THE MARIO MOUBARAK OUTRAGE CYCLE

A MULTI-PLATFORM NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lebanon's online sphere has become the primary arena where public narratives form, spread, and solidify. The case of stand-up comedian Mario Moubarak, whose edited performance clip triggered a nationwide controversy, exemplifies how Lebanon's fragmented and polarized digital environment transforms isolated incidents into large-scale moral conflicts and political controversises.

This report reconstructs how the Moubarak episode unfolded across platforms, identifies the actors and networks that shaped the debate, and analyzes the structural conditions that allowed the controversy to escalate. The findings highlight the vulnerabilities of Lebanon's digital ecosystem and the strategic use of outrage by ideological clusters, influencers, and mainstream institutions.

The controversy originated from a manipulated video extracted from a 19-minute comedy performance. The viral clip stitched together two non-consecutive segments, removed contextual cues, and paired the edit with captions designed to provoke anger. None of the statements portrayed as blasphemous carried the intention suggested online. The outrage was therefore caused by a fabrication rather than the content of the original performance, following a familiar disinformation pattern of isolating, editing, distorting, and weaponizing material.

METHODOLOGY AND LIMITS

To trace how the narrative spread, the analysis draws on a multi-platform approach combining:

- X scraping, capturing Arabic-language mentions of "Mario Moubarak" between November 24 and 30, 2025.
- Manual monitoring of WhatsApp groups, Lebanon's most influential news-distribution channel.
- Observation of Telegram channels, which serve as ideological relay networks despite their smaller audience.
- Manual collection of high-engagement Instagram posts, the platform where the controversy amassed the widest reach.
- Review of Facebook hyperlocal groups, still relevant for geographically anchored amplification.
- Cross-referencing with mainstream media coverage.

Technical constraints, including but not limited to WhatsApp's closed architecture, Instagram's inaccessible analytics, Telegram's scale, and the difficulty of scraping the term "awkward," mean

that the dataset provides an accurate reconstruction of dynamics, not a census of all activity. Political profiling relied strictly on observable posting behavior, not self-declared identity.

KEY FINDINGS

The earliest visible trigger appeared on Instagram, where Christian evangelist Badih Beainy posted the manipulated clip, reaching nearly half a million viewers. His template became the basis for most subsequent reuploads across X, WhatsApp, and TikTok.

On X, right-wing figure Cyril Sirgi was the first to post the video. His framing linked Moubarak and the Awkward comedy troupe to a fabricated, foreign-funded leftist agenda, reviving narratives previously deployed against NGOs, journalists, and reformist actors. His posts immediately shaped the tone and ideological framing of the debate.

Right-wing influencers Michel Chamoun and Zach Bouery, both associated with or close to the "Jnoud el Rab" ecosystem, escalated hostility further by encouraging followers to report Moubarak's whereabouts, effectively triggering a doxxing campaign.

Apolitical entertainment accounts also played a role: Charbelitta_Official shared the clip to more than a million claimed views. Influencers such as Pierre Hachach, Ahmad D. Berro, and Hachem Khodor added momentum, pushing the incident well beyond its initial partisan origin.

Another catalyst was the coordinated attack on journalist Diana Moukalled, whose posts and tweets defending Moubarak triggered a wave of identity-based smears across right-wing networks.

The largest single amplifier was Blinx, an Emirati youth-focused outlet whose coverage spread the controversy to regional audiences.

The turning point occurred when Father Abdo Abou Kassm, head of the Lebanese Catholic Media Center, issued an official statement condemning the joke. This institutional response triggered an immediate surge in coverage across national, hyperlocal, and regional pages.

X became the center of ideological contestation, producing three major waves of outrage:

1. Right-wing Christian activists, framing the clip as an attack on Christianity and part of a conspiracy against Christians.
2. The Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) conservative faction, escalating the narrative into a defense of religious identity.
3. Hezbollah's digital base, framing the act as a violation of sacred values and adding sectarian comparisons.

WhatsApp enabled rapid nationwide dissemination. Telegram served as a niche relay, adding persistence and searchability. Instagram drove mass exposure across public audiences. Facebook amplified sentiment through village and community pages. Mainstream media then institutionalized the framing, with most outlets echoing the narrative of blasphemy.

LESSONS LEARNED

The Moubarak case underscores structural weaknesses in Lebanon's information environment:

- Speed overrides verification, allowing manipulated content to dominate before context emerges.
- The loudest and most extreme voices gain disproportionate influence, while moderates rarely appear.
- Coordinated networks and ideological clusters can rapidly impose their framing across platforms.
- Religious triggers hold exceptional mobilizing power, often overriding political divisions.
- Mainstream institutions, including the Church and media outlets, frequently reinforce rather than counterbalance digital outrage.
- Counter-narratives exist but remain fragile, depending on a small set of independent voices and alternative media.

Independent outlets such as Megaphone, Daraj, Naqd, Al Modon, in addition to Al Akhbar, along with influencers like John Achkar, Nabil Habiby, and Michel Helou, reached approximately one million people with corrective content. Their impact shows that non-partisan actors can slow or soften moral-panic cycles when they intervene early and with scale.

However, in the absence of state-led regulation, institutional vision, or platform accountability, Lebanon's information ecosystem remains acutely vulnerable to manipulation. Civil society, researchers, and independent media effectively serve as the only line of defense.

1. INTRODUCTION

Online debate in Lebanon has become a central arena where stories take shape and where the first reactions often determine how an issue will be understood. People now encounter news, controversy, and commentary through their social feeds before any other source, and the pace of these exchanges gives them an outsized influence. A single clip, a caption, or a call-to-action can steer public attention with remarkable speed.

This environment carries growing risks. Manipulated videos circulate widely before their accuracy is questioned. Emotional content achieves reach that verified information rarely matches. Ultra-conservative voices, through organized networks, individual preachers, and anonymous accounts monitor cultural topics closely and step in quickly to impose their framing. Their presence creates an atmosphere where intimidation campaigns, moral accusations, and coordinated anger can gain traction within minutes.

The recent controversy involving stand-up comedian Mario Moubarak illustrates these conditions clearly. An edited excerpt detached from its context traveled across platforms, triggering reactions that expanded far beyond the original moment. The intensity of this reaction revealed patterns that now define much of Lebanon's digital sphere: rapid judgment, competition among influencers to "own" the narrative, and the strategic use of outrage by actors with very different agendas.

This report examines how the debate around the Moubarak episode unfolded. The goal is to understand which accounts shaped the discussion, how narratives evolved across platforms, and which dynamics allowed certain interpretations to dominate. By tracing these elements, we aim to provide a clearer picture of the forces currently influencing public conversation in Lebanon and the vulnerabilities that make these cycles possible.

