on both values and identities. It should be emphasized that an individual who practices communication should assume personal responsibilities, hence integrity and authenticity (Molleda, 2010; Molleda & Jian, 2013). According to Camilleri (2008, as cited by Molleda, 2010, p.233), “an authentic claim requires authentic communication”, meaning that it demands transparency, openness, and “avowal of commitment” (Molleda & Jian, 2013, p.3). Hence, authentic communication is a transparent communication, where “expression of authenticity is the art of storytelling” (Molleda & Jian, 2013, p.3), and where communication strategy becomes creating a sincere story (Molleda, 2010).

Furthermore, Molleda and Jian (2013) specify that forming authenticity can start from the process of understanding and communicating identity. Ni et al (2018, p. 148) define communication as a “means by which individuals and groups negotiate, co-create, reinforce,

and challenge identities”. The way identity is perceived by others creates a certain vision of this identity, and might lead to a better or worse identity performance (Vecci & Zelinsky, 2016; Alencar, 2018). Identity can be defined as a combination of assets that influences and shapes the self to others; identity can be avowed meaning that they are identified with the cultural group and their membership to it, or can be ascribed by one person to another person (Sha, 2006). Ni et al (2018) also claim that identities can be interchangeable where self-selected identities may vary from ascribed ones, and depend on such factors as culture, ethnicity, religion, and other attributes. In the end, Ladkin and Taylor (2010) mention that identities can also be situated, meaning that identities become active in particular situations and contexts. Communication continuously helps to reveal the self, construct the perception of the self, and identify the self (Theunissen & Noordin, 2012; Vecci & Zelinsky, 2016; Sha, 2018; Mead, 1934/2007). Thus, being self-aware of such a variety of identities and accepting them contributes to communicating the authentic self (Ladkin & Taylor, 2010).

## **2.2 Authentic Communication and Authentic Leader**

According to Theunissen and Noordin (2012), authentic communication includes purposeful attempts to increase understanding, raise awareness, and encourage collaboration among its participants. It is a mutually constructive, engaging, and participatory form of relationship (Theunissen & Noordin, 2012). It is based on understanding an individual’s values, identities (Choi & Cameron, 2005; Shin et al, 2011; Molleda & Jian, 2013), feelings and beliefs (Carey, 2009); and it can be evaluated through authentic actions and responses (Molleda, 2010).

An individual who disseminates authentic communication can be defined as a persuader or an influencer (Molleda, 2010); an individual, who is also aware of his/her openness, can be defined as an authentic leader (Molleda & Jian, 2013). Molleda and Jian (2013) emphasize that an authentic leader is honest and true to his/he self; is capable of reflecting life experiences, aspirations; and “entitled to his/her acceptance or belief” (OED, 2010, as cited by Molleda & Jian, 2013, p. 1). Gardner et al (2005), on the other hand, claim that being authentic is also about acting in consistency with expressed emotions, values, beliefs, and identities. Moreover, Gardner et al (2005) also outline that an authentic leader can be seen as an individual who is not only being consistent with one’s beliefs and actions but also helping others to find their true selves. Thus, authentic leaders play an important role in social identity

formation (Vecci & Zelinsky, 2016). Thus, an authentic leader can be defined through self-awareness, self-acceptance, authenticity in actions, and creating a sense of relations (Gardner et al, 2005; Bailey et al, 2020).

Authentic leaders' communication helps to shape meanings, influence groups, raise aspiration, and boost motivation (Gardner et al, 2005). Authentic leaders can be seen as role models by their public where role models are defined as "individuals who provide an example of the kind of success that one may achieve, and often also provide a template of the behavior that is needed to achieve such success" (Lockwood, 2006, p. 36 as cited by Valero et al, 2019, p. 265). Role models, as well as authentic leaders influence people's decision-making process (Enke & Borchers, 2019), and thus can be considered as a source of communication and social integration guidance (Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014).

As strategic communication integrates several disciplines, it is capable to address complex issues; at the same time, it creates the field for finding new understanding, meaning, and solutions for social problems (Werder et al, 2018). One of such social issues is immigration that has always been seen as such. When migrants move homes, they lose everything from basic resources like financial, social, and psychological statuses to control over life, gaining psychological distress and questioning their belonging (Sharaby & Lipkin, 2018). Through reaching authenticity strategic communication builds long-lasting relations (Molleda, 2010) where these complex issues can be solved. Authentic leaders' communication increases the sense of belonging through authentic self-expression (Molleda, 2010; Bailey et al, 2020), and forms a positive psychological state by increasing well-being, confidence, and optimism among participants (Gardner et al, 2005; Vecci & Zelinsky, 2016; Bailey et al, 2020). Compassion, passion, and enthusiasm of authentic leaders sustain authentic communication and lead to empowerment (Gardner et al, 2005; Valero et al, 2019; Ihlen & Heath, 2019; Luo et al, 2015). Thus, authentic leaders' communication leads to empowerment.

Abbasian and Bildt (2009) claim that portraying authentic identity and values creates a sense of independence, and thus a sense of confidence and empowerment; in other words, to influence one's life, choices, decisions, and power to act upon those choices and decisions. By raising one's interest and motivation to engage in interaction an individual can create a sense of being empowered which is crucial to the health and also the well-being of all individuals (Abbasian & Bildt, 2009). Showing trust, understanding, empathy, and enhancing the emo-

tional consistency of authentic communication gives an individual the opportunity to speak one's mind (Jin, 2010), to engage, and to empower. On the other hand, Place (2012) considers empowerment more as an individuals' ability and will to share and collaborate for the common good of the self and the group. Thus, creating trust, openness, engagement, and commitment are the main assets for authentic female leaders to conduct authentic communication (Pruchniewska, 2018; Abitbol & Sternadori, 2018).

### **2.3 Women Role in Authentic Communication**

As mentioned earlier authenticity can be achieved through communicating uniqueness, portraying true identities (Molleda & Jian, 2013), and creating a sense of belonging (Molleda, 2010). Authentic female leaders through portraying their authentic selves create an engaging environment to increase one's well-being (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2018). Abitbol and Sternadori (2018) further discuss that authentic communication can reflect increased visibility of a female portrayal in strategic communication. Authentic communication by female leaders creates the experience which can be transported and thus can enhance persuasion, and higher attitude of emotions (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2018). Furthermore, Abbasian and Bildt (2009) emphasizes that a concept of a strategic female portrayal is crucial for females' ability to embrace the power over their own lives. From this point of view, authentic communication becomes an aspiration tool for authentic female immigrant leaders to enhance a sense of identification, increase motivation, and gain power. Thus, authentic communication conducted by authentic female leaders can become a vital asset of strategic communication significance.

Authentic communication may offer unique opportunities for women immigrant leaders. Specifically, it may help them build a sense of belonging, become self-aware of their new identities, build a communication network, become self-confident and independent, gain control over their lives, reach a sense of empowerment, and overcome social exclusion. When migrants move their home, they experience an identity crisis which has two ways: desocialization of preserving an old identity and resocialization of building a new identity (Itzhaky, 2003).

According to Itzhaky (2003), female immigrants experience desocialization, cognitive uncertainty, confusion, and financial insecurity. To move from the state of helpless to the active state, according to Sharaby and Lipkin (2018), the acquired professional knowledge, edu-

cation, and skills are needed. The previous studies related to the topic of this research were grounded in the area of women in entrepreneurship and its role in the integration process (Abbasian & Bildt, 2009; Itzhaky, 2003; De Luca & Ambrosini, 2019; Sharaby & Lipkin, 2018; Odeh, 2019). Women entrepreneurship represents one-third of the world's entrepreneurship activity which is a considerable part of it (De Luca & Ambrosini, 2019). De Luca & Ambrosini (2019) emphasize the contribution of immigrant female entrepreneurs to a host society through their social engagement and voluntary work. They also discuss the reasons which motivate female immigrants to become entrepreneurs which are injustice regarding gender, race, and language; labor market exclusion; and the need for self-confidence, self-respect, and independence building (De Luca & Ambrosini, 2019).

The study on Chinese female immigrants in Italy showed that such activism led not only to economic integration but to native links, formal connections, extended networking development which also had a positive effect on socio-cultural integration (De Luca & Ambrosini, 2019). In addition, entrepreneurship was found to help women to overcome discrimination in the labor market. For instance, Hoffman and Papoutsaki (2019) emphasizes that overcoming discrimination in the labor market specifically is the reason to become an entrepreneur. The study showed that female immigrants from Latin America in New Zealand met discrimination regarding language, job qualifications, and work experience (Hoffman & Papoutsaki, 2019). On the other side, New Zealand as a country of a high level of gender equality offered a better perspective for female immigrants understanding the gender role and work-life balance (Hoffman & Papoutsaki, 2019). It led to a growing networking phenomenon among women to enhance their learning and developing opportunities, to increase inspiration and motivation (Hoffman & Papoutsaki, 2019). The key success factor in economic integration among female immigrants in New Zealand was building the network with women from similar ethnic, cultural backgrounds and migration experiences (Hoffman & Papoutsaki, 2019).

