Contributing Factors towards Women's Leadership in Malaysia Creative Industry: A Preliminary Findings

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Abstract

This research focuses on the contributing factors towards women's leadership in Malaysia's creative industry. Despite increasing research focused on professional work group leadership by male leaders, research on female leadership, has received little attention in the creative industries. This paper focuses on senior female executives working in film, digital, television and radio in Malaysia. As more and more women hold decision making positions in these areas, there are also more opportunities for women to manage and influence the content of the programs broadcasted on these media platforms. These women are not only industry leaders, but also have the power to shape the attitudes of society through content creation. To understand the situation from the women leaders themselves, this paper uses data from in-depth interviews, discussing the characteristics and contributing factors for women to rise as leaders in the creative media industry as well as their influence on content development. The extent of their decision-making process was also assessed. The data presented here is important because it provides access to the internal voice of stakeholders in the industry. The research surveyed nine industry leaders and identified the challenges faced by women in the media creative industry. However, this paper extracted the data from two interviews with two selected informants. These informants were also asked about their views on how to increase the potential of more women at the managerial level. Preliminary findings from two informants selected in this detailed interview revealed that digital transformation plays an important role in giving female creators a voice and influencing their followers. When it comes to creating content, gender consciousness is mentioned by both informants as a critical factor towards the success of women's leadership. It can be concluded that despite effort to inject empowerment and break the cultural stereotypical mole of women's role in the media, the effort is often diminished by popular culture, ratings, and revenue. The audience acceptance is highly regarded, and often media houses will give them what they want. Another crucial key finding from this research is that a support system is a major key success indicator for women leaders to thrive. The support system can be divided into two, internal which included support from family members, parents, and spouse, while external support highlights superior's buy in and subordinates' trusts and encouragement.

Keywords: *Creative Industry, Women, Leadership, Decision-Making, Broadcast, Digital*

Faktor-Faktor yang Menyumbang kepada Kepimpinan Wanita dalam Industri Kreatif di Malaysia: Dapatan Kajian Rintis

Abstrak

Kajian ini menumpukan kepada faktor-faktor yang menyumbang kepada kepimpinan wanita dalam industri kreatif di Malaysia. Kajian ini begitu signfikan kerana penyelidikan tentang kepimpinan wanita dalam industri kreatif masih tidak banyak dilakukan. Makalah ini menumpukan kepada dapatan temu bual dengan eksekutif kanan wanita yang bertugas dalam sektor kreatif seperti radio, filem, televisyen dan organisasi kandungan digital di Malaysia. Perkembangan semasa yang menyaksikan semakin ramai wanita yang mempunyai kedudukan tinggi dalam industri kreatif seakan membenarkan hipotesis bahawa semakin luas peluang untuk mereka mengurus dan mempengaruhi kandungan yang disiarkan dalam semua platform media. Mereka bukan sekadar menjadi pemimpin industri, tetapi diandaikan mempunyai kekuatan untuk mempengaruhi sikap khalayak menerusi penghasilan kandungan kreatif yang bernuansa baharu. Bagi memahami situasi ini, makalah ini mengenengahkan data awal daripada dua informan yang membincangkan ciri-ciri dan faktor yang menyumbang kepada senario kepimpinan wanita dalam industri kreatif. Data yang dibincangkan ini adalah sangat penting kerana ianya memberi peluang kepada pengkaji menyusup ke dalam suara nurani pemimpin wanita dalam industri budaya. Data awal daripada kajian ini menunjukkan transformasi digital memainkan peranan untuk memberi suara kepada pengkarya wanita dan seterusnya mempengaruhi para pengikutnya. Informan dalam kajian rintis ini menyatakan kesedaran gender adalah sangat penting dalam mengukuhkan kepimpinan wanita. Walau bagaimanapun, usaha merekayasa kepimpinan wanita dan meruntuhkan stereotaip terhadap wanita dalam media kerap terhalang oleh faktor seperti budaya popular, rating dan perihal keuntungan. Selain itu, kehendak khalayak juga sentiasa diutamakan oleh pihak pengurusan organisasi kreatif dan institusi media berbanding kualiti kandungan. Kajian rintis ini juga menyatakan sistem sokongan adalah sangat penting sebagai petanda kejayaan wanita dalam kepimpinan industri kreatif. Sistem sokongan ini terbahagi kepada dua iaitu peringkat dalaman dan luaran. Sistem sokongan dalaman termasuklah dari kaum keluarga, sanak-saudara dan pasangan hidup kepada profesional wanita dalam industri kreatif. Sistem sokongan luar pula adalah berupa sokongan daripada pemimpin atasan dan kepercayaan serta dorongan daripada para pekerja.