2. METHODOLOGY AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

This report relies on a multi-platform analytical approach designed to capture how the Mario Moubarak controversy moved across Lebanon's fragmented digital ecosystem. Because each platform operates under different technical conditions and social dynamics, the goal of the methodology is to reconstruct the trajectory of the narrative with maximal accuracy, even where full representativeness is structurally unattainable. The methodology therefore combines quantitative scraping where possible, manual sampling where necessary, and cross-platform triangulation to verify patterns identified in subsequent chapters.

2.1 DATA SOURCES AND COLLECTION APPROACH

The core of the dataset was collected from X, which offers the only environment where large-scale scraping remains feasible. We extracted every Arabic-language mention of "Mario Moubarak" between November 24 and 30, 2025, the period preceding the second wave of condemnation and support for Moubarak, following his short detention by General Security upon his arrival at Rafic Hariri International Airport on December 5, 2025. This corpus provided the backbone of the analysis because it can be reliably tagged, clustered, and subjected to temporal and behavioral mapping.

To understand how the narrative circulated beyond X, we monitored several WhatsApp news-forwarding groups during the same period. These groups function as a core information pipeline in Lebanon, frequently pushing stories into mainstream visibility. While WhatsApp does not allow scraping and provides no API access, the observation of these groups offered crucial insight into the timing, tone, and mutation of messages as they spread.

We also examined Telegram channels representing political, community, and news-oriented spaces. Although Telegram adoption in Lebanon remains limited compared to other platforms, it still acts as a relay for specific partisan networks. Its relevance lies less in volume and more in the ability of certain clusters to coordinate reactions and spread framed interpretations.

Instagram's restricted API environment prevents meaningful scraping and data extraction. For this reason, we manually collected the top 35 posts referencing Mario Moubarak or the Awkward comedy troupe during the same timeframe. This includes posts by major public figures and high-engagement creators. Instagram stories, which account for the majority of activity and disappear within twenty-four hours, could not be collected; their absence is explicitly accounted for in the limitations section.

Facebook was monitored through manual observation of hyperlocal pages and village-based groups, which often serve as amplifiers for sensitive content. Although Facebook's national influence has declined relative to Instagram and TikTok, these local communities remain active in shaping sentiment around culturally charged issues.

Finally, we cross-referenced the digital data with reporting across mainstream media outlets, including television stations, newspapers, radio stations, and online news platforms. This layer helped contextualize when and how the controversy jumped from digital spaces into traditional media narratives.

2.2 LIMITATIONS AND REPRESENTATIVENESS

This dataset reflects an indicative snapshot rather than a representative sample, shaped by the technical constraints of each platform.

WhatsApp's private API and disappearing messages feature restrict visibility. Circulation patterns can be inferred but not comprehensively mapped.

Instagram offers almost no accessible data. The dominance of ephemeral stories and the absence of accessible analytics prevent full capture of engagement dynamics.

Telegram's relatively small user base also reduces its representativeness. Nevertheless, it offers insight into ideologically motivated mobilization.

On X, many users discussed the issue only through references to the Awkward comedy group without mentioning Mario Moubarak namely. Because "awkward" is a globally common English word, scraping these posts is methodologically infeasible without falling into massive and difficult to navigate noise.

These constraints mean that the analysis reconstructs the shape, timing, and architecture of the narrative, rather than its exhaustive volume. The dataset remains sufficient to track escalation dynamics, identify key actors, and compare patterns across platforms, but it must not be interpreted as a census of all online activity related to the controversy.

2.3 PROFILING AND CODING METHOD

Political and ideological classification relied exclusively on observable behavioral patterns. Users were categorised as FPM, Lebanese Forces (LF), Kataeb, Hezbollah, Right-Wing, or Independent based on:

- amplification of partisan figures and channels
- repeated adoption of known political slogans
- alignment with recognized narrative frames
- identifiable retweet/repost networks
- cross-engagement patterns with existing partisan ecosystems

This method treats online identity with caution. A user's claimed sect, party affiliation, or profession carries no evidentiary weight. A user claiming to be Christian or Shiite may in fact be an impersonator, a troll, or part of a digital army.

2.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

All analysis was conducted using publicly accessible data or content from closed groups where the researchers were legitimate members. No private messages were accessed. No attempt was made to deanonymize users.

3. KEY FINDINGS

3.1 UNDERSTANDING THE DISINFORMATION CONTEXT

The controversy surrounding Mario Moubarak emerged from a fundamental distortion of the original material. His joke was part of a 19-minute stand-up performance delivered in a comedy venue, where he interacted with the audience through crowd work and character mimicry. The performance followed the familiar conventions of live comedy, and the fact that Moubarak himself is Christian gives cultural context to the themes he explored on stage.

The clip that went viral was not a faithful representation of this performance. It combined two separate segments, stitched together and edited to maximize provocation. This manipulated excerpt was then circulated with captions and commentary designed to inflame emotions. The final product bore little resemblance to the original tone, structure, or intent of the full show. What spread online was not a joke, but an engineered trigger.

3.2 CONTENT FORENSICS: WHAT THE JOKE ACTUALLY SAID

The first line that angered many viewers was "the funeral was not good" (12:17). The line appeared toward the end of a longer sequence about Lebanese funeral rituals (9:08- 12:17). Within that sequence, the reference to Jesus' burial was factual and not derogatory. Jesus did not receive a traditional funeral by the standards of ordinary rituals. The joke was therefore observational rather than disrespectful.

The second element was the laugh that followed his question "Did you get it?". Many interpreted this laugh as mockery of Jesus. In the full performance, however, Moubarak was mimicking a character introduced earlier in the show – an uncle with a distinct, exaggerated laugh (8:07). This mimicry was part of his ongoing crowd work routine. The laugh was a callback to a recurring character, not a reaction to the religious reference itself.

The third element was the line in which he said that Jesus "had a sense of humor." This was the part that touched lightly on the tension between scripture and contemporary moral behavior. Even in this moment, the purpose was to emphasize how society often overlooks the ethical teachings embedded in scripture, not to insult Jesus. It was a moral observation delivered with comedic timing.

Taken together, these elements demonstrate that the viral clip did not capture a blasphemous moment. It was a fragment stripped of context, rearranged to intensify outrage, and circulated with captions designed to provoke anger. The resulting outrage was driven not by the content of the actual performance but on a manipulated representation of it. This pattern is familiar in disinformation campaigns: isolate, edit, distort, weaponize.