Another study on Ethiopian female immigrants in Israel showed that integration in the labor market was built on personal and community empowerment (Sharaby & Lipkin, 2018). The personal empowerment stage included self-awareness development when the community stage was profession-oriented which included leadership building skills, language instructions, job training, and community involvement workshops (Sharaby & Lipkin, 2018; Itzhaky, 2003). Sharaby and Lipkin (2018) stressed that this approach boosted personal well-being,

satisfaction, and social adjustment as confidence, self-esteem, and aspiration among female immigrants. Such a way of empowerment helped women gain control over their lives, develop leadership skills, and find a sense of belonging (Sharaby & Lipkin, 2018). The success of this integration approach was based on ethical learning principle where women interest and need was heard; based on women personal development and growth; and knowledge gaining through empowering feminism (Itzhaky, 2003; Sharaby & Lipkin, 2018). The study also had an accent on mutual help in the immigrant community as an important attribute of empowerment (Sharaby & Lipkin, 2018).

Female immigrants from Arab countries in the USA who fled war, violence, and poverty managed to overcome integration challenges in the host community through personal development as building self-confidence, self-reliance, and independence (Odeh, 2019). The integration program included raising self-awareness elements, understanding one's strengths and weaknesses, discovering leadership skills, and developing a new identity (Odeh, 2019). Similar to previous studies, Abbasian and Bildt (2009) claim that entrepreneurship is a way to achieve integration among immigrants. The study investigated the female immigrants' integration in Sweden. The reasons to start their own business were not recognized qualifications, unemployment, lack of suitable jobs, discrimination, desire for personal development, independence, and freedom (Abbasian & Bildt, 2009). According to Abbasian and Bildt (2009), such empowerment is seen as a tool to overcome social exclusion. According to Ahkavan et al (2004; as cited by Abbasian & Bildt, 2009), deskilling as qualification unrecognition is one of the reasons for sick leaves among female immigrants which is much higher than among ethnic Swedes. The interviewed women were satisfied with their newly created jobs, hence their job satisfaction as a rightful social lace led to economic integration (Abbasian & Bildt, 2009).

Hence, previous studies on immigrant women entrepreneurship and empowerment argued that becoming active in a host society, taking responsibility for your own, and reaching personal development are factors to reach successful economic integration. For this specific research, the interest is allocated to see how similar feminist communication practices among Arab female immigrants in Sweden lead to social integration. It was also mentioned that self-awareness, self-respect, self-confidence; a sense of cultural, linguistic identification, and belonging stimulate integration among female immigrants. Thus, it is important to investigate how Arab women in Sweden become authentic leaders, through which practices, and how they communicate their newly built and integrated identities.

## 2.4 Social Integration

As defined earlier communicating identities becomes a strategic communication means where strategic communication should take into consideration the understanding of differences in identities. Such identities should be learned as they improve the ability to communicate in a better cultural sensitivity, more efficiently towards different groups (Sha, 2006). Identities are created by “the exchange of messages between people who interact and emerge” in this new cultural communication context (Ni et al, 2018, p. 148). A clear sense of personal and cultural leads to personal satisfaction and the ability to deal with daily problems (Berry, 1997). Moreover, integrated identity is a visible form of cultural appreciation and acceptance of differences (Ni et al, 2018). A communication environment where identities can be learned and recognized is the one where the home and the host culture’s attributes are obtained by these identities and where identities are not silenced (Pompper, 2007).

Integration is a free choice of an individual, one’s opportunity to maintain cultural heritage and become a part of a new society (Berry, 1997). Integration can be defined as an interest in maintaining one’s original cultural integrity during the daily interaction as well as there is an interest in participating as a part of the major social group (Berry, 1997). Alencar (2018) sees integration as a negotiation of both societies about their cultures and differences. Croucher (2011) discusses the role of media and communication in integration. As migrants socially adapt, their social networking ability will strengthen their new integrated identity (Croucher, 2011). From this perspective, “communication becomes a key dimension of migrants’ integration” (Alencar, 2018, p.1591).

Specifically, media and communication can provide help in the cultural settlement by bringing both homes and host cultural practices together as language learning, cultural and social training, and network development (Croucher, 2011). Obtaining education in a new culture and society also leads to a positive stable change (Berry, 1997). Luo et al (2015) claim that digital communication specifically creates a more effective engagement in communication to raise awareness, share inspiring content, facilitate participants’ interaction, and develop a sense of attachment. Enke and Borchers (2019) emphasize that such communication leads to a community engagement; and becomes a more participatory form of communication (Weber & Grauer, 2019; Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014).



It becomes vital to pay attention to the developing process of immigrants' identities. Authentic female immigrant leaders need to have socially integrated identities to practice a positive and stable social change. Moreover, authentic female immigrant leaders' communication can be based on both the home and the host culture, and thus affect the social engagement of society members. Trayner (2016) argues that social integration needs to be rooted in strategic communication and linked to identities and values. Aimed to learn the culture, raise awareness and eliminate isolation (Alencar, 2018) strategic communication becomes purposeful in reaching social integration needs. Integrated identities of authentic female immigrant leaders become a core for their more effective and culturally sensitive communication, for raising awareness and motivating for social integration.

To summarize, the culture and values of an individual define and establish certain frames for identity building. Identity further obtains a specific form of behavior and communication style which are continuously evolved by its life experiences. Understanding the roles of identities in authentic communication, how they evolve and change through this communication can help to establish a better knowledge of authenticity and identify better authentic communication strategies. For this research, authentic female immigrant leaders become the representation of identities and experiences to which migrants can relate to. They can influence one individual's confidence, motivation, and attitude through sharing their authentic selves. They can help migrants have a clear picture of newly situated identities, reach cultural and social satisfaction through social engagement. They can create an impact on immigrants' social and cultural interaction, and motivate them for social integration through authentic communication practices.

For this research, it is important to investigate the integrated identities of authentic female immigrant leaders and how they strategically communicate their experiences. This study argues that female immigrant leaders' authentic communication, built on trust, enthusiasm, and commitment, is a tool of strategic communication for social integration as their authentic practices are effective to inspire other immigrants for a change. Authentic leaders' sense of self-awareness, perception of their strengths and weaknesses become a basis for one's authenticity to be shared. Hence, this research focuses on female immigrant leaders and their authentic communication and strategies used towards their public.

## 3. Theory

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This chapter discusses the relevance of the Ethics of Care theory and how self-reflection becomes a fundamental asset for being able to express ethical caring. The Authentic Leadership theory discusses a more detailed approach on what it means to be an authentic leader and how authenticity in communication is essential for building long-lasting relations.

### 3.1 The Ethics of Care Theory

The ethics of care theory was developed from ‘relational feminism’ (Nicholson & Kurucz, 2019), which emphasizes the difference in moral development between men and women where care is more often employed by women (McConnell, 1996). The Ethics of Care theory integrates a bigger view on ethics where the ethical basis of humanity building relations between each other and among a larger society is included as well (Nicholson & Kurucz, 2019). Following this tradition, ethics of care can be seen as moral reasoning for action to enhance one’s well-being (Nicholson & Kurucz, 2019). The state of caring and being cared for becomes a core value for humans’ growth, development, and building mutual trust (Nicholson & Kurucz, 2019).

The ethics of care theory is presented by two main concepts: natural caring and ethical caring. First of all, natural caring is seen as a desire which requires people’s engagement in reasoning to be able to take a decision on what and how to behave to provide the best care towards others (Nicholson & Kurucz, 2019). Ethical caring, on the other hand, is focused on caring and being cared which requires the best self-expression for such a relation construct (Nicholson & Kurucz, 2019). In other words, it is in our nature to care about others, thus we express natural caring in a way of listening, for example (Nicholson & Kurucz, 2019). Ethical caring, though, is located on another level of the ethics of care theory: it is built on a moral obligation which one may take towards another one (Nicholson & Kurucz, 2019). Ethical caring might involve some sacrifice as if one can devote oneself towards another one: listening while one does not have a proper time in a schedule for that, for instance (Nicholson & Kurucz, 2019). It is not automatically assumed that if one naturally cares for another, one can also express ethical caring. Hence, one’s belief becomes a fundamental moral to relate to an-

other one as it requires self-reflection and a reflection on a situation as well as a self-understanding (Nicholson & Kurucz, 2019).

Caring-for can be described as “an encounter or a set of encounters characterized by direct attention and responses which requires the establishment of a caring relation, person-to-person contact of some sort” (Noddings, 2013, p. xiv as cited by Nicholson & Kurucz, 2019, p. 28). The commitment to caring is central to the ethics of care theory, thus, morals become central for understanding such ethics. As one is capable of analyzing the self and reflecting on it, ethical caring can be expressed.

From a communication perspective, it can be assumed by communicators that one-way communication engagement is the effective one. However, the value of two-way communication is higher as it allows communicators to create a change, a meaning, and become coaches of such communication (Nicholson & Kurucz, 2019). In previous research, Nicholson and Kurucz (2019) emphasize that through ethics of care, mainly through relatedness and receptivity in responses, the co-creation of new understanding among individuals is possible.

For this research, the relatedness becomes very important: it is vital to see how self-reflection and self-understanding of one’s personal experiences reveal the ethical caring of this person and make another person relate due to shared experiences during communication. This theory would contribute to this study by deepening the understanding of authentic communication through ethical caring. Moreover, this theory is complementary for this study as it specifically analyses women’s ethical caring and how they can build trust and engagement through their communication. Thus, this theory is suitable for this study to apply to analyze women’s self-reflections and self-awareness, their morals, and experiences as well their motives for engagement in the authentic communication process.

