



for GROWTH

a monthly series

**The Rise of
Women Power in
the Middle East**

August | 2025



The MENA region is witnessing **a profound transformation powered by a formidable force: Women Power.**

Women in our region are **increasingly reshaping their identity and societal impact** by breaking traditional boundaries and **leading transformative change across various spheres of life**

By challenging long-held norms and **forging bold new paths**, Middle Eastern women are **creating fresh paradigms of influence and inspiring the next generation of changemakers.**



The Growing Influence of Women in the Middle East

Women in our region are **stepping into roles of influence, power, and decision-making**, demonstrating that leadership is defined by capability and vision rather than gender stereotypes.

This transformation is driven by a combination of socio-political changes, educational advancements, and a **growing recognition of the critical role women play in societal progress**

"Saudi Arabia Surpasses Vision 2030 Target: Female Labor Force Participation Hits 36% in 2024" (Financial Times)

"UAE's She Investment Summit 2025: Gender Equality Moves from Policy to Practice"

"Saudi Women Take to the Skies: Pilots & Aircraft Engineers Breaking Career Ceilings"

"Middle East's First Female Supercar Club Sells: Arabian Gazelles Rally in UAE Challenges Stereotypes"

"Emirati Women Scientist-Astronauts: UAE Continues to Lead Arab Women into Space & STEM"

"Future Women Leaders Forum 2025: Mentorship & Mindset Shift Sparks Action in Dubai"

Here is a snapshot of how this 'She-evolution' is unfolding in our region:

1

**Owning & Celebrating
her Identity:**
*From Tradition to
Transformation*

**2**

**Redefining boundaries
and Expanding Choices:**
*Foraying into
unchartered territory*

**3**

**Growing Influence
at work:**
*Rewriting the
workplace narrative*

**4**

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*The boom of
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Empowerment &
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Representation:**
*Breaking Barriers
to Create an
Impact*

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**'She' Matters
even to herself:**
*Making a
statement on
importance of
self-care.*



Theme 1

Owning & Celebrating her Identity: *From Tradition to Transformation*

Women in the Middle East are navigating a powerful cultural evolution as they reinterpret heritage while embracing modern values, autonomy, and innovation. This shift is **not a rejection of tradition**, but a **reclamation and redefinition** of identity in a fast-evolving context.

Middle Eastern women are **redefining femininity and strength, blending cultural roots with modern aspirations.**

No longer confined to passive roles, they are **actively reframing the societal discourse, values, and expectations.** They are no longer merely navigating culture—they are curating, evolving, and leading it.

Examples of this are seen across varied spheres as they assert their voice be it literature, film, art, sports, business, etc. **sharing nuanced stories of identity, resilience, and transformation.**

"I don't want to break tradition—I want to shape it into something that reflects me."



Theme 1: EXAMPLES

Owning & Celebrating her Identity: From Tradition to Transformation



Entrepreneurship Rooted in Culture – Economic empowerment that's **authentic to their roots**.

Women are using **local culture and tradition** as inspiration for building businesses in fashion, food, wellness, and tourism.

Female-led concepts like **Talli House** (reviving Emirati embroidery) or **The Dinner Club by No. 57** (luxury dining experience rooted in local hospitality).

Women in KSA launching **date-based health food products**, preserving heritage while tapping into global wellness trends.

The rise of the “modest fashion” movement, is a powerful expression of this identity—bridging heritage, faith, and global aesthetics.



Storytelling Through Film and Media: Women are rewriting the **cultural script**, voicing stories that reflect their reality.

Female filmmakers and storytellers are offering **authentic portrayals of women's lives**. **Netflix & Shahid** are featuring **female-led narratives** in Gulf dramas, often addressing themes like ambition, identity conflict, and generational tension.

Fashion as Cultural Reclamation: Tradition is no longer static; it's being **stylized and globalized**

Women are blending **traditional garments** with **modern design sensibilities** to reflect individuality and pride in heritage.