3.3 THE AMPLIFICATION PROCESS

The earliest visible trigger on Instagram was a high-quality edited video posted by Badih Beainy, a Christian evangelist with a sizable online presence. His version of the clip reached nearly half a million viewers, a significant figure within the Lebanese digital landscape. Shortly afterward, that same clip began appearing on X, WhatsApp, and TikTok. Although Beainy may not have produced the original edit, his post is the earliest identifiable source of the manipulated version that dominated the circulation cycle. The vast majority of subsequent uploads lacked the production quality of his video, indicating that his post served as the template for widespread replication.
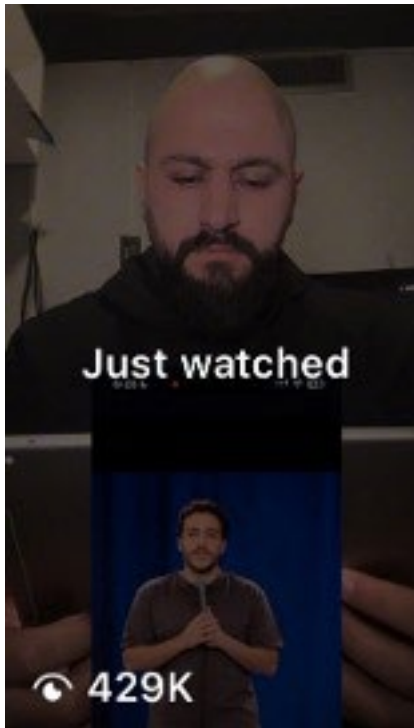
Figure 1: Screenshot of the video with "Breaking News" watermark, shared on X.

Figure 2: Evidence of circulation of the content on TikTok.

Figure 3: Badih Beainy's commentary.

On X, the first amplifier was Cyril Sirgi, a figure associated to the emerging right-wing digital cluster that has taken shape in recent years. Sirgi was the first to upload the clip to the platform, and his post quickly accumulated 45,000+ views, a substantial figure given that only a small share of Lebanese citizens use X. Sirgi's framing echoed narratives that have circulated within right-wing and FPM-aligned networks since 2019, which repeatedly attempt to link comedians, alternative media platforms, and civil society groups to a fabricated, foreign-funded "leftist agenda." In previous cycles, this tactic targeted independent MPs, investigative journalists, and reform-oriented organizations. In this incident, Sirgi extended the accusation to the Awkward comedy group, claiming they were funded by Kulluna Irada and George Soros with the aim to "insult religion" and "advance leftist agendas." This language fits within a broader pattern of delegitimization campaigns that attempt to discredit any actor perceived as operating independently from traditional power structures.

Sirgi's post helped set the tone for the entire online conversation. It revived a familiar smear template, assigned a political identity to a non-political comedy performance, and framed the issue as an intentional attack on religion carried out by a supposed foreign-backed cultural front. This narrative primed a range of ideological groups to engage with the video, each drawing from their own fears and biases, and helped transform a single edited clip into a national controversy.

Figure 4: Collection of Cyril Sirgi's tweet on X and Facebook posts.

Sirgi's tweets and posts translate to:

- Tweet 1: This is the company "Awkward," which is supported by the group "Kulluna Irada" and George Soros. The "comedians in it" take money so they can intentionally insult religion and carry out leftist agendas. This shop needs to be shut down!

- Post 2: Don't let anything happening in the country make you forget this outrageous scandal: Mario Moubarak and the "Awkward" company, that satanic crew.

- Post 3: And this is Megaphone, funded by Kulluna Irada and George Soros, just like the Awkward comedy group, doing everything possible to fight religion and spread social corruption, just like what's happening in the West and with massive funding. Megaphone is the main news platform for these leftists.

- Post 4: Reporting on Mario Moubarak is not enough. The Awkward company must issue an official apology, otherwise there will be actions taken that could go as far as preventing them from performing their work. Our insults will no longer go unpunished; we are living in a time of darkness, and now more than ever we must resist these devils.

■   Post 5: Mario Moubarak takes money in exchange for mocking the Holy Gospel and Jesus Christ.
May God disgrace you. It's a shame that you hold this name, you lowlife."

Figure 5: Chronological participation tagged ideologically.
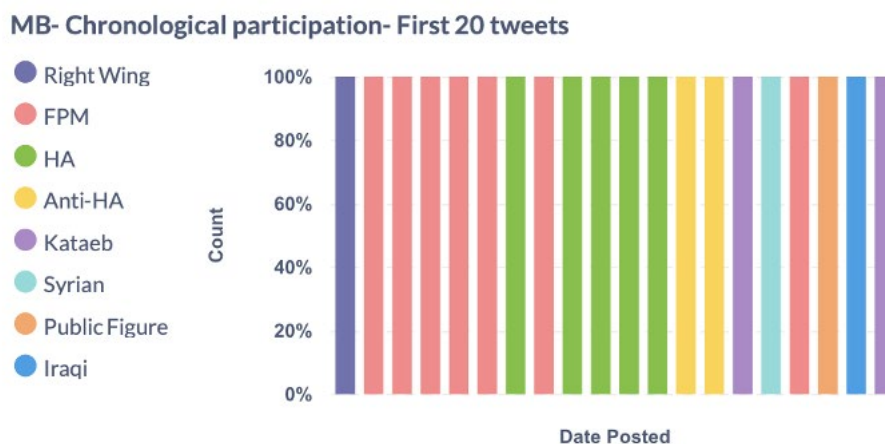
Michel Chamoun and Zach Bouery[1], both prominent right-wing figures aligned with or close to the
"Jnoud el Rab" ecosystem, played a central role in escalating hostility around the incident. Bouery
openly promotes the group by wearing its branded clothes and repeats their tagline: "*Hayyon huwa
Rabb al Jounoud*". Michel Chamoun does not publicly display allegiance to the group, but he was one
of the most influential anti-LGBTQ voices who legitimized the "Jnoud el Rab" attack on the Madame
Om pub in August 2023.

Their videos did not simply express outrage; they actively fueled a climate of intimidation. Both
called on followers to submit information about Mario Moubarak's whereabouts, vehicle, and daily
movements, effectively encouraging doxxing. This aggressive tone quickly spread beyond their
immediate audiences.

In terms of immediate political affiliation of accounts involved in the amplification, right-wing clusters
tweeted first, followed by FPM-aligned accounts, and then by Hezbollah's digital base. LF did not
initiate or drive the smear campaign; LF-affiliated accounts appeared much later in the chain and
played only a secondary role.

Apolitical pop-culture pages amplified the trend as well. The account Charbelitta_Official, known
primarily for lifestyle and entertainment content rather than political commentary, shared the edited
clip with a call for legal action. The post registered a claimed 1.6 million views and 1,029 shares.
Although this figure appears inflated compared with the page's typical engagement patterns, even
a conservative estimate of 10% actual viewership would still represent a significant reach within the
Lebanese Instagram landscape.

1   The original post by Zach Bouery was deleted, it was captured on slide 2 of the post by activist Charbel Khoury.

Other influencers added momentum to the negative narrative and reinforced the hostile framing (the data was captured on November 30, 2025):

- Pierre Hachach generated 1,009 likes and 810 shares, contributing to the backlash.
- Ahmad D. Berro drew 55,000 views with a strongly negative stance.
- Hachem Khodor, one of the most impactful contributors, recorded 553 shares, 9,000 likes, and 253,000 views, helping spread the controversy across new demographic segments.