Kata Kunci: *Industri Kreatif, Kepimpinan, Wanita, Pembuatan Keputusan, Penyiar, Digital.*

Introduction

As media consumers watch movies, tuned in to their favourite soap opera, listen to the radio and scroll their social media accounts we are most likely to come across a women figure either as the main cast or introducing her crafts on these platforms. Women make up half of the world's population, but only one in four women is mentioned in the news, 21% are filmmakers, and only 23% have a female protagonist (UNwomen, 2020). According to the Beijing Platform for Action, in 2020, 46% of printed, radio and television news perpetuate gender stereotypes.

Behind the scenes, men still account for 73% of top media management (UN Women, 2018). Along similar line, when gender relationship is concerned, the content of media, media language and visuals have the potential to accentuate the prominence and dominance of gender relationship and hence resulting in stereotypical gender generalisations (Strumska-Cylwik & Faridah 2014). These scholars also contended that media language and portrayal of content also play an important role in creating social awareness that is associated with the opinions, beliefs and models of the way people think. They also argued that the presentation of media language and content also plays an important role in creating social awareness linked to people's opinions, beliefs, and models of their thinking.

In 2000, 189 of the United Nations member states recognized the media's central role in the shift of gender stereotypes in the first Platform for the Beijing Code of Conduct. Women and the media are part of 12 key areas of action, encouraging media everywhere to do more to move women forward. The rise of women in leadership and political roles is positive but slow, and based on current trends, it could take another half a century to reach the UN Millennium Development Goals for Gender Equality in Political Representatives. Areas of agreement discussed during the meeting include decision-making, breaking stereotypes, training for female leaders, professional guidelines for reducing discrimination, and the establishment of monitoring groups to track progress.

The purpose of this qualitative research is to investigate the contributing factors towards women leadership in Malaysian creative industry. We pay particular attention to the creative economy as it emerges as one of the new industries with great potential to increase the country's growth and income. Cultural and creative industries are one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world. The economic contributions of the creative industries around the world are widely recognized. It is estimated to account for 3% to 12% of world GDP (World Economic Forum, 2014). This will make it a powerful and up-and-coming economic sector, reinforced by digitalization and the proliferation of services.

The term creative industries are officially derived from the United Kingdom. Tony Blair, as the then newly elected Prime Minister in the Labour Government, created a Creative Industries Task Force (CITF), as "a central activity of its new Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)" (Flew, 2012, p. 9). According to Terry Flew, the task force produces The Creative Industry Mapping Document in 1998, which recognizes the growing importance of this industry for the United Kingdom's economy as it employs 1.4 million people and contributes about 5% of total national income for that country.

In Malaysia, the creative industry is rapidly growing into a lucrative and financially stable sector. Malaysia's rich culture and heritage is an ideal setting for many talented Malaysian to showcase their creativity especially women. In *United Nation Conference in Trade and Development* report (UNCTD 2008), Malaysia has been identified as one of the top cultural producers among developing countries. In 2009 the creative industry has become a policy focus area of the Malaysian government, with the launch of *Dasar Industri Kreatif Negara* (DIKN) document in 2009.

In a time of rapid globalisation, many countries recognise that the combination of culture and commerce that the creative industries represent is a powerful way of providing a distinctive image of a country or a city, helping it to stand out from its competitors. Creative industries also help to shape and influence the public's mind.

