

THE IMPACT AND CHALLENGES OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AS JOURNALISTS IN MALAYSIA'S MEDIA INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

In the 21st century, women's empowerment has become a burning issue around the world. Modern women are seeking an equal opportunity with men in various sectors and industries. In the past few decades, the number of women in journalism has grown remarkably around the world. Nevertheless, female journalists have not yet reached a critical mass and they remain a minority in the higher echelons of new organizations. This conceptual paper is to attempt to close the gap in identifying the challenges faced by women in the journalism industry, especially in Malaysia. On top of this, the study believed can gather women's perception of women empowerment in the journalism industry and what are the ways available to empower them. Information will be collected through surveys, interviews and together with secondary data, and will be analysed using SPSS. This study expected to find out the level of satisfaction of women and their perception towards media industry, challenges and opportunities for women journalists in Malaysia and finally will attempt to propose some ways to empower women in the media industry in Malaysia.

Keywords: Journalist, Malaysia, Media Industry, Women Empowerment

1. Introduction

The rise of gender sensitivity is one of the distinguishing features of our times. Two perspectives have emerged in the contemporary discourse on the modalities of gender equity which are women's development and women's empowerment (Aminur Rahman, 2013). Nowadays, empowerment has been discussed especially on women empowerment in various aspects.

In the 21st century, women's empowerment has become a hot issue around the world. Modern women are seeking an equal opportunity with men and they are aggressively competing in

various such as politics, economics, and the social sector. Many researchers also show that women around the world are now standing equally with men when it comes to certain issues. According to Rajechwari (2015), women constitute almost 50% of the world's population and women in almost every country are being the backbone towards their country's development.

Women's involvement in the journalism industry keeps increasing and the world has been viewed by many popular women journalists for the past 100 years. Women journalists like Christiane Amanpour for CNN, Hannah Arendt in the year 1963 who reported the Eichmann trial, Margaret Bourke-White a photographer was among the first women to report on wars, Rachel Carson, a science writer, Barbara Ehrenreich a journalist and political activist, Linda Greenhouse, a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter who worked for The New York Times for more than 25 years, Barbara Walters, a journalist known for her interviewing skills and many others. (Jen Doll, 2012)

The growth opportunities for women in the media and journalism are available and women have already achieved top positions. Nevertheless, there are still many cases whereby women's side-line by men and women have become the victims. Many challenges are being faced by women especially in the journalism industry and most of the time their talent has been denied due to gender. This research is to discuss the challenges faced by women in the journalism industry and how to empower them in this field.

2. Background of the Industry: Women Empowerment in Media and Journalism Industry

Media Industry refers to a content industry that produces several types of content, using diverse formats and distribution over different platforms. Media consumption is part of everyday life and an important part of leisure time, shaping cultural identities in a global context of media culture in which media are the primary disseminators of popular texts and thus, trends and consumption, using advertising and, currently new advertising forms and formats that integrate editorial content and shaping media content hybridization.

In Malaysia, many media outlets are either owned directly by the government of Malaysia (e.g. Bernama) or owned by components parties of the Barisan Nasional coalition which formed the government until May 2018. There are over 30 newspapers and tabloids published mainly in Malay, English, Chinese and Tamil. The most prominent newspapers include The Star, New

Straits Times, the Sun, Berita Harian, Utusan Malaysia, Sin Chew Jit Poh, Nanyang Siang Pau and Nanban. Both television and radio were set up as government departments.

In Malaysia, women first forayed into the profession around the 1950s. Many at that time are graduated from Malay schools with some knowledge of the English and Japanese languages. According to a paper by Universiti Sains Malaysia's History Professor Dr. Mahani Musa on the contributions of Malay women in newspaper and magazine journalism in Malaysia in the 1920s through 1960s. After that, New Straits Times has renowned journalists like Margaret Wee and Lakshmi Natarajan. A good number of women journalists was brought to the Malaysian Women Journalist Association (Pertama) in 1971 to safeguard the interest of women journalists as well as to serve as a platform to discuss issues pertaining to the profession.

2. Problem Statement

Past few decades, the number of women in journalism has grown remarkably around the world, where the percentage of women who reported the news rose from 28% in 1995 to 37% in 2009 (Gallagher, 2010). Nevertheless, female journalists have not yet reached a critical mass and they remain a minority in the higher echelons of new organizations.

On top of this, a glass ceiling effect continues to limit women's promotion to key decision-making positions. Hence, when it comes to symbolic power in the field, gender balance is still far from reality (Robinson, 2008). A UN Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on women's participation in and access to the media in 2002 highlighted the fact the status of women and the status of the media are both key indices of the development and democratization of society. Media, in all their forms, are central to women's advancement and empowerment.

Even though women very much contribute to a developing country, yet their contribution to media is still not encouraging. It has been observed that the ratio of challenges is more proportion to opportunities for women journalists in media. Women substantially outnumber men in journalism training and enter the profession in greater numbers, but still today relatively few are rising to senior jobs and the pay gap between male and female journalists remains a stubbornly wide one (Bhavna et al, 2018).