These accounts are indicative though not representative examples of trendsetters that helped transform an initially niche controversy into a nationwide moral panic, pushing the story into the mainstream and cementing the negative sentiment surrounding Mario Moubarak.

Another significant amplifier in the immediate aftermath was the coordinated reaction to Diana Moukalled's tweet in support of Mario. Her post circulated widely across right-wing clusters on X, triggering a wave of responses that deployed familiar smear labels: "the Left," "George Soros," "Kulluna Irada," etc. to delegitimize her stance and frame her commentary as part of a foreign-funded ideological agenda. This pattern is consistent with tactics commonly used against independent journalists and activists: reducing their arguments to identity-based attacks, reframing them as political operatives, and shifting public attention away from the substance of their critique. The virality, speed, and reach of these smears illustrate how quickly entrenched narratives are mobilized and how effectively they function as force multipliers within Lebanon's polarized digital ecosystem.

The most influential player in terms of reach was Blinx, on their YouTube, Instagram, ans Facebook pages. Blinx is an UAE-based digital outlet popular among Arab youth. Its coverage of the story accumulated close to one million views across social platforms, introducing the controversy to a regional audience and further anchoring the narrative that Mario Moubarak had mocked religious symbols. Another notable amplifier was BintJbeil.org, a South Lebanon-based news outlet targeting Shiite communities, reaching 210,000+ views. Another notable amplifier was the social media account Weiniye el Dawleh, known for leaking internal security documents, and often suspected to be a security branch instrument. Its intervention signaled that the story had shifted fully into the broader political and social ecosystem.

Figure 6: Right-wing clusters attacking Diana Moukalled.

The turning point came when the Church issued an official public response. Father Abdo Abou Kassm, head of the Lebanese Catholic Media Center, released a statement that acted as an immediate catalyst, triggering a new wave of media attention. From that moment forward, local outlets, hyper-local pages, and regional Facebook and Instagram pages picked up the story almost simultaneously, all of them driving overwhelmingly negative sentiment.

The escalation spread across a wide range of pages[2], each contributing to the amplification (the data was captured on November 30, 2025):

- Jbeildailynews: 642 shares – negative.
- Kesserwan Online: 27 shares – negative.
- Lebanon_961_lb: 55 shares – negative.
- Jobbetbsharri: 53 shares – negative.
- Vulgata_bible: one of the most impactful nodes with 1,700 shares and 100,000 views – negative.
- Yasou3ouna: 254 shares and 1,600 likes – negative.
- Cedarsvoicenews, Lebanonscreen, Koura Online, Metn Talks, Tripoli244, Lebanonpress, presswithoutborders, Jbeil_talks each produced fewer than 20 shares, maintaining a consistent negative tone throughout.
- St_rafqa: 938 likes and 77 shares – negative.
- Min.albe.albak: 54 shares and 450 likes – negative.

3.4 PROPAGATION DYNAMICS ACROSS THE LEBANESE X ECOSYSTEM

The outrage on X unfolded in three distinct waves, each propelled by a different political cluster, ultimately converging into a rare moment of cross-sectarian digital alignment.

The first spark came from within the Christian right-wing sphere, where a prominent account circulated the clipped video. This cluster – known for its hyper-reactive, moralistic posture – tends to interpret cultural controversies through a lens that mixes anti-Hezbollah and anti-Syrian sentiment with federalist undertones, open hostility towards the left and civil society, while buying into the anti-George Soros conspiracy theories. They routinely smear any opposition voices or alternative media as foreign funded. Their early framing positioned the incident as both a direct insult to Christianity and part of a wider conspiracy against Christians, setting the tone for the broader moral panic that followed.

The second wave was driven by FPM's digital base, particularly its emerging conservative faction. This group amplified the clip almost immediately, pushing the outrage into an identity-defense narrative centered on "protecting the faith." Their mobilization reflects a deeper transformation within the FPM's online community, which has increasingly embraced Christian conservatism and moved closer to the right-wing discourse that dominated the first wave.

The third wave came from a less expected direction: Hezbollah's online ecosystem. Hezbollah-affiliated accounts became the second-largest smear cluster, surpassing LF-aligned accounts in

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2   Each of the named pages has a presence on multiple social media platforms. The content has likely been published on more than one platform. The links provided in the following list only capture one platform per page.

both volume and intensity. Their reaction framed the joke not in political terms, but primarily as a violation of sacred religious values. Some of the Hezbollah-affiliated accounts also used the incident to draw sectarian comparisons. This attitude underscored the fact that Hezbollah's digital community is culturally conservative and deeply religious, even while operating from an authoritarian-left political position that blends anti-imperialist and anti-neoliberal rhetoric with a welfare-style model providing services to "oppressed classes." Hezbollah's political narrative frames politics as a struggle between the oppressed and Western-aligned elites while maintaining a centralized, authoritarian structure. At the same time, it enforces strict social conservatism, tight organizational discipline, and the – often violent – suppression of dissent.

A fourth wave emerged through coordinated attacks on Diana Moukalled following her Daraj article and tweets defending Mario Moubarak. Right-wing clusters, including the FPM's conservative faction, seized on her intervention to escalate the discourse into a sectarian comparison campaign. Their messaging framed her stance as part of a "leftist-Islamist agenda," recycling familiar tropes that equate defending free expression with selectively excusing religious insults. The rhetoric accusing her of preaching tolerance only when Christianity is mocked while allegedly avoiding any comparable defense of those who joke about Prophet Mohammad out of fear of Muslim backlash. The wave weaponized cross-sectarian grievance narratives to delegitimize both the journalist and the broader civil society space she represents.

Taken together, these waves produced an unusual moment of convergence. Right-wing Christian activists, the FPM's conservative faction, and segments of Hezbollah's digital base – typically adversarial and often locked in fierce rivalry – aligned around a shared moral panic. This alignment underscores the outsized influence of religious triggers in Lebanon's digital sphere and their ability to override entrenched political divisions, even if only temporarily.

In parallel, seven accounts circulated identical narrative frames linking Mario Moubarak and the Awkward comedy group to longstanding conspiracy theories that have recurred in the Lebanese digital space since 2019. These narratives included claims that the content was "Soros-funded," that Mario represented a "product of October 17," or – among FPM-friendly accounts – that the performance was "LF-backed" (i.e., their direct political adversary). This pattern mirrors previous smear campaigns documented against activists, NGOs, artists, comedians, and independent political actors. The function of these narratives, as observed in the data, was to position the target within a framework of alleged foreign influence, political subversion, or cultural threat. The recurrence of these conspiracy theories aligns with previously identified right-wing digital rhetoric in Lebanon.