With all that being said, how much of the creative industry represents Malaysian women's voice? Women's leadership and decision making in the creative industry is very crucial in order to give a fair representation of content, images and perception of the country to the world. Therefore, this qualitative study examined women's leadership role in the creative media industries in Malaysia specifically narrowing it to area of activities of television, radio and digital platform. Areas of which women have played a role in building the country's financial stability but not necessarily benefitted from the country's economic progress.

In line with the purpose of this study, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What are the characteristics and contributing factors for women to rise as leaders in the creative media industries?
2. What are the factors that contribute to women leaders' decision making in content creation in the creative industry?
3. What are the factors that contribute to women under-representation in media leadership in Malaysia creative media industry?
4. What are the supporting factors that can enhanced women's leadership in the creative industry?

Methodology

The selected research methodology for this paper is the qualitative research design. A total of eight women who hold or recently hold leadership positions in creative media participated in an in-depth interview ranging from thirty minutes to one-hour long session. Informants selected were amongst those in senior leadership positions and have served the creative media industry for more than 10 years.

This study analyses data collected through a series of qualitative interviews. This study takes an applied research approach by contributing to the current field of knowledge around women leaders in creative media. It provides an improved understanding of the existing challenges for women and aims at beginning to identify areas for solutions to be developed. Thematic Content Analysis was used to analyse verbatim data from the interviews and elucidate common themes from the women's experiences.

This study, from its inception through analysis, took place between January 2021 and March 2022 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The interviews were conducted in various locations of the participants' choice. For this preliminary research, verbatim responses from two informants were extracted, out of the eight interviewed, in order to provide initial data for this paper. The interviews were conducted via online platform namely *Zoom* due to the pandemic COVID-19 multistage restriction movement order.

About the informants; they are both business owners and founder of their production houses specialising in film, documentaries and content for television. They have been in the industry for more than 20 years, and are known for their women empowerment content. Informant 2 was a local Mass Communications graduate and informant 1 has started directing and producing since the early 1980s.

Informant 1 has produced more than 20 film titles and informant 2 has directed and produced nine well known films under her belt. Their diversity as a director and producer works on diverse genres such as romance, soap opera, horror, and history, and is an explicit version of third-wave feminist consciousness embodied in a sarcastic sense of playfulness that feminist media studies cannot ignore.

Qualitative research has been valued because of its ability to provide depth information about a particular phenomenon. Qualitative research is primarily an exploratory research. Qualitative research generally includes data in the form of words rather than numbers (Punch, 2013). It is used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations. It provides insights into the problem or helps to develop ideas or hypotheses for potential

quantitative research. Qualitative research is also used to uncover trends in thoughts and opinions, and dive deeper into the problem. Qualitative data collection methods vary using unstructured or semi-structured techniques. Some common methods include focus groups (group discussions), individual interviews, and participation/observations. The sample size is typically small, and respondents are selected to fulfil a given quota.

The researcher uses this method in order to find a deeper understanding of the situation based on the subjective individual experience which the researcher will analyse qualitatively. Qualitative methods are inclined to be looking at subject perspective or participant perspective. The qualitative method is used instead of a statistical approach which uses mathematical procedures because the aspirations and the experiences of the respondents are unique and diverse. Qualitative methods are naturalistic as they unfold naturally; non-manipulative and non-controlling; the researcher is open to whatever emerges.

The method is emergent and fluid as it accepts and adapts to inquiry as understanding deepens and/or situations change; the researcher avoids rigid designs that eliminate responding to opportunities to pursue new paths of discovery as they emerge (Silverman, 2016). Qualitative research is "information rich" and illuminative. That is, they offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest; sampling is aimed at insight about the phenomenon, not empirical generalization derived from a sample and applied to a population. To comprehend some meanings of life, one must get close to that life (Stake & Jegatheesan , 2008).