On average, a survey from 100 media companies shows that 80% of the directors are men, 17% of top management officers are women and there are only 6 female CEOs trading corporations on the top-100 list. The ratio of female decision-makers in the media industry is almost

negligible. Besides, the position for female decision-makers is almost neglected in many organizations around the world.

Therefore, this research is to close the gap in identifying the challenges faced by women in the journalism industry, especially in Malaysia. On top of this, the study believed can gather women's perception of women empowerment in the journalism industry and what are ways available to empower them.

3. Research Objectives

As noted in the problem statement, the general and specific objectives of this research study are as follow: The general objective of this study is to identify the challenges faced by women journalist in the media industry in Malaysia and specific objectives as stated below:

- To examine the work satisfaction of women journalists in the media industry Malaysia
- To identify the perception towards women empowerment in the media industry Malaysia
- To find out the challenges and the opportunities for women journalists in the media industry Malaysia
- To propose ways to empower women in the media industry in Malaysia.

4. Significance of the study

This study empirically explores in detail the challenges faced by women in the journalism industry, the level of satisfaction and perception towards women empowerment in the media industry, and reports how this industry can have empowered women. On a different note, the practical aspects of this study may provide information with regards to women empowerment with organizational and country development. Thus, this study may help the management of the media industry in Malaysia to increase the performance of the organization with women empowerment.

This study may not only contribute to the work undertaken in this field but may also lead to further studies on women empowerment in Malaysia's media industry. The research would also benefit the media industry in identifying the obstacles and then taking the required steps to overcome those obstacles to effectively empower women. Thus, overall, this research provides meaningful information to organizations such as academics, practitioners, media industries,

and policymakers in regards to women empowerment in different sectors in Malaysia or even in other countries. Also, Malaysia Media industry players will be better equipped with women empowerment knowledge to compete in the global arena by understanding the importance of women empowerment and its best practices.

This study focuses on women's empowerment and the challenges faced by women journalists in Malaysia. In the future, research can be extended to other industries on women empowerment.

5. Scope of the study

The study will cover only the media industry in Malaysia and coverage will be limited to women empowerment. Besides that, the researcher will focus only on the challenges faced by women journalist and their level of satisfaction as women journalists in the media industry.

Furthermore, the researcher will focus on the opportunities available for women in the media industry in Malaysia and finally will propose a mechanism to empower women in the media industry in Malaysia.

6. Literature Review

The rise if gender sensitivity is one of the distinguishing features of our times. Paulo Freire (1996) in his book “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” has discussed empowerment and after him, there are many scholars who have discussed and argued on empowerment and women empowerment. According to Kate Young (1993) empowerment enables women to take control of their own lives, set their agenda, organise to help each other, and make demands on the state for support and on the society itself for change.

Empowerment is related to the word power. Power can be defined as control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology. Material assets can be physical, human or financial; intellectual resources are knowledge, information and ideas; and control over ideology signifies the ability to generate, propagate, sustain and institutionalise specific sets of beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviour.

According to Riano (1994) empowerment is not just individual achievements or assessing certain power positions, but the way of energising individual and collective objects to participate in social movements and the process of emancipation. Besides that, women’s

empowerment also can be defined as “women’s ability to make strategic life choices which they had been previously denied” (Anju et al,2009)

According to a group of researchers, Golla Molhota, Nanba, and Mehra (2011) women are economically empowered when they can succeed and have the power to make and act on economic decisions. In addition to this, research also shows that dis-empowering women happened in many sectors. Feminist working in the field of media has unveiled the limited portrayal of women’s images, the increased presence of women in the media profession and despite this, the lack of progressive images of women in the media (Shanti Bhalraj,2000).

Besides, conferences like the Beijing Platform for Action, the Beijing +5 Declaration and Resolution, the Cairo Programme of Action, the Millennium Declaration, and the Convention on the Elimination and together with other conventions, has identified that there is gender equality in both as a development objective in itself, means to promote growth, reduce poverty and promote better governance (Kamla Gupta and Princy Yesudian,2006). These researchers also agreed that women’s empowerment is important for ensuring not only their personal or household welfare but also the wellbeing of society and is responsible for modification of quality and quantity of human resources available in-country to promote sustainable development. Apart from that, empowerment can also be seen through many perspectives and many researchers have used education, work participation at the workplace, exposure to mass media, freedom of movement, autonomy, and attitudinal changes in favor of gender equality as an indicator of empowerment (Selvi and Bakialekshmi, 2017).

Zaiton and Noraini (2015), women are responsible for about half the population of Malaysia and have participated in various sectors of employment such as manufacturing, business, service, and agriculture, in addition to their traditional role in the unpaid domestic sectors of the economy. Also, under Malaysian Gender gap index recorded an improvement in gender inequality from 0.34 in 1980 to 0.25 in 2009. However, the improvement has not come equally from all dimensions.

6.1. Women Empowerment Theories and Perspectives

Few perspectives explained women empowerment such as liberal perspective, structural view, and others.