3.5 WHO SAID WHAT ON X?
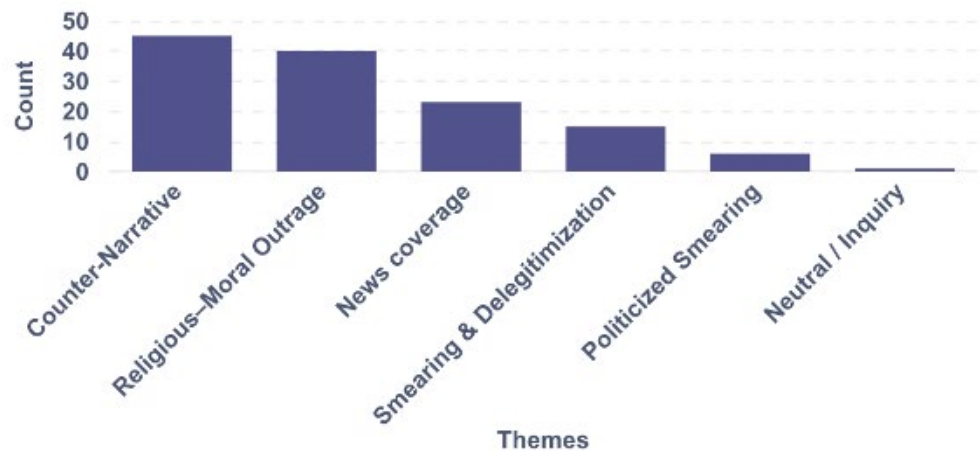
Figure 7: Themes of the conversation on X.

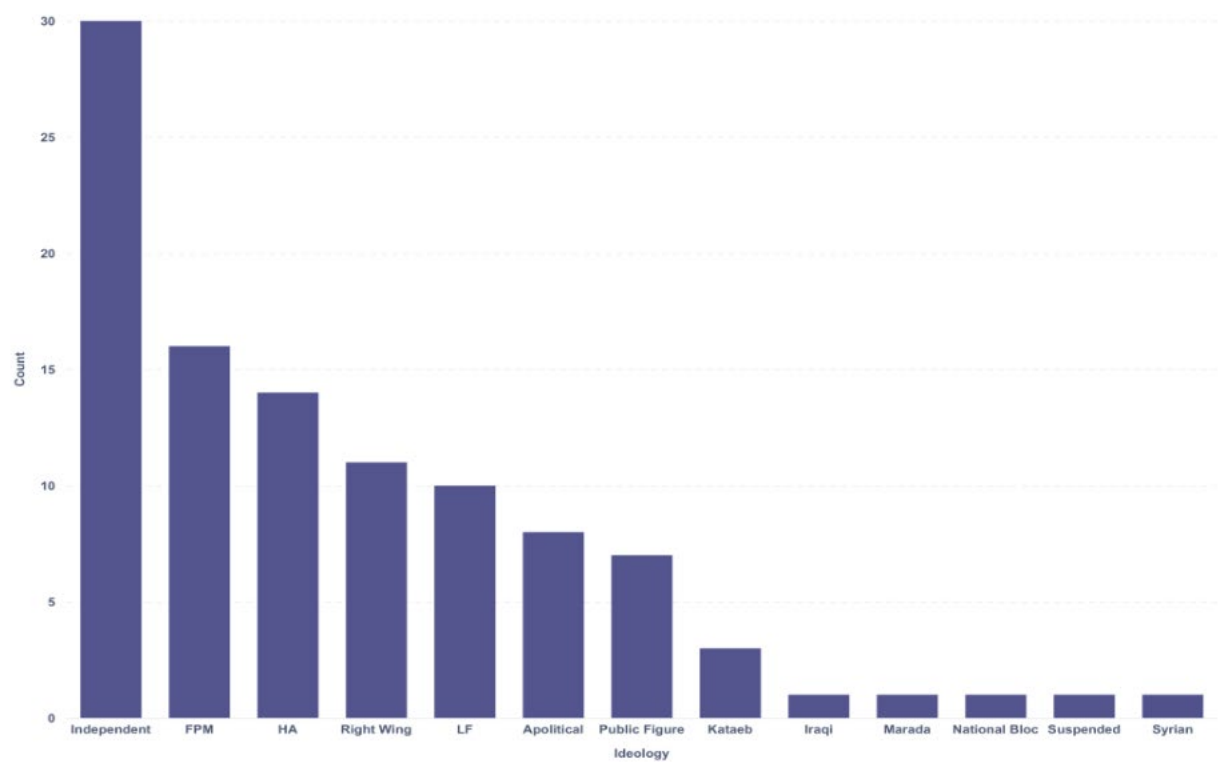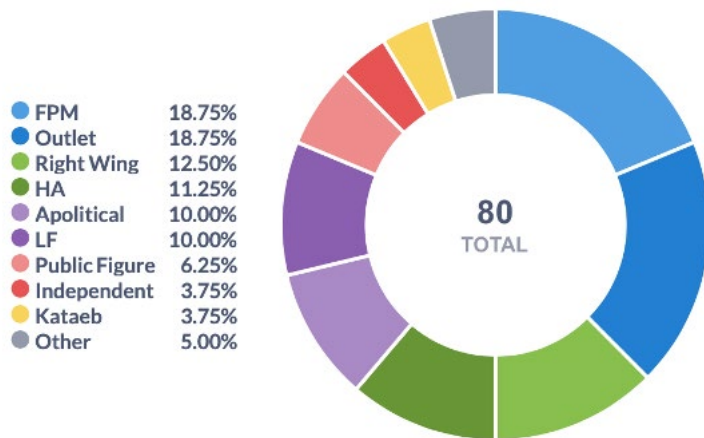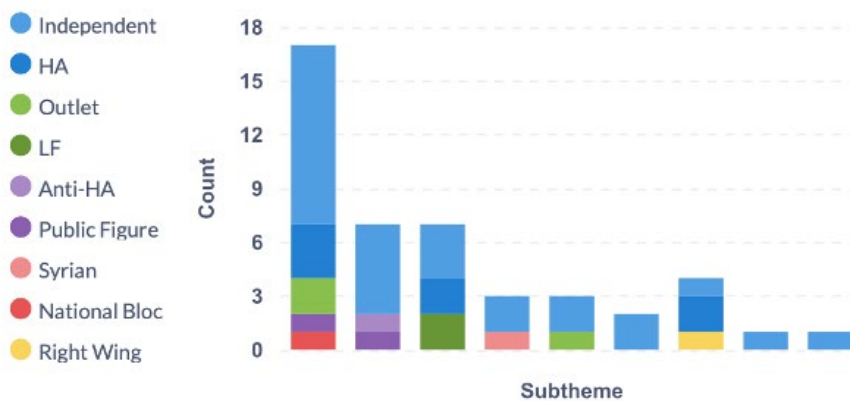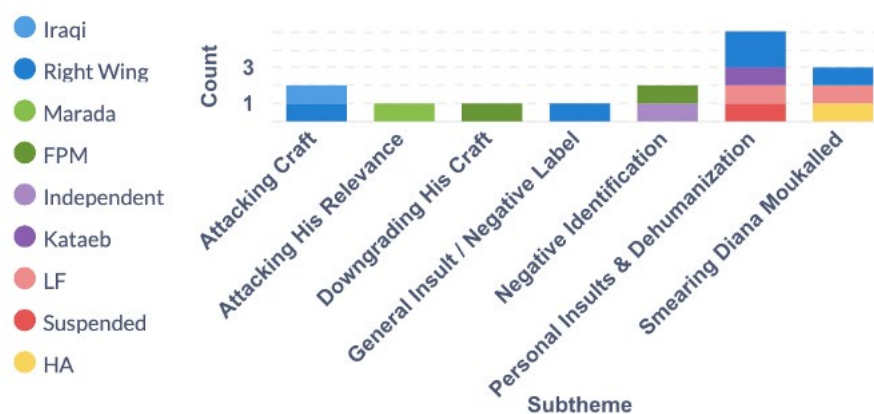**Figure 8: Political/ideological distribution of X accounts steering the conversation.**