Findings and Discussions

This paper reports preliminary findings related to women's leadership in creative media industry in Malaysia. Based on the research questions they are grouped under four main themes: The findings are based on two women leaders' personal narratives collected during the in- depth interviews.

a. The characteristics and contributing factors for women to rise as leaders in the creative media industries

For the two women leaders that was interviewed during these preliminary data collections, there were overlapping themes of common characteristics contributing to the rise of women leaders in the creative media industries from their interview. Both have been involved in the industry for more than 20 years, and have experience the changing landscape of the creative media industry - from traditional platform to digital transformation.

1. Digital Platform

They strongly agreed that the rise of technology enabling democratisation of broadcast platform has given opportunity for content creators to share their voice. Women influencers are gaining control of their content and appear authentic and genuine as compared to the traditional platform. The demand for content and the rise of every person on social media was further amplified by the lockdown as a result of the pandemic.

Lockdowns resulted in increasing social media usage, a shift in customer behaviour from Covid-19, production issues with traditional advertising shoots, audiences gravitating toward authenticity and curated content, and brand budgets being upended, necessitating the swift change. Informant 2 summarises her view by saying that:

> *"So I think there is… there has been a shift. And I think the influence because of the fact that women are willing to voice up and using social media and in the more mass media space"*
>
> *(Informant 2)*

In addition, informant 2 observed that the digital space embraces the freedom of expression in a new liberating way. With lower cost of entry and less stringent monitoring by the authority, almost anyone with the passion to create content has the opportunity to rise. Furthermore, all the aspects of editorial decision are determined by the creator, they decide what should be broadcast.

> *"Well… basically all these women are saying to hell with all this authority lah… aku nak buat sendiri, it's a question of survival you know so when it comes to survival, they seem to be able to handle it"*
>
> *(Informant 2)*

The digital space presents women creators with a platform that is accessible, cost effective and user friendly.

2. Entrepreneurship

The informants also highlighted the fact that entrepreneurship plays an important factor in encouraging the rise of women leaders in the creative industry. Both of the informants are business owners and they are founders of their own production company. Thus, this set up has allowed them to have control of almost all aspects of their company, products, content and services. Being a business owner liberates women from the typical hierarchal corporate world. Bendell et al. (2019) claim that female entrepreneurs have significantly higher self-leadership skills.

Abd Rani (2018) has stated that due to the patriarchal structure of Malay families, the need for self-identification and achievement among women has encouraged the large-scale participation of women in such fields. This means that the patriarchal system and male dominance have emerged as a regressive system enabling women to take creative industries as a way of proving their identities. Creative industries are generally more receptive towards soft skills such as community building, networking, and writing as opposed to hard skills, which require complex problem-solving techniques (Sopa et al. 2020). This makes a case for women, who in Malaysia are mostly confined to their homes and are expected to take up creative industries more than their male counterparts.

Informant 1 stated that,

> *"I see a lot more women creators who do um… produce, create own content and they run their company, they try to do different things you know"*
> *(Informant 1)*

While informant 2 contributes the rise of women business owners to the advancement of technology and the open-ness of the digital space,

> *" The mushrooming of business using live streaming um digital business using digital platform… so things are grown in more ways that you can imagine . We call it the punca kuasa, you're the power"*
> *(Informant 2)*

The study of Sanyu (2018) has cited globalization along with technology as the main drivers of this change. This is because, with the technology, women do not have to work at a physical location but can now work anywhere with a stable internet connection. This gives rise to women entrepreneur amongst women especially opening business from home selling online.

3. Support

A superior support can help an employee increased job satisfaction, improved relationship with employees, increased organisational citizenship behaviour and reduced job tension. Both informants agreed that without the recommendation and strong support from leader or direct supervisory personnel, the chances of an employee to rise to leadership position is weaker. What more for women, a superior who advocate for her promotion, will give her a better chance to lead, giving her credibility and gaining the trust of others on her capabilities.