The abaya is now being transformed into a **fashion-forward symbol**—with bold colors, tailored cuts, and luxury branding in the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

Local Designers & brands like **Toby by Hatem Alakeel** and **Haifa Al Habtoor** promote Arab identity with a contemporary aesthetic.

Theme 2:**Redefining boundaries and Expanding Choices:
*Foraying into uncharted territory***

Women in our region are **redefining their roles** by **expanding their choices** across personal, social, and economic spheres. This shift is **not only reshaping societies but also influencing policy, education, and industry** at a transformative pace.

Women are stepping into previously male-dominated sectors—**finance, law, STEM, logistics, aviation, politics, and entrepreneurship.**

Women are investing in careers, choosing when to marry and asserting autonomy in personal choices. Younger generations, especially Gen Z, are pushing back on social expectations and **promoting dialogue around topics like mental health, gender equity, etc.**

These changes are **normalizing Female Empowerment.** What was once considered “bold” is becoming mainstream. Young girls are **growing up seeing female role models in every field**—from astronauts to ministers.

“Middle Eastern women are no longer asking for space—they are claiming it. By expanding their choices, they’re not just shaping their own futures, but rewriting the narrative for generations to come.”



Theme 2: EXAMPLES

Redefining boundaries and Expanding Choices: *Foraying into uncharted territory*



Platforms like **SheCodes** and **Saudi Digital Academy** are training women in tech, AI, and coding.

Qatar: Over 65% of university graduates are women.

UAE: Women make up 56% of STEM graduates.

Women are **equipping** themselves not just to enter the workforce, but to lead in future-facing industries.



Founded in Dubai, the Arabian Gazelles is the **first all-female supercar club in the Middle East**. These women—entrepreneurs, executives, and creatives—share a love for performance machines and are unapologetically claiming space on the tarmac. But it's not just about cars; it's about **confidence, visibility, and rewriting expectations**.

Women like Captain Hanadi Al Hindi (Saudi Arabia's first female pilot) and Mariam Al Mansouri (UAE's first female fighter pilot) have become national icons. Their success has paved the way for more women to enter aviation academies, lead technical teams, and serve in high-stakes air operations

As founder Hanan Mazouzi Sobati says, *"We're not here to prove anything. We're here because we belong—on the road, in the boardroom, and everywhere in between."*



Aviation in the Arab world is being **reshaped by a new generation of trailblazing women**. From pilots and air traffic controllers to aerospace engineers and aviation executives, **Arab women** are increasingly taking to the skies and soaring into uncharted territory.

Theme 3:

Growing Influence at Work: *Rewriting the workplace narrative*

Referred to as the **Fourth Revolution**, growing female participation in the workforce is likely to **turbocharge economic growth** in the region

Women joining the workforce is not just increasing diversity—it's **reshaping the very structure, culture, and future** of the workplace.

It is driving Cultural Transformation by evolving work environments into **more inclusive, collaborative cultures**. Businesses are becoming more open to **flexible working hours, parental leave policies**, and diversity training to support female participation.

Companies are redesigning office spaces and practices to **accommodate family-friendly needs** (e.g., nursing rooms, flexible schedules).

Women in leadership positions are promoting **empathetic management styles, greater transparency, and people-first cultures**.

With women entering sectors like **STEM, finance, law, aviation, and entrepreneurship**, the workforce is expanding in **both depth and diversity**.

As women bring new perspectives to product development, marketing, and service design, companies are better able to **connect with female consumers**, who drive over **70% of household purchasing decisions**.

The digital economy is allowing more women to Work remotely, Launch startups, Freelance or become digital creators

"Increasingly, I see women like me leading meetings, making decisions, and shaping the future—and it makes me believe there's no role we can't claim."
– UAE-based marketing professional



Theme 3: EXAMPLES

Growing Influence at Work: *Rewriting the workplace narrative*



Saudi Arabia and UAE have witnessed significant policy shifts supporting **female employment**



Governments across the GCC are actively promoting **female employment** as part of their national vision (e.g., Saudi Vision 2030, UAE Centennial 2071).