### **3.2 Authentic Leadership Theory**

Authenticity is a “self-referential construct that involves knowing oneself and acting according to with one's ‘true self’” (Gardner et al, 2021, p. 2). Leadership, on the other hand, involves both influencing and being influenced while keeps remaining true to one’s values and goals (Gardner et al, 2021). It should be noted that being authentic is not an ultimate condition of being either authentic or inauthentic: instead one can be more or less true to him/herself (Gardner et al, 2021). Hence, a leader should follow the behavior according to his/her values, beliefs, and identities (Gardner et al, 2021). It should also be mentioned that one can achieve authenticity by fulfilling one’s psychological need for autonomy, competence, and

relatedness (Gardner et al, 2021). From this perspective, being true to oneself goes beyond one's values, and integrates one's strengths, knowledge, skills, and abilities (Gardner et al, 2021).

To achieve a psychological need of personal fulfillment and a sense of authenticity four main concepts are presented in the authentic leadership theory which are self-awareness, balance processing, relational transparency, and internalized moral perspective. The theory allows this study to analyze communicators' motivation, and goals; investigate how transparent and authentic they are in their communication towards others; reveal their moral stands and values, and see how strategic communicators are in what they say and what they do. These four main concepts can be applied as one's capabilities to encourage authentic communication (Mazutis & Slawinski, 2008).

**Self-awareness:** is presented by a leader's understanding of the world, and meaning creation process (Gardner et al, 2021). It is important to be self-aware of one's motives, goals, and values to provide aid to others to practice these values (Gardner et al, 2021). It is also a leader's skill to understand his/her unique capabilities, knowledge, and experiences. Thus, self-awareness becomes a deep self-reflection process (Mazutis & Slawinski, 2008).

**Balance processing:** is presented by the ability to perceive both positive and negative information relevant to oneself as a way to be aware of one's limitations (Gardner et al, 2021; Mazutis & Slawinski, 2008). Information, in this case, enables active listening to one's unique point of view to achieve a common ground of understanding (Gardner et al, 2021) which becomes essential for decision-making and strategic acting. (Mazutis & Slawinski, 2008).

**Relational transparency:** is presented by a leader's ability to share his/her genuine thoughts and feelings openly (Gardner et al, 2021). It is about being open to one's opinion, idea, and point of view (Gardner et al, 2021), and being transparent in expressing one's goals motives, values, emotions, and identities (Mazutis & Slawinski, 2008). Both processes can be seen as vital for building mutual trust and intimacy. Relational transparency as a learning process also seeks one's self-knowledge of strengths and weaknesses of oneself (Gardner et al, 2021) to be open to receiving feedback (Mazutis & Slawinski, 2008).

**Internalized moral perspective:** is expressed by a leader's ability to demonstrate a commitment through his/her values, principles, and standards as a matter of personal choice (Gardner et al, 2021), to remain consistent in one's vision and action (Mazutis

& Slawinski, 2008). It is important to follow one's morals, incorporate respect and justice for others to be an authentic leader (Gardner et al, 2021).

An authentic leader is about “doing the right things and solving all or most problems” (Alvesson & Einola, 2019, p. 386 as cited by Gardner et al, 2021, p. 3). Being authentic also means being vulnerable, which is essential for establishing mutual trust (Gardner et al, 2021). As a leader takes such a commitment, he/she also meets the consequences of taken actions. Thus, practicing ethics and internalized moral perspective become core values of leadership, from this point of view. Authenticity is the internal process of oneself, thus, it is quite difficult to evaluate one's authenticity and authentic communication as it is difficult to see if one is being true to oneself (Gardner et al, 2021).

Authentic leadership theory allows analyzing female immigrants' authentic communication through evaluating one's self-awareness, balance processing, relational transparency, and internalized moral perspective. The theory also takes into account the local social and cultural norms conditions through which authentic communication is practiced (Gardner et al, 2021). Those norms are important to include as the self is constantly adjusting to the environment and conditions to be able to respond and participate in social interaction, to be able to establish intimacy and mutual trust, together with encouragement and aspiration towards its public (Gardner et al, 2021). Besides social and cultural norms that affect one's communication, moral stands and personal values can play a vital role in one's motives and goals that can be applied to one's authentic communication process. This theory does not exclude personal biases or the risk of one not being authentic more to oneself, though.

Authentic leadership theory contributes to a study by analyzing female immigrant leaders' authenticity and see whether they can be seen as authentic leaders based on the four main concepts of the aforementioned theory. This theory also provides a framework to evaluate how authentic female immigrants make sense of their communication through self-awareness, self-knowledge, personal experiences, a sense of relatedness, and authenticity. The theory also contributes to the understanding of how female immigrant leaders while being self-aware about one's values, beliefs, and identities impacts the choice of communication strategies and how strategically one's authentic experience can be communicated.

## 4. Methodology

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This chapter discusses the Feminism paradigm for the qualitative research. More specifically, it is focused on the research method, data collection and analysis procedure.

### 4.1 Research Paradigm: Feminism

The Feminist tradition appeared from the invisibility and exploitation of women in the public sphere as underpaid positions at the workplace and unrecognized as homemakers contributors (Prasad, 2018). The feminism paradigm as a woman-centered perspective is especially critical to a continuous pattern of male dominance (Prasad, 2018). It became a sociopolitical movement with concerns of education access, equality of rights, and opportunities (Prasad, 2018). Feminism incorporates values as female empowerment, gender equality, freedom of choice, and visible activism (Pruchniewska, 2018). It modified from a political movement into individual empowerment and choice movement including mediated cultural expressions (Pruchniewska, 2018).

By incorporating multiple traditions, women's voice or experience feminism seeks recognition of women experiences that shape mental processes, values, and identities; the privilege of women voices; and modification of social arrangements according to women's needs (Prasad, 2018). Feminism also includes understanding women's lives, concerns, and identity (Prasad, 2018). It initiates female empowerment; increases female visibility in a wider understanding of the gendered nature of work as well as shifts the understanding of femininity and masculinity concepts (Prasad, 2018). Ontologically speaking, it is focused on women's emancipation, gender and identity creation, and its role in constructing different aspects of society (Prasad, 2018).

Feminism theory is built on an understanding of human behavior through a social life change: it is focused on making visible, in this research, women and their experiences (Hon, 1995). Women create a sense of connection and mutuality over individualism and autonomy (Prasad, 2018). Life experiences, mental processes, and obtained values are notions for the construction of identities and are different from men's (Prasad, 2018). Identities are socially learned and created: they are constructed by behavioral aspects (Prasad, 2018). Sex is ascribed

as an application based on biological criteria; gender, on the other hand, is socially constructed through social, psychological, and cultural means (Prasad, 2018).

The concepts of sex, gender, ethnicity, nationality, and religion become superior while thinking of women stereotyping, especially migrant women. Ideological underestimation and manipulation by these categories lead to disengagement, disintegration, and exclusion, while their combination with gender can reinforce power relations in their own way (Prasad, 2018). Through social interaction women's enacted identities, going beyond an average picture of women, are expressed, and a source of female leaders' motivation, dimension of being and becoming is revealed (Villares-Varela et al, 2017).

In this research, the feminism paradigm offers a view on a study through which a portrayal of women, moreover an immigrant female portrayal can be researched. Psychological, social, and cultural means predetermine behavioral patterns thus are crucial for the research. As mentioned before, identity is constructed by societal and cultural aspects; it is also defined by its values. On the other hand, values together with their identities define the patterns of behavior and communication. Female empowerment can be seen as a long-term strategy of women's portrayal which consequently encourages and motivates women to act (Hon, 1995). As a form of activism, it stands for values like empathy and altruism and presents a broader portrayal of women than just average women (Hon, 1995).

Such an empowering women portrayal is even more crucial while talking about female immigrants. There are millions of women who while being scattered across the world as economic migrants, undocumented workers, refugees or asylum seekers (Brah & Phoenix, 2004) lack a strong and inspiring picture of being a woman. Migration tends to transform gender ideologies and power relations (Hon, 1995). The application of these two categories creates a new form of empowerment which involves building one's own strength by building up others (Hon, 1995).

In this research, the focus is on the female immigrants' strength built by a sense of self-identification, life experiences, and empowerment by building up others. Women tend to obtain a greater ability to interpersonal relations incorporating such values as altruism, commitment, ethics, morality, and tolerance (Grunig et al, 2000). Female empowerment is especially boosted by the females' ability to interpersonal relationship building (Grunig et al, 2000). Moreover, from the rhetorical perspective, a key dimension of feminism is not only the relationship building but also feminist values as care, the ability to conduct a dialogue for meaning-making, and a vision of unity (Grunig et al, 2000). According to Grunig et al (2000),

feminist values can be a solid foundation for learning communication and public relations ethics.

The feminist paradigm is critical for qualitative research as it allows investigating the meaning of women's identities, values, and needs; it allows analyzing the women's abilities to interpersonal relationship building, and women's portrayals in it. More specifically, it is critical for this study as it allows researching women's experiences, identities constructions, and the authentic part in it through communicating these experiences strategically as the focus of this study is on the authenticity of female immigrant leaders and their communication strategies.

## **4.2 Data Collection Method**

The research is based on the qualitative research method. Qualitative research includes individual interviews conduction where in-depth qualified answers provide the sense-making of central themes of interviewees' lived environment (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). This method is aimed to provide qualitative interviews which access people's life experience (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). This study is based on 10 in-depth interviews which tend to obtain the form of nuanced, precise, and specific data collection to conduct detailed analysis (O'Reilly, 2012).