According to a research done by Fairygodboss, Female Quotient and Progyny (2018) it was found that men are more likely to be promoted by men, and women are more likely to be promoted by women. This is a remarkable example to show that there is gender discrimination when it comes to promotion in the work place. When speaking to informant 1, she is constantly aware when building her team. She is a strong advocate for women to take the lead, but found it challenging to find women who wants to take on the position.

> *" I've tried so hard to find women female directors that I want to give projects to, nak bagi tau. Like I can't find… I can't find!!! Then the ones that are already directing, they're directing, they're busy."*
>
> *(Informant 1)*

Informant 2 shared her observation on women leadership role in public broadcasting. She observed that in the government sector, the political influence played such an important role. A change in government would also mean a change in the senior leadership team.

> *"Sometimes you depend on the minister, the minister likes you or wants you to stay, then you stay lah, if not then you get transferred out, so and, but you know it makes a lot of difference when you have women in charge".*
>
> *(Informant 2)*

Informant 2 also highlighted that women broadcaster especially those who are empowered and becoming gender sensitive will ensure that women talents will be promoted for senior position. Despite the challenges that they face with the stereotypical demand of broadcaster, women will fight for women to be in the main lead.

> *"In my team my company mostly the women, the one that's very active in promoting content that have women as in the lead characters uh even though like the tv station state that they want women yang abcd … a bit more the typical lah but we always try and push"*
>
> *(Informant 2).*

4. Gender consciousness

Gender consciousness aims at increasing general sensitivity, understanding and knowledge about gender (in)equality. Awareness raising is a process which helps to facilitate the exchange of ideas, improve mutual understanding and develop competencies and skills necessary for societal change (Strumska-Cylwik & Faridah, 2014). These scholars argued that awareness raising comes with great challenges where media messages connected to gender are often subjected to some interpretation subordinated to specified ideologies, political and cultural habitus that given opinions and linguistic patterns connected with gender are based on.

Nevertheless, with greater gender sensitivity and more exposure to knowledge in the current evolving societies brought by globalisation, we are now more gender conscious than before with the available excess to resources on the internet, open conversations and discussions on gender equality, there's much more exposure and awareness amongst the public. Informant 2 attributes the rise of women leaders in the creative industry to this. The gender consciousness movement are visible and accessible to anyone, and thus men are equally exposed to it too. She opinionated that it doesn't matter if they are men or women, but they need to be gender sensitive to make that change.

> *"if they are not gender-sensitive, they will never be able to make that difference"*
>
> *(Informant 2).*

Informant 1 observed the shift throughout her 20 years' experience being in the creative industry, there is an upraise trend.

> *"And I think the uh the voices of the women producers the women creatives are getting very loud, So I mean I feel yes there is a bridge, there is a change, there is a shift"*
>
> *(Informant 1)*

b. The factors that contribute to women leaders' decision making in content creation in the creative industry

1. Revenue vs Ratings

Both informants are clear on their sentiment towards women portrayal in the creations. Be it from screening strong positive women lead roles to the people who are working in production. They make a conscious decision to hiring women to take the lead.

On content development both informants are very involved in conceptualising the story of their end product be it a full length film or for television programs for broadcasts. They are involved from the beginning of the inception of the project, from selecting the writers, actors, producers, directors right up to the production crew.

An interesting insight from both informants regarding content creations is the fact that even though they are advocates of breaking the stereotypical portrayal of women in media, they have to understand the mind-set and acceptance of the viewers. The TV programme ratings which then results to revenue generation is a very important indicator for any programs to be broadcasts. Informant 1 exclaims that,

> *"Open advertising that decides. you can have a parent power woman out there but the moment you are driven by your advertising needs… you no longer the influence that we can rely on"*
>
> *(Informant 1)*

Informant 2 on the other hand highlighted that, even though the creators included a slight tweak in the storyline to show an empowered women character, the cultural norm may resist it, forcing creators to go back to popular culture.