Figure 9: Negative narratives by political affiliation.

● FPM	18.75%
● Outlet	18.75%
● Right Wing	12.50%
● HA	11.25%
● Apolitical	10.00%
● LF	10.00%
● Public Figure	6.25%
● Independent	3.75%
● Kataeb	3.75%
● Other	5.00%

80 TOTAL

Figure 10: counter narratives by political affiliation.

● Independent
● HA
● Outlet
● LF
● Anti-HA
● Public Figure
● Syrian
● National Bloc
● Right Wing

Figure 11: Smearing narratives by political affiliation.

● Iraqi
● Right Wing
● Marada
● FPM
● Independent
● Kataeb
● LF
● Suspended
● HA

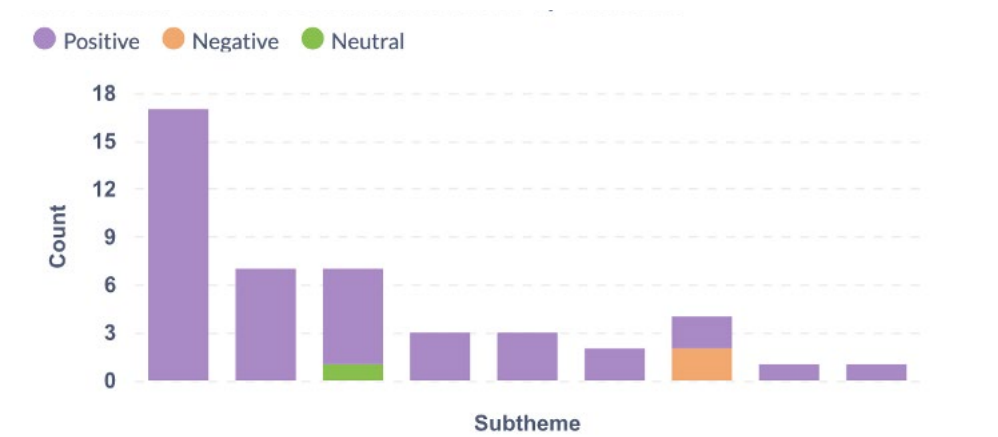**Figure 12: Counter narratives by sentiment.**

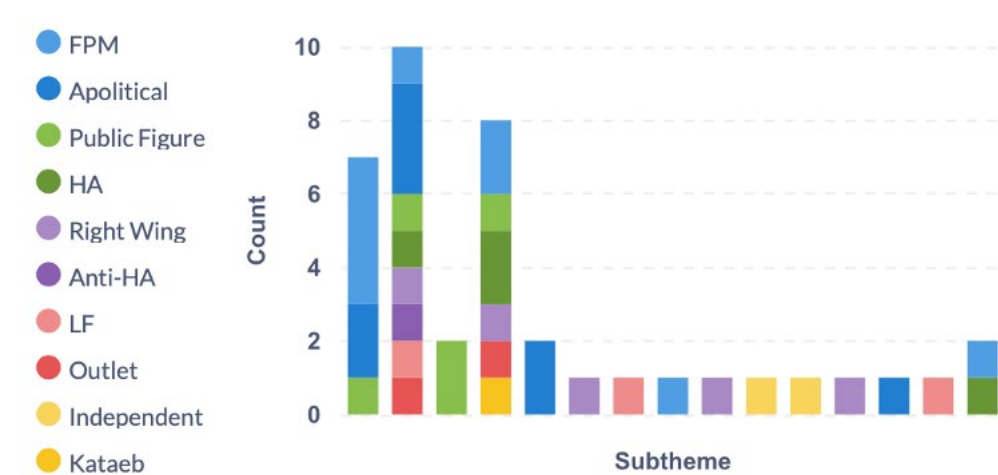**Figure 13: Religious and moral outrage by political affiliation.**
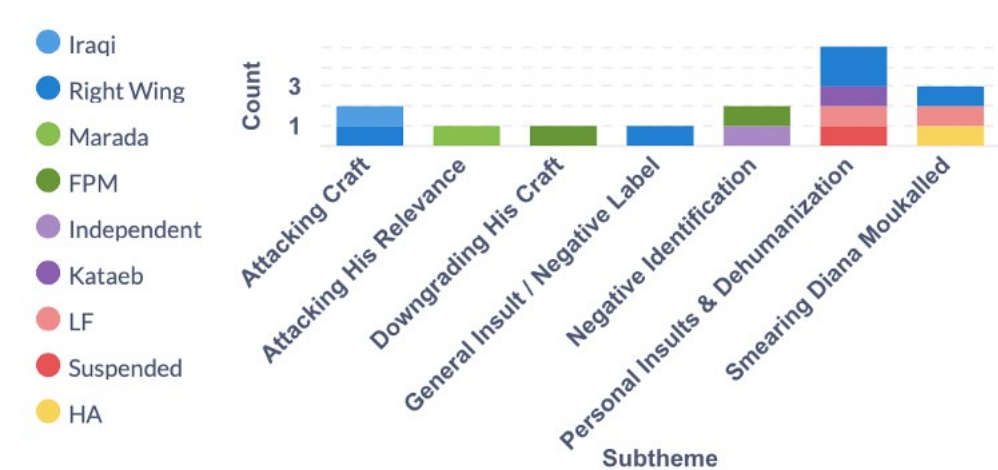

Figure 14: Smearing by political affiliation.