According to Rubin and Rubin (2005), in-depth interviews aim to gain a new perspective through in-depth, length, and more detailed answers; aim to explain those answers, give examples, and describe experiences. Interviews' "richness with many concepts and themes allows learning the complexity of people's world" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 133). It allows investigating life experiences in-depth and revealing other potential factors that can possibly affect, in this case, communication and communication strategies, thus it requires openness in interviewing process to be able to achieve the aforementioned. In-depth interviews are also suitable for illuminating concepts (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) where for this specific study it is a chosen approach to illuminate the concept of authenticity in strategic communication practices.

In-depth interviewing includes three main stages where in the beginning the interviewer introduces him/herself and the topic to build the confidence of the participant and establish trust between the interviewee and the interviewer (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The second



part is the main part where sensitive questions can be asked, and at the end, the intensity is reduced (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The in-depth interview approach is less balanced compared to a normal conversation as here the interviewer tends to ask more when the interviewee mainly answers (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). According to Rubin and Rubin (2005), audio interviews are not preferable for in-depth methods. According to O'Reilly (2012), face-to-face communication aids to ease communication during the interview, observation during the interview, and interpretation. Such interviews can obtain the form of informal interviews to reveal the actual participant's behavior, create the opportunity for an identity expression, and life experiences share as main parts of authenticity construction which at the same time is the interview goal for this research. Thus, unless participants want to meet in person, video calls are the most optimal approach for this study.

The strength of the chosen research method is located in generating in-depth understanding from human interaction through its flexibility (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). It is explorative but subjective as it depends on personal interrelations between the interviewer and interviewee (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The weakness of the qualitative interviews is that interviews tend to be ambiguous: selection of participants' bias, procedure implementation, and interpretation of the results can be affected by the subjective opinion of the interviewer (O'Reilly, 2012). Interpretation of the collected data can be immediately reflected, based on personal impression, and thus can also be subjective. As the research is based on individual participants' selection and data collection, it cannot provide generalizations on the researched topic (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Despite the aforementioned, the chosen method is still preferable as it makes it possible to gather detailed data for analysis: it creates an intimate environment for one to speak up one's mind, open up and share personal life experiences to collect more personal and sensitive units. Considering both advantages, disadvantages, and the aim of the method, it becomes a well-fitted approach for current research.

### **4.3 Data Collection Procedure**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted using more or less structured questions in the interview guide (Merriam, 2009). The interview guide included introductory, specifying (both direct and indirect), and follow-up interview questions which used flexibility (Merriam, 2009). The questions directly related to certain units or concepts of the data showing a specific interest in the research such as authenticity in strategic communication. The data collection

procedure was also based on active listening in order for the interviewer to be able to conduct the interview and receive in-depth answers.

The purpose of a semi-structured interview is to present a structure of the interview, to reveal a phenomenon under research at the same time keeping flexibility in order not to limit the understanding of the phenomenon, to have both the focus and the flow in the research process, and still obtain the access to the concepts of the research (Merriam, 2009). In order to increase the quality of an interview guide to receive in-depth answers, one trial interview took place beforehand. It helped to analyze formulated questions in the interview guide: if questions were consistent, logical, and if they were formulated in a way that could lead to obtaining the data related to the phenomenon. For instance, one of the questions related to the participant's self-awareness was: '*What do you want to achieve with the job you do?*' The question '*Which values are important for your job, according to you?*' was asked to understand participant's values and morals. To understand the participants' communication process questions such as '*What are your strategies? How do you communicate your strategies?*' were asked. For example, a question related to how open participants communicate was: '*How does that what audience says affect you?*' To see how authentic and transparent participants were in their behavior some questions were asked such as: '*Do you share your negative experience with other people during communication process?*'

#### **4.4 Sampling**

The researcher used purposeful sampling for participants to meet the main criteria which were identified for this research (Etikan et al, 2016). Purposeful sampling defines participants as those who have certain qualities valuable for the interview (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). In this research, participants are seen as members or informants who obtain special knowledge about specific social practice; they are positioned as experts of their own field of knowledge and create the opportunity to develop an understanding of societal values and new meaning creation (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). In this case, participants are seen as experts in communication and integration practices. The sample is homogenous where all the participants obtain similarities in qualities to a certain extent (Etikan et al, 2016).

These interviewees' qualities were the following: **1)** being a female immigrant in Sweden, with the age over 18; **2)** having an Arab<sup>1</sup> culture background (League of Arab States, 2020) as it is one of the biggest cultural groups in Sweden and a target group for this research. It is important to know that there is a difference in culture between Arab states itself. It is also important to consider that being an Arab woman is a sensitive topic that includes a certain role of women in the family, community, and society (Abbasian & Bildt, 2009).

One of the main criteria was **3)** representing both the home and the host culture meaning that they should be integrated into the environment that they locate themselves in. According to Berry (1997), being integrated into society means that it is an individual free choice, that individual is accepted by the host community but at the same time represents the home culture heritage. It also means that an individual has spent some time in a new culture where a certain amount of months or years is difficult to define as it is an individual mental process (Berry, 1997). It can be defined as a long-term staying period, though, which positively affects mental well-being and integration (Berry, 1997). To conceptualize the integrated identity of the participants the briefing was conducted where interviewees expressed their maintained cultural heritage together with being a part of the Swedish society, e.g. having a job, sustaining themselves financially, actively participating as members of the Swedish society, and applying Swedish values and norms in their daily lives.

It also led to the last but not the least criterion which was **4)** being communicators themselves as entrepreneurs or having a position in communication in the organization. Participants should have a direct influence on their target audience through communication. Its role could be a main occupation or an extra, aside, or volunteer job. The languages that are used by interviewees in their strategic communication are Arabic, Swedish, and English.

The recruitment process included announcement posts on Facebook and LinkedIn social media about the research: on groups like Helsingborg International Connections, IKF Malmo, Malmo Startups, Skane Startups International Citizen Hub Lund and etc. were used to recruit participants. Networking was used for recruiting when the interviewer found participants at public events, for instance, at the Pecha Kucha event at Mindpark (Helsingborg). All interviewees contacted the interviewer on a personal will and interest to participate in the re-

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<sup>1</sup>Arab League or League of Arab States include 22 countries which are Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Libya, Sudan, Tunisia, Morocco, Kuwait, Algeria, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Mauritania, Palestine, Somalia, Djibouti, and Comoros.

search through the interviewer's personal contacts. Further, the pseudonyms of participants are used.

**Participant 1 interview description:** Asima, from Algeria, a Tik Tok and Instagram influencer and artist with 400 followers (voluntary work), a software engineer (as the main job). The interview took place on the 11<sup>th</sup> of April at 6 pm on Zoom; approximately 90 minutes; during the interview, the participant shared insights about the importance of different communication channels and their usage; networking in Sweden was one of the main and important strategies that were discussed and elaborated by the participant to help other immigrants integrate.

**Participant 2 interview description:** Leila, from Syria, a Tik Tok influencer with 230,000 followers (voluntary work), a web developer and designer (as the last job). The interview took place on the 12<sup>th</sup> of April at 1 pm on Zoom; approximately 60 minutes; the interviewee discussed the importance of being authentic, honest, the value of being confident as an Arab woman, and the possible effect of these concepts on communication were also highlighted during the interview; here social media played as an opportunity platform for personal experience expression which had an influence of raising awareness about Arab culture and the woman in the Arab culture among Swedes, other Scandinavian citizens, among Arabs as well.

**Participant 3 interview description:** Aisha, from Morocco, a board member of a locally established national NGO, responsible for public relations (voluntary work), a student assistant (as a main job). The interview took place on the 13<sup>th</sup> of April at 6 pm on Zoom, approximately 90 minutes; the interviewee found her place in a Swedish society through becoming a volunteer and establishing the organization which meets local immigrants' need and helps them integrate; the social and cultural integration had a focus on Arab women with specific activities and opportunities for women personal development and growth in Swedish society; it also helped the participant to find her cultural self.

**Participant 4 interview description:** Zena, from Tunisia, a project leader of cultural and educational events for an organization and a language assistant (both main jobs). The interview took place on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April at 1 pm on Zoom, approximately 60 minutes; the interviewee shared about her journey to help other immigrants integrate through establishing constant communication channels, raising awareness about Arab culture in Sweden, and increasing social engagement through cultural, linguistic, and

educational events; as well as spreading the knowledge and increasing the interest in Swedish culture and language abroad.

**Participant 5 interview description:** Badra, from Jordan, a project leader of educational events for an organization and a student assistant (both main jobs). The interview took place on the 20<sup>th</sup> of April at 7 pm on Zoom, approximately 60 minutes; the participant shared about supporting communication strategies for immigrant students to reach their integration in both Swedish educational and social spheres.

**Participant 6 interview description:** Lalita, from Egypt, a CEO of an NGO and a project leader of educational and integration events for an organization (both main jobs). The interview took place on the 21<sup>st</sup> of April at 2 pm in person, approximately 90 minutes; the interview resulted in the discussion of a Swedish employment office and its role in immigrants' economic integration; a personal participant experience of looking for jobs in Sweden motivated her to take a stand in this field; collaboration with the Swedish employment office as the main strategy was discussed for listening to immigrants' needs, creating a network for current immigrants, enhancing their communication skills, raising awareness about Swedish working culture among participants to integrate them in the Swedish labor market.