> *"And then Datuk said um itu kita buat and then we sold and then no lah ratings tak bagus, diorang tak boleh accept she ran away"*
>
> *(Informant 2)*

This sentiment also arises from informant 1, when she shared that:

> *"…even women don't want to see characters kalau perempuan tu too strong they want you to tempo it down a bit"*
>
> *(Informant 1)*

Striking a balance between popularity and women empowerment content is a challenge for local producers, where cultural norm and patriarchy system dominates the society's mindset. Though there is much awareness and effort on the creator's side, the acceptance of the general public is still low. The audience expects an ending that is expected and accepted.

2. Pushing Boundaries

When it comes to content, both informants who are respected figures in the film making industries, shared that they have to push the envelope in their quest to influence content creation. They would recruit like-minded group of people to work on the project. Informant 2 shared that,

> *"Open advertising that decides. you can have a parent power woman out there but the moment you are driven by your advertising needs… you no longer the influence that we can rely on"*
>
> *(Informant 1)*

Informants 1 and 2 also shared that they act as a mentor and coaching other team members to think critically and look at how content can create impact.

> *"I'm sharing something that can inspire them to think beyond on what you can do and to be helpful to your own gender not just your family your friends but there're women out there who genuinely needs help"*
>
> *(Informant 1)*

Despite being given a predictable brief by clients or stations when it comes to content, informant 1 is a rebel when ensuring that the women agenda is taken seriously.

> *"in my team my company mostly the women… the one that's very active in promoting content that have women as in the lead characters uh even though like the TV station state that they want women yang abcd …a bit more the typical lah but we always try and push"*
>
> *(Informant 1)*

Informant 2 also emphasised that she needs to work creatively around the norm, manoeuvre within boundaries, but yet need to inject elements where audience are triggered to think.

> *"when I convince them that it's in your hands to then change it to make it interesting without losing what is good about the novel"*
>
> *(Informant 2)*

The quest to influence or create change in breaking the stereotypical role of women as seen in our media is not an easy one for these informants. Despite being someone of power, dominance and influence with a cause, they have to push and persuade.

c. The factors that contribute to women under-representation in media leadership in Malaysia's creative media industry

1. Cultural and institutional barriers

In between the two informants, culture has been heavily highlighted as the main factor in contributing to women under-representation in creative media. The stereotypical perception of what a woman should be still prevails in the society's mindset despite the fact that a woman may hold credentials, experience and leadership role. In various occasion informant 1 shared that she resorted to getting a man to represent her views to get *buy-in*, especially when highlighting sensitive gender issues. The scenario represents by this statement:

> *but I've had times when I pass a paper to my male colleague… can you bring this up I think if I bring it up it will be sensitive"*
>
> *(Informant 1)*

Informant 2 added that people always perceived that a woman speaks or leads and tries to insert a change, they are seen as though they have a hidden agenda.

> *"Whereas I think if a man speaks up somehow people listen to it more. If a woman's talking about it, can we make the woman character macam ni macam ni, people be like eh apa your agenda ni feminist ke… "*
>
> *(Informant 2)*

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Women leaders are still minority amongst the pool of men in the creative media industry in Malaysia. Thus, lacking in support and sense of belonging makes being a female lead a lonely journey. Women are expected to behave and join their male counterparts, and this can be very discouraging and demotivating, this is what informant 1 has to say about *Boys Club;*

> *"in the bro club you either go for teh tarik at the warung with the guys or you're have a few drinks at the with your bosses, which we women know we can't fit in there "*
>
> *(Informant 1)*

Informant 2 echoed the sentiment and added that because we see leadership as a very masculine role and in a patriarchal society, woman is seen as nurturing, obedient and are expected to behave in a certain way, placing a lot of pressure for women to conform.

> *"I think there's a lot of pressure because for especially women uh, and more so actually especially Muslim women because they're so more judged than any other.. you know. So it's a lot more pressure to be …to be good… good on the internet than… than to be different"*
>
> *(Informant 2)*

The cultural mindset posed a challenge for women to rise as leaders in creative media industries. Though they may bring in their own leadership style and strengths, she may be seen as ineffective because what we are used to seeing and experiencing is the masculine style which tend towards assertive and tasks-based behaviour. Women's leadership style is more towards relationship oriented and democratic.