In UAE, women make up two-thirds of public sector employees and are entering leadership roles in **finance, aviation, and diplomacy**.

UAE now mandates listed companies to have at least one woman on their boards.



Saudi female labor force participation rose from 19% in 2016 to over 35% in 2024. **Saudi Arabia** has also seen a **tripling of female leadership** roles over the past 5 years.

Theme 4:**Entrepreneurship & Financial Independence:
*Reshaping the Business Landscape***

Female founders are becoming essential for economic diversification, supporting national efforts to reduce oil dependence. With backing from government policies, financial institutions, and accelerators, **women-led startups are gaining traction**.

What distinguishes many women-led ventures is their **nuanced understanding of local market dynamics**. Female founders often bring cultural insights that create competitive advantages, particularly in **sectors such as healthcare, education and financial services**, where family considerations heavily influence purchasing decisions.

Across hubs like Dubai, Riyadh, and Cairo, women entrepreneurs are not only building commercially successful ventures but also **redefining the region's business landscape**. Their rise marks a transformative shift—**addressing unmet market needs, unlocking new employment channels, and challenging long-standing cultural norms**. As this momentum builds, women-led innovation has the potential to contribute significantly to GDP and **reshape the socio-economic fabric of the MENA region**.

"These women aren't just building companies – they're reshaping economies."
(World Economic Forum)

"We're not just building businesses—we're building a new narrative for the region. As women, we bring insight, resilience, and purpose to the table. And that's becoming the engine of real economic change."

— Rania Nashar, Saudi business executive & former CEO, Samba Financial Group



Theme 4: EXAMPLES

Entrepreneurship & Financial Independence: *Reshaping the Business Landscape*



Women are choosing entrepreneurship not just for flexibility, but to create value and ownership on their own terms.

With almost **\$37 million in funding secured**, including from Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund, **RedSea** exemplifies how women-led innovation can tackle the region's most pressing environmental challenges.

The financial technology sector is also being transformed by female founders like **Nuha Hashem**, whose **neobank, Zywa**, targets the region's digitally native younger generation. By focusing on financial literacy and inclusion, these entrepreneurs are addressing critical gaps in traditional banking services while opening new markets.



Visa's **"She's Next"** initiative exemplifies this approach, offering grants **ranging from \$10,000 to \$50,000**, along with access to an exclusive network.

At the **LEAP 2024** conference in Riyadh this February, the Kingdom's Ministry of Communications and Information Technology unveiled its comprehensive **"Women in Tech"** programme, providing substantial resources to female-led startups in strategic sectors.



Theme 5:

Digital Empowerment & Influence: *Challenging Cultural & Media Narratives*

The region is seeing a steady **rise in female tech founders, influencer entrepreneurs, and digital educators**. Women are leveraging technology, social media, and e-commerce to **create new spaces for autonomy and influence**.

They're not just participating—they're **designing new economies rooted in digital freedom and creativity**. They are using **social media platforms** to **build businesses, advocate for causes, and craft personal brands**.

Influencers in fashion, wellness, parenting, and education are **reshaping narratives and monetizing their reach**.

Digital literacy and tech entrepreneurship are on the rise among Gen Z and millennial women.

The **digital landscape has emerged as a powerful platform** for Middle Eastern women to challenge norms, amplify their voices, and reshape societal perceptions.

"Through Instagram and YouTube, I finally saw women like me—confident, unapologetic, and ambitious. They gave me the courage to start my own business and share my story. We're not just consuming content anymore—we're shaping it."

— Dubai-based entrepreneur and content creator



Theme 5: EXAMPLES

Digital Empowerment & Influence: Challenging Cultural & Media Narratives

Social Media as a Catalyst for Change: Women are leveraging platforms like Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and X (formerly Twitter) to express themselves, promote causes, and build communities.

Tunisian influencer Meriem Debbagh speaks openly about fashion, beauty, and self-confidence, confronting societal taboos while engaging millions.