**Participant 7 interview description:** Halina, from Syria, a journalist (as a former job) and a school principal (as a current job position). The interview took place on the 26<sup>th</sup> of April at 1 pm on Zoom, approximately 130 minutes; the interviewee shared about her experience with NGOs on a matter of women rights and children rights, about her journey from becoming a journalist in Sweden towards building democracy back in her home country; networking, providing opportunities for education, personal development and growth were mentioned as main strategies towards immigrants to integrate into Swedish society; having confidence in the self, being true to the self, and listening to immigrants' needs were mentioned as brinks of communication to reach successful integration.

**Participant 8 interview description:** Aini, from Syria, a writer (as aside work) and a student assistant (as a current job). The interview took place on the 28<sup>th</sup> of April at 6 pm on Zoom, approximately 90 minutes; the interviewee's personal experience integrating into the Swedish labor market motivated her for creating a new methodology approach in educating Arab students; the importance of creating an environment where students can connect to their cultural heritage, and build their new identities was

discussed as an important asset to reach social integration among new immigrants; it also allowed an interviewee to reconnect with her cultural self.

**Participant 9 interview description:** Jemina, from Iraq, a civil society relationship developer (as a current job). The interview took place on the 30<sup>th</sup> of April at 9 am on Zoom, approximately 50 minutes; the interviewee's strategy had a focus on Arab women and their integration in the employment system in Sweden and the Swedish job market with the communication strategies of raising awareness about democracy, working opportunities, building society related skills as leadership, collaboration, engagement, communication, and linguistic skills; it also helped the participant to obtain her cultural self, built a personal and professional growth, and reconsider the role of Arab women in modern society.

**Participant 10 interview description:** Karima, from Libya, a communication specialist. The interview took place on the 17<sup>th</sup> of May at 11 am on Zoom, approximately 90 minutes; having previous experience with communication, marketing, and reputation management, with a deep understanding of planning and evaluation of communication strategies, as well as information representation including cultural sensitivity of local communities the interviewee used social media as a tool to connect immigrants with Arab background with norms, systems, and values in Sweden.

## 4.5 Data Gathering Procedure

The data was collected over a period of two months (April and May) in Sweden in 2021. The data gathering procedure was structured in three main stages: briefing, interview, and debriefing. The briefing stage included questions about the informed form of consent, signing this form, the interviewer introduction, and clarifications of doubts and concerns related to the research. All interviews were conducted on Zoom (digitally) with the video camera being turned on, but one was in person; hence during all the interviews both the interviewer and the interviewee had the opportunity to observe each other which helped to establish a mutual trust as discussed earlier. Interviews had an informal tone, comfortable and safe environment where no one else except the interviewer and the interviewee was present in a room when both conducted physically and digitally. The interviewer could be seen as a prober where an empathetic and active listening to identify with participants and create a deeper emotional level for more intimate questions were shown as well as an interest in participants' opinions and attitudes while remaining a listener and abstaining from the interruption by oc-

asionally posing questions to assist the interviewee (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). All interviews were guided by the semi-structured interview guide and follow-up questions. All interviews were audio-recorded by using the mobile application called Otter which is the speech-to-text algorithm. All interviews scripts were manually revised afterward. At the end of each interview debriefing stage included the tension release and question asked to check a participant's emotional state.

#### **4.6 Data Analysis Procedure**

The interviews were recorded without disturbing sounds or background noises; hence they were audible to be transcribed. Each interview took 80 minutes on average which resulted in 155 pages overall. Interviews were transcribed by the same interviewer meaning that they have the same pattern of transcription where all pauses, exclamations or other emotional expressions of participants have remained. The subject of the interview was presented to all interviewees in the same way. The data analysis procedure was based on a meaning condensation analysis which has a form of categorization of the transcribed interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The analysis approach is focused on understanding the meaning of authenticity and authentic communication in this research. Different questions were asked to analyze the same concept where gathered data is categorized in a way to answer the research question (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Meaning condensation is grounded on a coding procedure to get the sense of the whole (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The coding categorization allows investigating differences among data units and revealing comparisons (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

At the beginning of the analysis procedure summaries of each interview were presented in the study. The research obtains a form of an abductive approach where both predefined categories based on the literature and theory and identified categories during the analysis were applied (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The abductive analysis brings a deeper understanding of the phenomenon as it allows having an alternative perspective from the predefined concepts on collected data (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Three levels of coding were used for this research: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Open coding included identified concepts where their dimensions were discovered during the analysis while axial coding was conducted by creating sub-categories to open codes in advance (Styhre, 2014). Thus, categories were created for bigger concepts. On the other hand, selective coding integrated the classifications from the used theories and the literature review in the research (Styhre, 2014)

The data was broken into units where the selected units of information could be analyzed (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The data units were analyzed by determining concepts; these concepts were broken down into categories where categories were deconstructed into single codes (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The concepts were predefined by the theories used in the research as well as categories. Both analytical codes from the theoretical framework and descriptive codes from the collected data are presented in this study, though (Styhre, 2014). In other words, codes to categories and concepts were both defined in advance and ad hoc. At the end of the analysis to be able to answer the research question concepts were elaborated to interrogate the overall meaning. It was achieved by classifying data, weighting data units from different interviews, comparing and combining data units of the same category; these categories were further narrowed down and integrated into the concepts (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Quotes that represented the concept were included in this study (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Empirical data is demonstrating the pattern which is identified in the theoretical framework (Styhre, 2014). Empirical data is presented as results in this paper while the discussion is presented as an alignment between the theory and the collected data (Styhre, 2014). The research has implicative reasoning meaning that the interpretation of the evidence is to produce a specific conclusion (Machi & McEvoy, 2012).

#### **4.7 Validity**

According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2015), the validity of qualitative research is based on the objective transformation of the oral text into the written one. The basis of the research validity lies in the trustworthiness of the study: it analyses how well the research is grounded in its strength of the research statement and its convincing argument to understand how justifiable the analyzed data is (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Trustworthiness of results is also reflected in the consistent transcription style of the researcher: it can be noticed through the same answers given to paraphrased questions by interviewers during the procedure as well as the similarity of the answers on the topic given by different participants (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). This research applies trustworthiness in a way that the oral text was transformed into a written one without any additional remarks or changes. The collected data material presents direct words of participants which were neither changed nor adjusted, not even grammatically. The collected data of this study was transcribed by the same researcher; hence it is consistent, and trustworthy in its style and representation.



## **4.8 Ethical Consideration**

Concerning this particular study ethical consideration is presented by a signed informed form of consent, remaining confidentiality as well as by voluntary participation where the gathered private data cannot be disclosed, and avoiding harm principle is applied (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The actual names of participants were changed to pseudonyms. Participants were informed of the study purpose, data collection procedure, and data storage, about security measures and their rights (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The interviews started with the briefing stage and finished with the debriefing stage. At the end of each interview, participants were asked how they felt after the interview if they were tired or drained if they had any worries or concerns. All participants mentioned that the asked questions made them reflect deeper on their work and feel empowered.

The researcher was constantly aware of potential risks and sensitive about them. During the research process personal biases were constantly checked. The researcher made sure that the data would be presented in a trustworthy way, so there would be no risk of power-balance information distribution; and that the data was transcribed consistently. The researcher tried to reflect on personal biases regarding sex, gender, and identity (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Hence, the research results were communicated in a scientific and ethical matter to eliminate the aforementioned risks (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Particularly the researcher tried to reflect on the shared identity bias regarding being a woman and an immigrant herself as stated in the reflexivity statement.

## **4.9 Reflexivity Statement**

The interest in the research appeared from the personal experience of the researcher. The researcher has a long experience of migrating and integrating into distinctly different societies, thus the migration topic has always been the focus of the researcher. The strategic communication study appeared as a choice where the previous knowledge of political science could be applied and combined with the communication field. The researcher perceives migration as a global social phenomenon that rapidly develops and requires bigger attention and a deeper understanding from society. It was noticed by the researcher that migrants, especially female migrants, tend to help other migrants to settle and overcome challenges. During some communication events in Sweden, the researcher was inspired by migrant women communi-

cators' stand on migration issues. It was assumed that their empowerment could lead to a positive change in migrants' integration through communicating their personal experiences. The role of a woman, particularly a migrant woman, in a Swedish society, which is considered as empowering and feminist one, became a matter for a researcher to investigate.

## 5. Results

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The analysis is structured according to the authentic leadership theory which is grounded in four main concepts: leaders' self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, relational transparency, and balance processing. Authentic experience as an integral part of strategic communication refers to the self-understanding process and morals of authentic leaders. The strategic mission and vision for social integration part refers to the leaders' understanding of communication needs and formulating goals. Strategic communication practices part refers to actual tactics and strategies that were applied by authentic leaders.

The research participants were engaged in the different projects focused on communicating about immigrants' social integration. One of the participants organized a project of raising awareness about Arab culture in Sweden. It included communicating and conducting several workshops and events to bridge Arab and Swedish cultures. Another of the participants was engaged in a project focused on building immigrants' knowledge about democracy, human rights, and freedoms in Sweden. One of the participants developed cooperation with the Swedish employment agency to upgrade immigrants' professional skills. It included leadership, self-confidence, and independence skills boosting workshops as well as classes on networking, cooperation, negotiation, and project management.