2. The Confidence Gap

A study done at the Cornell University by David Dunning and Joyce Erlinger (2003) found that men overestimate their abilities and performance, while women underestimate both. In fact, their actual performance does not differ in quality or quantity. The informants highlighted the same sentiment through their experiences. They highlighted the level of confidence that men displayed are much higher than their counterpart. According to informant 2, when offering jobs opportunities such as directing a film:

> *"Guys were like, yes okay I'll do it like oh can I can you give me to me I will I want to do it." When we tell the girls to say how about trying to write, how about trying to direct… they may have to think can I...can I do this… I don't know whether I can or maybe I'm not creative enough"*
>
> *(Informant 2)*

As a result of this lack of confidence women do not pursue future opportunities, and thus hiring women into the industry is a great challenge. Informant 1 shared about her search in hiring women directors, where she wanted the position to be held by women, but found it challenging to fill.

> *" I can't get the girls or maybe the girls just feel like we do our own thing which also happens, I asked sometimes they said no lah no lah we're not ready lah, we do first our small small little production."*
>
> *(Informant 1)*

On top of that informant 2 shared that women fear rejection and disappointment more than men.

> *I don't know whether for guys they.. they don't worry about so much about rejection you know, they'll come out and they're like.. like... like yeah direct for you lah.*
>
> *(Informant 2)*

d. The supporting factors that can enhanced women's leadership in the creative industry

1. Education

When women come to power, everyone benefits. According to the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, this leads to better results for society as a whole, especially in areas such as health, infrastructure and education. Therefore, women empowered with have a role to play in advancing education, but the relationship is not one-sided. In fact, education is an important tool for empowering women. This was fully agreed by informant 1 who suggested that:

> *" I think it's timely we have that, then there's a lot of things that can be done, even under one roof you can work towards women empowerment their development starting with the education first discussing empowering women through having a women university or a university for women"*
>
> *(Informant 1)*

When mentioned education, it is not only limited to formal education, but also creating awareness by initiating conversation surrounding the topic, as informant 2 stated:

> *"…there has to be more on these kind of conversations that take place at very high levels at leadership levels lah… And I think if the women want to see change, they have to step up too"*
>
> *(Informant 2)*

2. Policy

There is a need for policy and program activities that would raise awareness through effective education, media programs, outreach programs, discussions and more. Though many parties believe that organic method without intervention is an ideal way to move forward, but without policy change this progress can be stagnant and sluggish. Informant 1 highlighted that:

"There's some good women but because your policy such that when you change you want people in your party to come in then you rather take people who are unqualified, not suitable but as long as it fulfils your um… political needs, so it affects the development of a lot of things but in the creative industry it is badly affected when you start doing that"

(Informant 1)

While informant 2 is of the opinion that because we have lack of awareness in the area, it is hard for people to be aware and most of the time they are oblivious to their choices. Thus, if there is a policy imposed, people would be more conscious. She said:

"I think what we are not doing is we're not being conscious enough, for example we have a panel, mesti ada kalau kita say okay we are talking to Malaysian directors, and then on the panel and all Malaysian directors are same race, same gender"

(Informant 2)

Conclusions

This paper discussed the challenges and potentials of women leadership in the media creative industries. To understand the situation, the characteristics and contributing factors for women to rise as leaders and their influence on content development were explored. The discussions were based on the in-depth interviews carried out amongst seasoned women leaders in the creative industry in Malaysia. Most respondents attribute areas such as support, entrepreneurship digital transformation and gender consciousness as crucial in paving the way for women to rise in leadership. In term of conceptualising content – creativity, consciousness and pushing boundaries are some of the ways where they exert their influence. When it comes to women's potential, the informants in this study believed that women have the prospects to go beyond. Only if aspects such as policy and education are considered seriously by the industry. The governing body also needs to acknowledge women's potential contribution as leaders in the creative media industry.

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