Saudi content creator Hala Alharithy (@hala) has amassed a large following through lifestyle content that blends tradition with modernity, inspiring young women to embrace their dual identity.



Rise of Digital Entrepreneurs: E-commerce and digital tools are empowering women to become financially independent, often from their homes. With access to platforms like **Shopify, Instagram Shops, and WhatsApp Business**, women are launching fashion labels, beauty brands, cooking channels, and wellness ventures.

Women-led startups like **The Modist** (a luxury modest fashion platform) showed the potential for global impact rooted in regional identity.



Sheworks in the UAE and **Female Fusion Network** in the GCC are examples of platforms supporting female founders in the digital space.

Content Creation as Cultural Commentary: Creators are using humor, storytelling, and personal experience to spark conversations about gender, tradition, and identity. From mini-documentaries to vlogs and comedy sketches, they are reframing narratives about what it means to be a Middle Eastern woman today.



Kuwaiti comedian and YouTuber Ascia Al Faraj challenges gender norms and stereotypes through her content, addressing mental health, motherhood, and independence.

Impact on Media Representation: The digital voice of women is influencing mainstream media and advertising. Brands are now more inclusive, portraying strong, authentic female characters that reflect today's realities.

Nike's **"What Will They Say About You?"** campaign in the Middle East celebrated female athletes and sparked widespread discussion and support online. Platforms like She Wins Arabia and Womana support female-led startups in tech, fintech, and wellness.



Theme 6:**Participation & Representation:
*Breaking Barriers to Create an Impact***

Across the Middle East, women are stepping into arenas once considered off-limits and **emerging as powerful symbols of progress, creativity, and national pride.**

From stadiums to stages, studios to screens, their growing presence **across sports, music, arts, and esports** is **reshaping societal narratives and inspiring a new generation.**

"We're not just being included—we're taking the lead. Whether it's a canvas, a concert stage, or a controller, we're showing the world what Arab women are capable of."

—Emirati creative director and esports enthusiast



Supported by **government reforms, private sector investment, and a new wave of social consciousness**, these women are not only participating—they are **leading, creating, and inspiring.** Their visibility is forging new aspirations for girls across the region, reminding the world that **empowerment isn't always loud**—it can also be skillful, artistic, strategic, and deeply transformational.

Theme 6: EXAMPLES

Participation & Representation: *Breaking Barriers to Create an Impact*

Women athletes in the Middle East are not just participating in competitive sports—they're making history.



In the **UAE**, the Fatima Bint Mubarak Ladies Sports Academy actively supports female participation across football, jiu-jitsu, and equestrian sports.



Saudi Arabia's debut female athletes in the Olympics and Asian Games have set milestones, with figures like **Tahani Alqahtani** (judo) and **Yasmeen Al Dabbagh** (track and field) gaining global attention.



Qatari athlete Mariam Farid, a hurdler and advocate, blends sports with social impact, encouraging young girls to pursue athletics.



Esports: Leveling the (Virtual) Playing Field

With gaming gaining mainstream traction, women across the Middle East are entering professional esports and streaming careers.



Female gamers such as **Reem Alabali** are gaining fanbases and sponsorships, proving that skill—not gender—defines success in gaming.



Saudi Arabia's National Gaming and Esports Strategy includes a strong emphasis on inclusivity, creating space for women in tournaments and game development.

Music & Performance: Finding Their Voice

Once constrained by cultural norms, women musicians and performers are now headlining festivals, streaming globally, and collaborating internationally.



Dana Hourani (Lebanon), and **Balqees Fathi** (UAE/Yemen) are among regional stars making waves.

Governments are increasingly investing in inclusive entertainment sectors, with events like **MDLBEAST Soundstorm** in **Saudi Arabia** showcasing both male and female artists.

Art & Culture: Telling New Stories

Women are at the forefront of the region's cultural renaissance—curating exhibitions, painting modern Arab identity, and reclaiming their narratives.