The overall results showed that the interviewees had a similar experience in the migration and integration processes in Sweden. The collected data also showed that all participants were aware of their identity-changing processes. They mentioned that they belong to both Swedish (the host) and the home societies. They believed that their authentic experience is both the guidance for themselves and new coming migrants for easier and better integration in Swedish society. Hence, all participants were highly motivated to help other immigrants. They also stated that they found the meaning of their work, and of their existence in what they are doing.

### **5.1 Personal experience as an integral part of strategic communication**

The collected data showed that interviewees believe they have valuable experience. The collected data stated that there is a need for interviewees to share their personal experi-

ences with other immigrants. This statement was based on the argument that interviewees experienced their path integrating into the Swedish society and received an insight into improving this process.

Based on their personal experience interviewees identified certain communication gaps between Arab and Swedish cultures were one of them was that many immigrants while moving to Sweden end up in the closed immigrant community:

[P7] *“It's hard when you come to Sweden. You are a being located with foreign people from other countries, and that doesn't help you to learn the language. So, all my time, and the young time of primary school and also secondary school was with people from other countries. It's all just people from other countries and it's a very isolated area, the people, it was like that, you don't come out from that area. You have everything there like school, work. You have your communication in that area so you don't go out. And so it was like that from the beginning, it was very isolated, and it wasn't like to live in Sweden, because you didn't have so much information about how it works outside that world.”*

Despite the aforementioned, the collected data showed that with the time and the process of socially integrating in Sweden interviewees perceive themselves both as members of the Swedish society and of their home society at the end. It was stated that being a part of both societies, accepting and respecting the difference between them made participants realize that they care about both cultures. They mentioned that outside the European region Europe itself can be perceived as something unified and similar but when relocating to the region, they identified varieties in cultures and values. Such cultural differences made interviewees more open-minded and flexible towards other people. The collected data showed that being flexible and more understanding is the values that were applied by participants.

The interviewees also identified that the way they find solutions for certain issues is different from the Swedish way. For instance, the Arab culture is distinct for being expressive and Arab people for being extrovert, according to the collected data. The participants found that being direct can be perceived as rudeness and complicate communication itself. Participants became also aware that there is criticism towards Arab culture on a matter of punctuality, openness, and loudness. They realized that loudness during communication can be perceived as an act of aggression or a conflict. While talking about being open and transparent is seen by the interviewees as the core value of communication. The collected data showed that

openness is perceived by interviewees as the mutual act of being free to express identities and ideas; as the mutual act of being honest and true to one's self in the communication:

[P7] *“If I can be myself, then my colleagues can be themselves. We can be open with the communication that I was talking about to be open so if I'm not open, then they will not open themselves.”*

### **5.1.1 Staying authentic while becoming a part of the host society**

This dichotomy of staying authentic and applying the Swedish social values motivated interviewees for a deeper self-understanding and self-reflection; it helped participants understand their own and Swedish cultural norms better. It inspired participants to be more engaged in communication adding authenticity to it as they believe being true to themselves and open in communication prevents a situation where unnecessary agendas can be hidden:

[P7] *“They (colleagues) have an open atmosphere, because when you are honest, then you don't have conflicts or reduce the conflicts when you are open, then you are open to what happens.”*

The collected data also showed that being open in communication is also perceived by the interviewees as a better and faster way of identifying problems, finding solutions for existing problems, and inspiring the audience for better achievement. Communication based on authenticity and trustworthiness is effective communication, according to the collected data. Moreover, according to collected data, the need to offer help to others, being open, and engaging in other people's difficulties is the act of trust in the Arab culture. The collected data showed that being trustworthy in communication creates a circle of trust where the audience provides more support and trust to the interviewees which leads to even more open and authentic communication.

Such self-awareness of personal and cultural norms and values inspired participants for helping other immigrants understand the Swedish cultural and social norms better while socially adjusting in Sweden. The collected data showed that being engaged in communication on a matter of social integration was found by participants as a fulfilling, meaningful, and empowering work that Swedish society needs. It also helped participants reconnect and rediscover their authentic selves:

[P8] *“I had so many, like, criticism against my culture, and I was running away from it. I was shutting it down. I was going somewhere else. No, when I came here to the foreign place, you know to Europe. It made me connected again. I reconnected with myself with the one and only thing that I was running away from.”*

The collected data also showed that through the self-reflection process interviewees realized that they have a certain commitment to Swedish society and a certain level of responsibility to the citizens of society. The data showed that interviewees see themselves as bridges that can connect two cultures: the Swedish culture and the Arab culture. Moreover, they see their work as the act of bridging communication gaps between the two aforementioned cultures, where isolated people can be connected to the Swedish community and vice versa.

### ***5.1.2 Self-development of the authentic self as of the immigrant women***

Furthermore, the collected data showed that all participants emphasized the importance of self-growth as immigrants in the new society, but especially as immigrant women in Sweden. The collected data showed that interviewees' previous qualifications, experiences, skills, and knowledge were not recognized in Sweden which limited their independence, self-confidence, and socializing skills. It was explained as the lack of trust between Arab and Swedish cultures, according to the collected data:

[P6] *“All my working experience in other countries didn't count. I wasn't considered as qualified because it wasn't so. I had worked as a CEO or I had like more than 40 employees and to say that that didn't count. I didn't have like a Swedish experience.”*

All participants stated that to be successfully integrated into Swedish society both personal and professional growth and development are needed. According to the collected data, it is vital to develop personally as an immigrant woman where independence, self-confidence, and leadership skills can be built. Professional knowledge development, personal growth, and improving leadership and communication skills are important, according to the collected data. Specifically, it was mentioned that improving ways of delivering a message, creating more effective content, increasing communication content quality for the audience are the ways that express care towards the audience, according to the interviewees. One of the interviewees mentioned that showing empathy and understanding, valuing people's experiences and mind-

sets, empowering people makes it crucial that such women as interviewees exist for others, especially immigrant women, and ease their adjustment period in Sweden.

## **5.2 Bridging cultures through communication**

The collected data showed that due to the irregular migration flows in 2015 from the Middle East, the need to bridge Arab and Swedish cultures became inevitable. According to the interviewees, there are social, cultural, and communication gaps that need to be overcome. The research participants see their mission as to connect two cultures (Arab and Swedish) and make them closer to each other through communication. Social integration is about two cultures adapting and meeting at some point, according to the interviewees:

[P8]                    *“I believe that we're different, but we can meet someplace and we can communicate and understand each other.”*

To allow new coming immigrants to take place in the Swedish society through communicating about Swedish culture, norms, and systems is the mission of interviewees' work. Providing help to ease new coming immigrants' integration in Swedish society through sharing support based on personal and authentic experiences of interviewees is the communication strategy, according to the collected data.

### **5.2.1 Vision of social integration for female immigrants**

According to the collected data, it is important to provide more information and knowledge to immigrant women about their rights and freedoms in Sweden; it is important to raise awareness about such rights among Arab immigrant women to help them integrate. On the other side, it is also important to raise awareness about Arab culture among Swedish members of society as well. According to one interviewee:

[P7]                    *“I was interested in those subjects were very important for me to help girls to get more freedom and woman rights. That was like immigrants that you have to fight for human rights, the ethnic rights, and also showing them (Swedes) that understanding to like come on meet each other and also even for them to understand how we (Arab women) think, what we are going through, what we need.”*

According to the interviewees, the communication goal is to reach the integration of new coming immigrant women in Swedish society and help them find their place there. One of the interviewees' projects resulted in the NGO establishment where people who struggled with integration could find help from people who spoke the same language, who found work, and who could help the new coming immigrants socially integrate. The NGO became a big network with branches in different cities in Sweden where the organizational goals are supposed to be adjusted to every city's needs in Sweden. There are three main aspects that the organization covers:

[P3] *“We focus on 3 aspects, I'd say. The first is the women empowerment. Second is raising kids because we started to hear that some people come to this culture shock, the way they were raising their kids, how it is going here. Some families lost their kids just because they couldn't manage the change. They couldn't adjust to this. And, and so the women, and the jobless people, we want to help. So these main three ideas which we believe it's the main challenges for Arab speakers or for someone.”*

The purpose is also to motivate women to continue studying to build their independence and self-confidence. The interviewee gave a clear explanation of why immigrant women are the target group to focus on:

[P3] *“Women, because here there's a big community from small villages in the Middle East, which the inhabitants are women; they don't study so much, and I can see, unfortunately with the years, now students who are 18 they are leaving schools and getting married. This is really so bad that I believe. So we want to focus on women and peers, and I feel like there's a gap, a need for some cultural activities something for these young people to do in this small city. When we can move freely like to go trips around, museums, something like they can meet in a good for a good purpose.”*

Creating a unique network to engage immigrants in the Swedish society, introducing immigrants to the Swedish labor market, boosting immigrants' communication, social, and personal skills is the overall purpose of the interviewees' activities. It is very important to mention that the interviewees see their projects as an aid for local municipalities where coop-



eration and partnership with local municipalities on a matter of social integration can be possible to solve the social challenges more effectively.

## **5.3 Strategic communication in practice**

### ***5.3.1 Strategic use of social media***

According to the collected data, social media strategy became one of the bases of interviewees' strategic communication. All social media become a matter of importance when reaching the audience, according to the interviewees. According to the collected data, social media is the communication strategy to reach to raise awareness, to increase the audience's interest in social engagement, cooperation, and networking.