Figure 15: Views by sentiment.
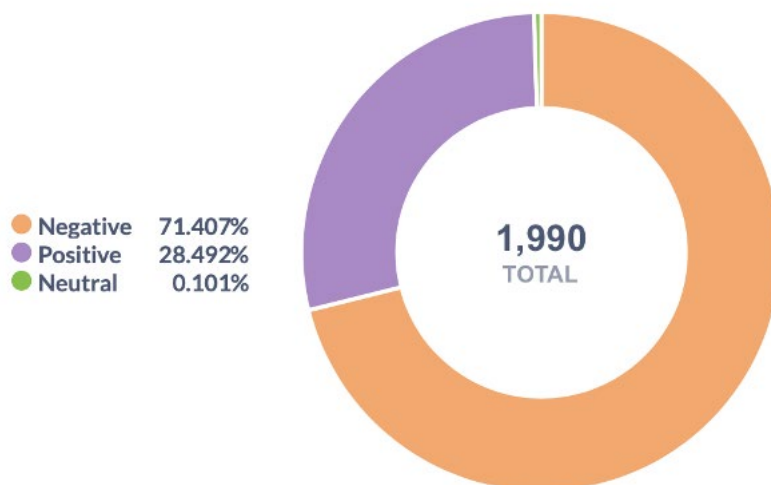

- Positive 72.523%
- Negative 27.311%
- Neutral   0.166%

341,774
TOTAL
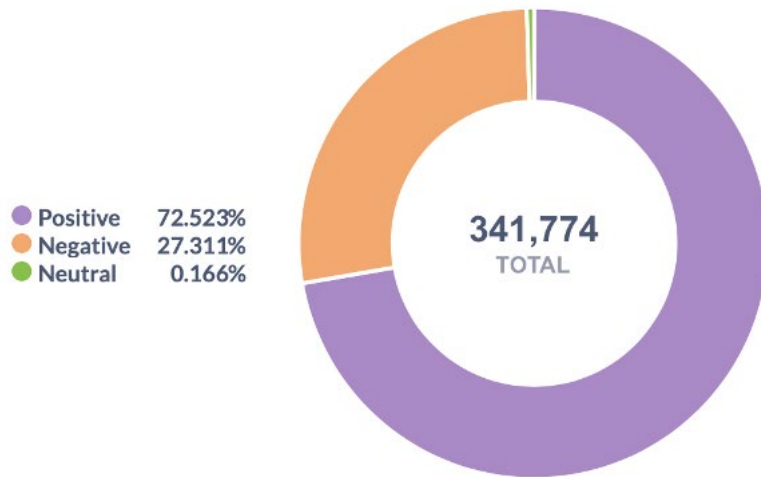
Figure 16: Likes by sentiment.

- Negative 71.407%
- Positive 28.492%
- Neutral   0.101%

1,990
TOTAL

3.6 CROSS-CLUSTER ANOMALIES

Although the majority of politically affiliated accounts aligned with their expected ideological positions, several exceptions appeared in the dataset. Two accounts categorized as linked to the LF posted content supportive of Mario Moubarak. Three accounts categorized as Hezbollah-affiliated also published content defending him. These instances indicate that not all users within a given political cluster adopted the dominant negative framing of the incident. Instead, a small number of accounts in both clusters expressed views that ran counter to the prevailing sentiment within their respective ecosystems. The presence of these exceptions is noted as part of the empirical distribution of reactions observed in the dataset.

3.7 PROPAGATION ACROSS OTHER PLATFORMS

a. WhatsApp

WhatsApp played a central role in the nationwide spread of the video. Once the clip circulated in groups such as *Khabar Ajil* and in municipal, village-based, and religious community networks, it spread rapidly across governorates. Previous research from 2023 showed that news content on WhatsApp typically crosses regional boundaries within three to four hours. Given the increased reliance on WhatsApp for news consumption since 2024, the circulation of the Mario Moubarak clip followed a similar trajectory. The platform's closed architecture and high penetration rate contributed to the broad dissemination of the video at the national level; examples include, Aljarida 3, Altaharri News 1, The News Jadidouna, Topskynews 434, LNN3 (Lebanon National News), Achrafiyeh News, 961 Time 259, Akhbar Albalad.

b. Telegram

Telegram's contribution to the spread was limited but observable. The clip appeared in political and news channels such as Beirut Al Horra, WNA News, and Lebanon Debate, Akhbar 961, Dailybeirut, as well as in unofficial Hezbollah-aligned channels such as Litani News, E3lam AlHarbi, Minassa Ikhbarya, and BintJbeil.org. Telegram did not generate viral momentum comparable to WhatsApp or Instagram, but it provided archiving, searchability, and cross-platform reinforcement for the narrative.

c. Instagram

Instagram served as the primary venue through which the incident gained large-scale visibility. High-reach pages such as Charbelitta_Official (1.6 million views), Hachem Khodor (253,000 views), Blinxnow (514,000 views), and Vulgata_Bible (100,000 views) published posts that framed the incident through highly emotional or religiously charged interpretations. These posts reached audiences far larger than those present on X, thereby expanding the controversy beyond politically engaged users and into the general public.

Several accounts also published counter-narratives, including Megaphone News (264,000 views), Nabil Habiby (130,000 views), Daraj, Naqd, and John Achkar. These posts emphasized context, free expression-based arguments, or critiques of the escalating reactions. Their reach was smaller than that of the outrage-driven content but nonetheless provided an alternative framing within the Instagram ecosystem.

d. Facebook

Facebook facilitated localized amplification across hyper-local and community pages. Examples include Qobeyyat, Bint Jbeil, Kesserwen, Sawt Janoubi, One Rmeich, Chabeb Kesserwen, Jounieh Online, Tripoli24. These pages typically framed the incident through religious language and moral concern, contributing to the spread of the controversy within geographically defined communities.

3.8 INFLUENCERS AND EXTREMIST ACTORS

Influencers with substantial followings played a significant role in amplifying and escalating the incident across platforms. Among them, right-wing figures such as Zach Bouery[3] and Michel Chamoun published videos calling for the identification of personal details related to Mario Moubarak, including his residence, vehicle, and movements. Their content included explicit calls for doxxing and presented Mario in highly confrontational terms.

Figure 17: A social media post publicly sharing Moubarak's personal phone number without consent, constituting doxxing and a violation of privacy.

Cyril Sirgi further politicized the narrative using the familiar rhetoric of "George Soros," "Kulluna Irada," and "the left," to portray Mario as a political threat and to hint at potential offline action against the Awkward comedy club. Additional influencers contributed to the negative framing, including but not limited to Charbelitta, Hachem Khodor, and Pierre Hachach, who published posts and videos aligned with the broader wave of religiously framed condemnation.

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3   The original post by Zach Bouery was deleted however, it was captured on slide 2 of the post by activist Charbel Khoury.

3.9 MAINSTREAM MEDIA

Mainstream media coverage largely adopted negative framing. Outlets including MTV, Nida' Al Watan, Annahar, VDL, Lebanon Debate, Lebanon Files, Kataeb.org, Red TV, Al Quds Al Arabi, and AlkalimaOnline published reports describing the incident as an insult or an act of blasphemy.