Artists like **Manal AlDowayan** (Saudi Arabia) and **Hayv Kahraman** (Iraq) explore gender, memory, and place in their works exhibited in international galleries. Institutions like **Art Jameel** and **Sharjah Art Foundation** actively support female creatives and cross-cultural dialogues.

Theme 7:**'She' Matters even to herself:
*Making a statement on importance of Self-Care***

In a region long associated with collective identity, duty, and tradition, Arab women are increasingly carving out a bold new space—one where they matter to themselves. The modern Arab woman is **embracing self-care not as a luxury, but as a form of self-respect, empowerment, and healing**. From mental wellness to mindful beauty, the shift is both personal and cultural, reflecting a **broader evolution in how women define their worth, time, and priorities**.

This growing movement toward self-care signals more than changing habits. It marks **a paradigm shift in identity—where women are not only caregivers, achievers, and nurturers but also individuals with needs, dreams, and boundaries**.

In choosing themselves, Arab women are **not stepping away from their responsibilities**—they're showing that **self-respect is the root of all care**.

"I've realized I can't pour from an empty cup. Taking care of my mind is no longer optional—it's essential."

—Saudi working mom and wellness blogger



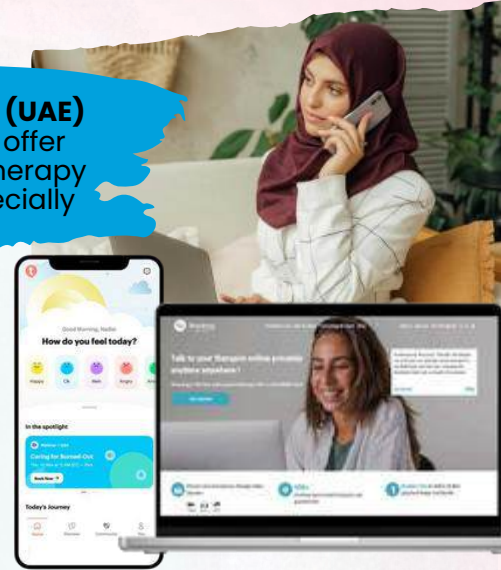
Theme 7: EXAMPLES

'She' Matters even to herself: *Making a statement on importance of Self-Care*



Influencers such as **Dr. Sarah Rasmi** and **Manal Rostom** openly speak about stress, self-worth, and boundaries, inspiring thousands to normalize emotional well-being.

Platforms like **Takalam (UAE)** and **Shezlong (Egypt)** offer confidential access to therapy in Arabic, catering especially to women.



Beauty as a Ritual, Not an Obligation: Self-care through beauty is no longer about external validation. It's about self-expression and confidence.

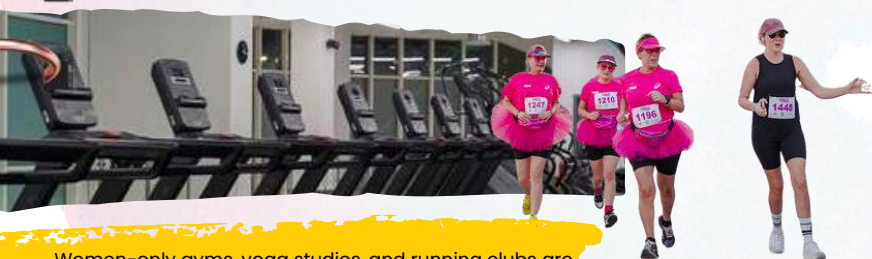


Women are increasingly choosing products with clean, halal, and sustainable ingredients—reflecting a shift toward **conscious consumption**.



Homegrown brands like **Huda Beauty**, **Shiffa**, and **Izil** promote wellness-focused beauty, with messaging that celebrates individuality and natural care.

Fitness & Movement for the Soul: Fitness is no longer just about aesthetics—it's about mental strength, energy, and longevity.