One interviewee is raising awareness about the Arab culture, especially about the Arab women, on social media. The content consists of posts, reels, videos, and lifestreams on TikTok, Instagram, and Youtube. According to the interviewee, videos have been published a minimum of 3 times per week mainly on TikTok but also on Youtube and Instagram. Lifestreams are taking place once a week on Youtube and Instagram. The audience consists of an approximately equal amount of men and women. The audience origin is from Sweden, but also Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Egypt.

One of the other interviewees prioritized Facebook as a platform of communication. According to the collected data, there is a big confusion among Arab immigrants, especially women, on understanding the Swedish system, norms, and values. Arab traditions and values differ distinctly, according to the interviewee:

[P10] *“I understand that there is a huge gap of what specifically offer exposure of understanding the system of accepting what should, what should be done what should be accepted what shouldn't have to communicate, how to understand the continuous messages of the Swedish system to the people, or to the ladies, or the empowering, or the fears.”*

Based on a personal and professional experience, understanding cultural sensitivity and differences in values, the interviewee tried to raise awareness about Swedish norms through engaging in direct communication on Facebook, meaning through commenting and reacting to the audience's requests:

[P10] *“There is the woman there they can put on the doubts, questions anonymously. I was responding to them in a way that would make them first confident; their fears, because there is lots of misunderstandings, and I don't know if this is something that is done on purpose, but there is a lot of fears that was raised and was developed by certain media channels, media discourse to make women fear the system. I was just trying to get the hand and say, don't be afraid.”*

According to the collected data, the interviewee was sharing the fact-checked information on different languages in a neutral and friendly tone of voice with references included to inform and clarify the audience about the Swedish system norms, decrease cultural skepticism and confusion so it is easier understood and accepted by Arab female immigrants:

[P10] *“I used my own experience because this is the best way I speak about my own experiences. I shared experiences. I also shared the information because as I said, when it comes to certain clarifications or confusions, I share. First I share my experience. Second, I share the correct wording about government message. This is the value of the knowledge because what's the value of the knowledge if you're not using it; what's the value of the experiences, if you're not sharing it. This is actually the basic of having a social relation, in general, is the interaction and sharing knowledge and sharing experience. And this is how I think community stabilizes because then, whatever I have you can if I'm sharing it with you, you can build on and build the society to be better.”*

### **5.3.2 Strategic use of mass media**

According to the collected data, the media was also used as the opportunity to raise awareness and to show the positive activities that were happening in the isolated city areas in Sweden. One of the participants mentioned in the interview:

[P7] *“I had so much to say because it was so much negative writings about the area and the people in the Swedish media, and the Swedish people were afraid of going there because they thought that things will happen if they go there. I wanted to show the other side of the area, the positive things we do in that area.”*

Some communication strategies that were applied were publishing articles in the local newspapers targeting Swedish speakers, raising awareness about Sweden through local radio

stations targeting Arab speakers. The media communication also included publishing articles about the cultural weeks in Sweden, raising awareness about famous Arab artists, musicians, and writers from Sweden and outside Sweden. According to the results, the strategies can eliminate the cultural confusion, overcome a communication gap, and reach a better understanding of the social system both cultures exist in.

Communicating about women's and children's rights through the media, publishing articles about democratic rights and freedoms on organizational websites targeting immigrants was the communication strategy to inform immigrants about their opportunities in Swedish society. It aimed to help immigrants eliminate stress and increase mental well-being. It also aimed to reach municipalities for tight cooperation on social integration. It later resulted in raising awareness and sustaining the agenda of women's and children's rights at one of the NGOs in Sweden:

[P7] *“I was working with their website. I was writing different articles about freedom. I had workshops and classes for workers at the different municipalities and working places. I also met those boys at different homes, they had like homes that they lived in. I met those two boys in those homes; they were like a collective of homes. They lived with each other. I was having different classes, workshops with them so they could open themselves. I was giving them information about their rights. I was helping them with different psychological talks; they had many problems with sleeping. They have different traumas. I worked with youth that came to Sweden from conflict zones, and their traumas. It was there I was getting the knowledge about traumas and how it works.”*

### **5.3.3 Strategic use of networking**

The collected data showed that the interviewees see networking as an important strategy for social integration and connecting to the new culture. One of the communication strategy goals is to increase and boost immigrants' networking skills and abilities in Sweden. They see their achievements and experiences as valuable and positive examples that can inspire and empower immigrants. It is especially important for the Arab immigrant women, according to the results. According to the interviewees, networking is seen as a unique opportunity for collaboration:

[P3] *“We are networking. We can do something together. We can reduce ... we can help the municipalities in facing some challenges. We can help this will help these people: when you are from the same background, you will have more influence; because you have the same everything's the same you feel the same.”*

The research participants developed activities to build the immigrants' networking, to engage people in the society. Some networks target a very narrow field of expertise. For instance, there is a network created for academic immigrants with an Arab background where through sharing experience and knowledge new coming migrants can find their career path. There is the same networking for medical workers. However, the biggest one is focused on immigrant engineers with an Arab background. Such networking is tailored to the immigrants' needs, working experiences, and expertise. It is designed to integrate immigrants into the Swedish professional environment, reveal and boost their skills, and find potential employment opportunities. One of the networks is specifically focused on Arab female immigrants and their employment in Sweden. One of the participants was communicating about the Swedish professional environment targeting Arab female immigrants so they understand which steps they need to fulfill to reach social integration:

[P9] *“I was focused on the women needs from the Swedish culture, what they need for the next step to find job, or, they need to know that culture for their children will be Swedish. They will have identity, and they need to understand they cannot be isolated. They need to learn Swedish, they need to learn the culture they need to, to get this. I focused on the employment, how the woman's can find a job, how the woman's will be very close to have a job with a lot of things. They can learn about economy, about how they will search for jobs, and this is my work every day. I make plans for this.”*

#### **5.3.4 Strategic use of collaboration**

According to the results, one of the established NGOs was seen as the collaborative space for Arab speakers in Sweden. It became the NGO umbrella with several establishments in different cities as the result. Before starting the NGO, the press release was published and the announcements were released on the official website of the organization and its social media platforms as Facebook. Such collaboration resulted in establishing the NGO branch in one more of Swedish cities by the interviewee. According to the collected data, the interview-

ee is planning to create a special program on sustaining Arab immigrant women who are on maternity leave. However, collaboration, negotiation, and communication about it paused due to the uncertain Covid-19 situation:

[P3] *“We have decided to make a program for women in maternity leave. We wanted to target so we decided to make this course but then the corona came. We could not rent a room and so we postponed it but now we are thinking of running it online. It's not the same because we want them to come out, and the idea that they can come out with their kids and there will be a room and someone to take care of the kids. They can go to the other room and meet someone from the employment agency to hear about education, learn something, and prepare for their life after the maternity leave.”*

According to the collected data, the other collaboration was to create a program to help immigrants integrate into the Swedish labor market. The program included the collaboration with the employment agency where people who were seeking jobs could upgrade their skills, tailor their skills to jobs and their education, and as the result receive an offer for a job. Interns from this project were mainly women from Bangladesh, Mexico, Iran but also Sweden. All collaborations directly or indirectly were targeting municipalities in their communication to reach a more effective engagement with municipalities and find solutions for the aforementioned challenges. According to the results, at the end of the collaboration, the active listening and upward communication strategy were applied to identify the audience's needs and rooms for improvement as an open and transparent communication strategy.

# 6. Discussion and Conclusion

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## 6.1 Discussion

The overall results can state that the research participants believe they are important communication bridges that connect Arab and Swedish cultures. Their communication work and devotion to social integration bridge communication gaps in the Swedish society helping immigrants to overcome social and cultural isolation and connect to the Swedish community. The authentic experience of interviewees played a crucial role in their self-awareness, personal development, and integration. Through their authentic experience of being immigrants in Sweden, participants obtained insight into how Arab and Swedish cultures can be disconnected and how communication can bring these two cultures together. Through understanding their new identity, maintaining the cultural heritage, and integrating Swedish norms participants found a way to share their authentic experience with other immigrants, and become voices that guide immigrants into Swedish society. Their communication influenced mostly Arab immigrants, specifically Arab female immigrants in Sweden. It can be concluded that through shared identities and portrayed experiences interviewees found it meaningful that such women exist for each other, empower each other, motivate and inspire each other in overcoming social challenges.

According to the Ethics of Care theory, ethical caring is requiring moral obligation at its better expression for a person to be able to express ethical caring (Nicholson & Kurucz, 2019). Based on collected data, the results proved that interviewees saw their authentic experience as a significant value to help other immigrants in their adjusting period in Sweden. The act of helping others became an act of expressing feminine qualities like empathy, trust, and care. The Arab culture and language together with the shared immigrant experience created a strong need for participants to help other immigrants with the same background. It created a moral obligation for participants to care about immigrants who experience similar struggles in the new society, as mentioned by Nicholson and Kurucz (2019). The participants' understanding that they can 'give something' to others resulted in the act of ethical caring of others where 'giving' is also a cultural act of trust in the Arab states.