Al Jadeed TV was a partial exception. Although it reported on the legal action taken against Mario, it also offered a neutral counter-narrative, including a segment in which the spokesperson for the Catholic Media Center was challenged during a live interview.

A smaller group of outlets, including Megaphone News, Daraj, Naqd, Al Modon, in addition to Al Akhbar, published counter-narrative content that emphasized context, questioned the prevailing framing, or highlighted references to freedom of expression.

At the regional level, the UAE-based Blinx released a report that received approximately half a million views and portrayed the incident as a case of disrespect. This expanded the controversy beyond Lebanon and introduced the debate to a regional audience.

4. CONCLUSION: WHAT THIS CASE REALLY TELLS US

4.1 CROSS-PLATFORM SEQUENCE

The dissemination of the Mario Moubarak video followed a familiar sequence observed in previous digital controversies in Lebanon. The clip first circulated on WhatsApp, then moved to X, where ideological clusters shaped its initial framing. Instagram and Facebook expanded the reach to mass audiences, while Telegram provided archival persistence and cross-platform reinforcement. Mainstream media later institutionalized the narrative through formal coverage, after which the story re-entered WhatsApp and continued circulating nationwide.

This multi-platform trajectory mirrors patterns documented in earlier Lebanese cases involving moral panic or religious sensitivity, including the incidents surrounding comedians Nour Hajjar and Shaden Fakih, Laïque Pride, the Ashrafieh "flag" controversy, and multiple smear campaigns targeting October 17 figures. The repetition of this pattern reflects structural features of Lebanon's information environment: high WhatsApp penetration, low digital media literacy, pronounced religious sensitivities, and the recurrent use of digital ecosystems for rapid mobilization.

4.2 THE RISE OF THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT-WING DIGITAL CLUSTER

One of the key findings is the consolidation of a distinct Christian right-wing digital cluster that had not previously materialized as a structured online force. This group overlaps with, but is not controlled by, traditional parties such as LF and FPM. Its members amplify, identify with, and rally around a shared ecosystem that includes pro-Riad Salameh narratives, admiration for controversial right-wing figures such as Peter Germanos and Nadine Barakat, active defense of MTV and Marcel Ghanem, hostility toward Hezbollah, and strong opposition to the current Syrian administration.

This cluster promotes militant conservative values, frequently uses Christian symbolism in its profiles, and expresses separatist or federalist aspirations. It is also heavily influenced by international right-wing lexicon, frequently invoking themes such as "the left," Soros-led conspiracies, and attacks on civil society groups including Kulluna Irada. Although it intersects with LF and FPM supporters, it functions as an independent network with its own influencers, discursive rituals, and amplification logic.

4.3 THE BATTLE OVER THE NARRATIVE

What happened with Mario Moubarak was not a battle over a joke, nor a dispute between freedom of expression and religious sensitivities. It was a battle over the Lebanese information space itself. The space has deteriorated to the point of dysfunction. It is a place where the loudest voices are often the most extreme, while moderate voices struggle to be heard. Truth carries little weight compared to whoever can seize and control the narrative and command the largest market share of attention.

In theory, Lebanon's digital sphere was once supposed to democratize speech. It gave room to alternative media, reformist voices, independent influencers, and anti-establishment narratives. Over time, however, the system corrected itself in the worst possible direction. Power slowly returned to those who already held power. Ideological machines, wealthy actors, political parties, and coordinated influence networks gradually reclaimed control of the digital ground.

The result is an ecosystem characterized by polarization, insecurity, religious anxiety, economic collapse, and overpowered gatekeepers. The information space is chaotic, unregulated, and extremely vulnerable to manipulation. In such environments, primitive reactions dominate: anger, fear, identity, and revenge determine what people see, consume, and amplify. And just like any repeated stimulus, repetition becomes truth, outrage becomes identity, and noise becomes authority. The loudest voices set the agenda, not the most informed. The fastest actors shape perception, not the most accurate. The public no longer processes information; it reacts to it. By the time context appears, it is too late; the narrative is already cemented.

4.4 HOW THE MOUBARAK CASE EXPOSED THESE DYNAMICS

The Mario Moubarak case shows how a fragmented digital environment can turn a minor incident into a national crisis. The video was clipped and stitched together, stripped of context, and released into the digital bloodstream. The first wave of reactions came from conservative Christian circles whose responses were driven by immediate emotional outrage. Within hours, the narrative was reshaped into a political tool and linked to the usual smear vocabulary of "the left," George Soros, Kulluna Irada, and October 17.

A sectarian layer followed. Some Christians condemned Mario Moubarak for touching the figure of Christ. Some Muslims condemned him in order to morally shield their own community from future criticism. Others used the moment to accuse Christians of double standards regarding freedom of expression. The narrative went through several stages. Each stage served a different political or emotional need.

The Church's reaction added further momentum. An institution traditionally expected to guide people, filter anger, and encourage positive attitudes, acted as an accelerant. Once the Catholic Media Council's official statement was released, mainstream media followed the trend. Local outlets, hyper-local pages, governorate-level platforms, and regional aggregators all pushed the same dominant negative framing. When Blinx published a regional report, the controversy expanded beyond Lebanon's borders. By then, the cycle was complete. The national information space had formed a unified, negative campaign against one individual based on an edited clip.

This incident was not about the joke. It was about the machinery that turned it into a national storm. It was about networks that shape public opinion, religious triggers that override rational thinking, influencers who chase outrage, and the absence of digital regulation and media literacy. It reflects a society where information spreads faster than verification, and where moral panic has become routine.

The cycle eventually slowed down, not because institutions intervened, but because counterweights finally appeared. A small group of independent and alternative media platforms such as Megaphone, Daraj, Naqd, Al Modon, in addition to Al Akhbar, offered a different narrative. Some influencers including John Achkar, Nabil Habiby, and Michel Helou produced content encouraging moderation. Together, their posts reached approximately one million people.

In Lebanon, very few voices reach a million people without political machinery behind them. This matters. It shows that when strong independent voices speak, moderates feel empowered to speak as well. They become less fearful of the crowd and more willing to say that something is wrong. Counter-narratives matter because quantity becomes a quality of its own. Without counterweights, moral panic wins by default.

Lebanon does not have a state-led strategy to protect its information ecosystem. There is no regulation and no institutional vision. This responsibility therefore falls on civil society, alternative media, researchers, and independent voices. It falls on these circles to correct public perception when needed and to stop disinformation cycles as they begin. In the absence of a governmental or platform strategy, the actors mentioned ealier become the guardians of the information system.

In a country where the information space shapes political stability, sectarian tension, public morality, and even personal safety, survival depends on a simple reality: the side that controls the narrative will control the country's future.

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