Women-only gyms, yoga studios, and running clubs are thriving. In Riyadh and Dubai, events like **Ladies Night** Runs and **SheMoves** festivals are making fitness social, empowering, and fun.

Influencers like **Lojain Omran** and **Amal Murad** are driving visibility and participation in everything from parkour to pilates.



Spiritual & Personal Growth: Arab women are turning to reading, journaling, mindfulness, and retreats to reconnect with their inner selves.



Book clubs like **The Reading Girls Club (KSA)** and workshops on self-worth and spirituality are flourishing across the region.

With all these mega movements in the region, what does this mean for brands

As more women are gaining financial independence there is a rise in their spending power. Yet many of them **feel misrepresented and misunderstood by brands who often use outdated stereotypes to represent them.**

Women in the region are **balancing cultural tradition with modern ambition—and they expect brands to recognize and reflect that duality**

According to research The Growing Influence of Women's Economic Power in the Middle East (MECSR, 2025)

In Saudi Arabia & UAE, over half of the sample are primary decision makers for purchasing for their home. Yet nearly half the sample say brands don't understand them, and they **don't feel empowered by how women are portrayed in advertising.**

Educated, digitally fluent, and deeply rooted in culture, these women demand more than tokenism—they expect brands to reflect both their ambition and tradition in equal measure.

Today's Middle Eastern women are not just consumers—they're culture shapers. Smart, connected, and ambitious, they expect brands to speak to their modern aspirations while being true to their cultural values.



Mind-the-Gap

Here is a snapshot of the generational mindsets to help better connect with them...



GEN ALPHA
(2012 onwards)



GEN Z
(1997 - 2012)



GEN Y
(1981 - 1996)



GEN X
(1965 - 1980)



BABY BOOMERS
(1946 - 1964)

ROLE (Emerging):

- Raised in a hyper-connected, AI-enabled world with access to knowledge from a young age.
- Growing up in households with working mothers, tech-savvy environments, and inclusive values.

- Bold, outspoken, digitally native, and socially conscious.
- Redefining what it means to be female, empowered, and intersectional

- The first digitally connected women who began rewriting gender narratives.
- Boldly pursued careers, entrepreneurship, global education, and lifestyle freedom.

- Bridging generation: balancing tradition with modernity.
- Gained greater access to higher education and career choices, though still faced gender bias.

- Primarily shaped by patriarchal structures, they were expected to prioritize family and domestic roles.
- Limited access to higher education, careers, & public influence—esp. in traditional societies.

Evolutionary Wins:

- Will likely become the most educated, entrepreneurial, and self-empowered generation of girls.
- Expected to thrive in STEM, AI, creative industries, and sustainability-focused roles.
- Will demand more freedom of choice, fluid gender roles, and global citizenship.

- Activists on issues like climate, body positivity, feminism, and mental health.
- Pioneers of inclusive identity, cross-cultural expression.
- Comfortable with remote work, digital business models, and freelancing.

- Rise in female-led startups, influencers, and social voices.
- Greater representation in leadership roles across public and private sectors.
- Advocated for work-life balance, mental health, and gender equity in relationships and workspaces.

- Entered professional fields and began challenging gender roles at home and at work.
- Became the first generation of working mothers in many parts of the Middle East and globally.
- Participated in early entrepreneurship and activism.

- First to enter the workforce in larger numbers (mostly in education, healthcare, and clerical roles).
- Started to advocate for rights—education, property, and employment—in many regions.

Social Identity:

- Curious, confident, globally minded.
- Raised to question, innovate, and lead.

- Unapologetic, creative, self-aware.
- Refusing to conform to pre-set molds; choosing authenticity over approval.

- Purpose-driven, expressive, boundary-pushing.
- Pioneers of the "have-it-all" mindset—career, wellness, family, and freedom.

- Independent, responsible, resourceful.
- Often labeled the "silent drivers of change."

- Respectable, reserved, duty-bound.
- Often lived lives shaped by external expectations, not personal choices.