As it is stated in the problematization of the research, female immigrants meet challenges on the way to social integration in Sweden with a specific of unrecognized previous qualifications and experiences (Abbasian & Bildt, 2009). Entrepreneurship as proactivity, initiative and a personal stand on social challenges is indeed the way to overcome social isolation, as mentioned by Abbasian and Bildt (2009). However, a more holistic approach to this issue is needed, mainly strategic communication on this matter. As a professional non-recognition limits opportunities for social, economic, and cultural integration, authentic communication as an integral part of strategic communication (Molleda & Jian, 2013) establishes openness, transparency, and commitment which raises awareness of an issue, increases understanding and collaboration on overcoming this issue, and as a result builds long-lasting relationships between communicators and the audience. Authentic communication through portraying authentic female immigrant leaders' experiences overcomes social exclusion by creating a sense of belonging to the host society.

The purpose of this research was to explore the use of authentic communication for social integration. As was mentioned by Theunissen and Noordin (2012) in the literature review, authentic communication includes purposeful attempts to increase understanding, raise awareness, and encourage collaboration among members of such communication. Moreover, understanding different values, feelings, beliefs, and identities is crucial for authentic communication (Theunissen & Noordin, 2012; Molleda & Jian, 2013). According to the results, authentic communication prevents situations where unnecessary hidden agendas, hence the confusion in communication can happen. It reveals social and cultural gaps, where confronting certain issues makes it easier for finding solutions.

Raising awareness about the need for personal and professional development among female immigrants, communicating about the opportunities new coming migrants have in the new host society, and helping personal examples to overcome psychological stress (Gardner et al, 2005; Vecci & Zelinsky, 2016; Bailey et al, 2020), creates better conditions for well-being (Hoffman & Papoutsaki, 2019; Nicholson & Kurucz, 2019), and build a sense of belonging to a new community (Molleda, 2010; Bailey et al, 2020). Through sharing empathy, understanding, support (McConnell, 1996), and experiences, authentic leaders ease the integration path and guide in building a new identity. Being true to themselves and others, expressing thoughts freely and openly is their communication strategy. Such sincere and honest communication builds long-lasting relationships in the community, according to the Ethics of Care theory (Nicholson & Kurucz, 2019). It is an integrative communication tool where both

the host and the home societies can meet, create meaning through their communication, and build mutual trust (Nicholson & Kurucz, 2019; Molleda, 2010).

According to the Authentic Leadership theory, to provide help to others, one should be aware of one's goals, motives, and values (Gardner et al, 2021). The collected data proved that authentic leaders are aware of their capacities, knowledge, and experience to practice communication which can be called authentic. The collected data showed that all participants had a deep self-understanding and were self-aware of their experiences which were reflected in-ground for their strategic communication towards their audience (Gardner et al, 2021). The interviewees focused their communication on authenticity and their authentic experiences. They mentioned that they lacked guidance and explanation of how the Swedish society works, how social communication is practiced, and how to behave so it is easier to integrate.

As mentioned by Molleda & Jian (2013) and Gardner et al (2021), authentic leaders are honest to themselves and capable of reflecting on their life experiences as well as being consistent in their beliefs and actions. The collected data showed that interviewees were not only true to themselves and their audience, capable of analyzing and sharing their both positive and negative life experiences but also capable of helping others find their true selves (Gardner et al, 2005). Communication helps an individual to reveal his or her identity (Theunissen & Noordin, 2012). Authentic communication helps to understand and communicate one's identity better (Molleda & Jian, 2013). According to the results, participants rediscovered and reconnected with their authentic selves while helping others.

According to the Authentic Leadership theory, authentic communication also creates meaning, raises inspiration and motivation among its participants (Gardner et al, 2005). The collected results proved that interviewees are committed to their audience as they strongly believe in their experiences and their ability to help other immigrants. The collected data showed that interviewees see the goal of their work to bridge both the Arab and the Swedish cultures together through authentic communication practices. Authentic communication strategy helped interviewees identify the audience's needs and tailor their activities according to those needs through various communication channels. According to the collected data and the Ethics of Care theory, authentic communication is indeed the strategy to raise awareness, to increase the audience's understanding and interest in social engagement, cooperation, and networking (Theunissen & Noordin, 2012).

According to Croucher (2011), media and communication provide aid in cultural settlement and bridge the home and the host societies. Croucher (2011) especially emphasizes networking as a tool that strengthens immigrants' ability for social integration. According to



the results, the strategic use of networking is to connect two cultures and ease a way for immigrants to 'step into' the society. As stated in the literature review by Luo et al (2015), digital communication also boosts more effective interaction. The results proved that the strategic use of not only traditional media but social media is to raise awareness about certain social and cultural challenges, eliminate confusions and connect cultures. Moreover, the increased quality of produced communication content is seen as an act of care of their audience, according to the interviewees.

As it is addressed by Werder et al (2018), strategic communication is capable to address solutions for complex issues. This research expands the field of the strategic communication discipline to including it in the finding solution for social challenges as social integration. Authentic communication is a purposeful attempt to reach immigrants and ease their social integration in the new society. Communicating the authentic experience strategically impacts the immigrants' well-being, eliminates confusion, and boosts their confidence while adjusting to new norms and values in the host society. Authentic communication by female leaders creates the transported experiences (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2018). It can consequently result in female leaders building a sense of belonging among their audience through authentic communication (Molleda, 2010; Bailey et al, 2020). Through authentic leadership, self-confidence, and independence the interviewees can potentially empower their audience to overcome social exclusion. Understanding one's true self and integrating it in authentic communication add a significant value to strategic communication. Thus, authenticity and authentic communication become strategic guidance for immigrants' social integration.

## **6.2 Conclusion**

The research suggests several theoretical implications. First, authenticity is understood as an act of being true to oneself. In the research, participants saw conducting authentic communication in a way that allowed them to be honest with themselves and their audience, understanding social challenges and ways of overcoming them, communicating both positive and negative experiences of being a female immigrant in Sweden. From this perspective, authenticity can complement strategic communication with providing a deeper understanding of immigrants' identity building, effects of differences in values, and beliefs, and the role of self-awareness and self-reflection processes in this identity building. Authenticity as a core value of strategic communication brings the deeper understanding of women's lives and concerns built in this study.

Authentic communication also becomes included in strategic communication as a way of portraying authentic identities, values, and experiences that make such interaction authentic. Authentic female leaders bring openness and transparency, moral obligations, and understanding of social integration to strategic communication. Second, authentic communication is understood as an act of trust, aid, and care to their audience. It is a way for a more effective and constructive dialogue for a meaning-making and unity creation. Through creating trust and expressing ethical caring authenticity plays a role in communicating the need and way for a stress release, well-being increase, and guidance for migrants on their way to social integration. Following the aforementioned, it is important to become aware of migrants' personal experiences and communicate those experiences openly and transparently to identify challenges and confusions in understanding other cultures and norms, preventing hidden agendas, and finding solutions for identified challenges. Authenticity as a core value as strategic communication brings feminist values discussed in this study.

The research also suggests practical implications for women's integration in Sweden. Practical implications for applying authenticity in strategic communication are about communicating immigrants' fears, confusions, and misunderstandings of the new host culture openly and transparently. Through mentoring, coaching, and guiding new coming migrants in the Swedish society authenticity will identify connections in overcoming cultural gaps and in constructing social ties in the host society. Authentic female immigrant leaders address fears revealed during authentic communication and provide knowledge about immigrants' rights, opportunities, and ways to overcome those fears in the new society. Through media and social media channels, networking and collaboration they can help to raise awareness and help both Arab and Swedish cultures connect.

### **6.3 Limitations**

The English language became an obstacle for the research as the majority of female immigrants from Arab countries in Sweden speak either Arab or Swedish. It limited the ability of interviewees to express them more effectively way as the interviews were conducted in English. The interviewer tried to double-check the understanding of context by asking several follow-up questions and specifying questions.

## **6.4 Future Research Suggestions**

Further research on the current topic is suggested. To complement a current study it will be beneficial to explore the perceived authenticity of the Arab female immigrants' target audience and how this audience perceives communication strategies of Arab female immigrants. It will be also complementary to conduct mixed approach research for the authentic communication strategies and analyze the effects these strategies have on the public and how they interrelate with empowerment and authenticity itself.

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# Appendix

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## **Appendix 1. The Interview guide**

### **Briefing**

My name is Yelyzaveta. I am a strategic communication master student at Lund University. I am your interviewer for my master thesis project. You will participate in a scientific research study on a topic “Authentic communication as a strategic tool for social and cultural integration among immigrants in Sweden”. The purpose of this study is to explore the role of authenticity in the communication of Arab female immigrant leaders. The interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed. It will have a confidential form, meaning that no one else but the interviewer will have access to the collected data. The collected data will be used for academic purpose as master thesis material. Your participation is voluntary. Hence, you have the right to withdraw from the interview any time as well as to withdraw your data at any stage of the process.

### General questions/Introduction:

- Can you, please, introduce yourself: where are you from? And how long have you been in Sweden?

### Self-awareness:

- What do you do?
- How is it different from working back home?
- What is your goal? What do you want to achieve with this job?

### Balance processing:

- How do you communicate?
- What is your result so far?
- What people say about your job? How does that affect you?

### Internalized moral perspective:

- How do you see yourself as a person?
- Which values, do you think, are important for your job?

### Rational transparency:

- Do you express negative emotions?
- Do you share your negative experience?

### **Debriefing**

The emotional and personal concerns state of a participant was checked again after the interview was conducted.