OUR

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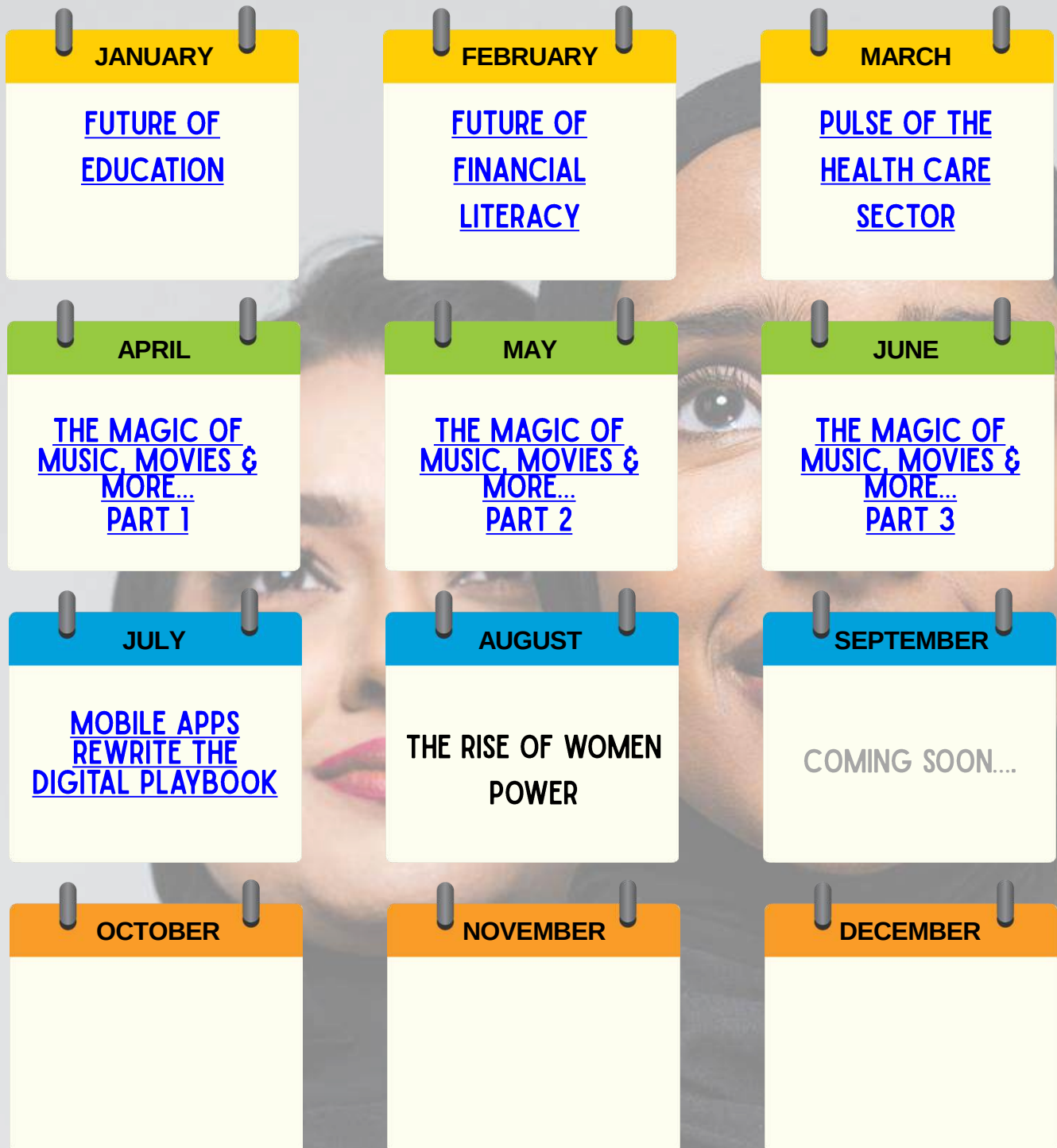
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OUR

Calendar 2025



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