Based on a **liberal perspective**, women empowerment approach suffers from three (3) fallacies; exclusionary bias, adversarial orientation, and subversive logic (Sharma, 2000). It suffers from an exclusionary bias in that it excludes men from the feminist discourse,

organization, and movement. Within the academic discourse again the women's question is being in isolation from the gender relations context.

From a **Structural viewpoint**, women's empowerment approach is intrinsically psychologist, structural, and elitist (Sharma,2000). It is a psychologist in that sense; it places over-optimism on the efficacy of conscientization as a key to women's empowerment. Even as the importance of awareness generation among women for their empowerment cannot be overemphasised, conscientization of women alone, to the exclusion of man is as important, perhaps even more than the change in the attitude of women, for setting gender relations on an even keel.

Besides that, the **Marxist perspective**, women's empowerment framework suffers from a sort of non-structuralist conditions. That is so because it ignores the importance of existential conditions, including the fact of the economic dependency of women on men. The economic dependency of women is built into the structure of property relations which are dominated by men. For sure, the developmental approach has failed to make a dent in the structure of gender-based property relations.

From the **Cultural perspective**, women's empowerment approach can be criticised for its marked Western ethnocentrism (Sharma,2000). It cannot relate to the cultural ethos of the countries of the East, including the Indian subcontinent. Its most severe limitation is its western ethnocentric bias. Hence, mired it is in the western feminist discourse that it fails to capture the cultural reality of gender relations in the non-western part of the world.

The **Equity approach** has also called the integrationist approach. The equity approach focus has moved from women's reproductive roles to productive roles, and employment and economic independence are seen as crucial to women's emancipation (Parpart,1998). Also, the theory recognises that development has affected women also detrimentally, and pursuing equality in the market and within the household could solve those problems. It stresses the importance of recognising both women's paid and unpaid work, as well as their opportunities to take part in the public sphere instead of being restricted within the domestic sphere (Erwer,2000), and these qualities made the equity approach difficult to implement.

The **Empowerment approach** developed in the mid-1980s is a relatively new approach in women and developmental discourse. According to Moser (1993), "The origins of the empowerment approach are derived less from the research of the First World women, and more from the emergent feminist writings and grassroots organizational experience of Third World women".

In addition, empowerment is related to the word power. Power can be defined as control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology. Material assets can be physical, human or financial; intellectual resources are knowledge, information and ideas; and control over ideology signifies the ability to generate, propagate, sustain and institutionalise specific sets of beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviour. Thus power accumulates to those who control or are able to influence the distribution of material resources, knowledge and the ideology that govern social relations in both public and private life. The extent of power held by individuals or groups is proportionate to the number of kinds of resources they can control, and the extent to which they can shape prevailing social, religious or political ideologies. This control is in turn relative to the power of decision making (Batliwala, 1994). The empowerment approach comes from women groups who seek to empower themselves through greater self-reliance. Women seek to influence their own change and the right to determine their own choice in life. It seems from the empowerment view that women need appropriate resources to achieve self-sufficiency.

6.2. Media and Gender

According to Lemish D, (2004) media texts are perceived to be one of the prime cultural sites through which it is possible to study the position of women in society. Wood (2005), there are three (3) themes that predominate the media: (1) women are underrepresented in news (2) women and men are portrayed primarily in stereotypical ways that reflect and sustain conventional views of gender. Men are represented as independent, aggressive, in-charge, confident, competent, and powerful. Women as dependent, ornamental objects, please men, domesticates and must be sexually desirable and available, subordinate to men, victims and angels. (3) depiction of the relationship between women and men emphasises traditional gender roles and unequal power between women and men.

6.3. Women and Media

Media are the mirror of society; hence they certainly need to reflect better the fact that gender equality is a fundamental human right. It is all about equal treatment of men and women and encompasses issues such as equal pay for equal work, equal access to decision making bodies, employment, pensions, health care, promotions and etc. In journalism, it also means fair gender portrayal in the news, the use of neutral and non-gender specific language, and women not being pigeonholed as 'lifestyle' or 'soft' news reporters.

According to the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP), a global survey taken every 5 years since 1995, by 2005 around 57% of all television news presenters were women, yet only 29% of news items were written by female reporters. Meanwhile, only 32% of ‘hard’ news was written or covered by women. Women are more often found reporting on ‘soft’ subjects such as social issues, the family, or arts and ‘living’ (up +40% women).

In many countries, the gender gap (different salaries for men and women) still exists. In most countries, the terms ‘sticky floors’ and ‘glass ceilings’ are used to describe how and why the gender pay gap increases with age, as women are overlooked for promotion in favour of male colleagues. Family unfriendly working practices such as flexible working hours or penalising women for taking time out to raise children, all contribute to the pay gap.

7. Challenges faced by Women Journalist

From the research conducted by various freedom of expression groups around the world, and consultations with individual experts, the report’s author of IMS Defending Journalism Book Series (2019) Silvia Chocarro concludes that globally, the threats women journalists face are two-fold.

As journalists, they are victims to the dangers all journalists work under but are also targeted for the simple fact they are women taking on a public role. Based on the author, the current worrying trends such as high imprisonment, murders, widespread impunity and attacks in digital space, affect women journalists as they do male journalists, on a specific gender dimension. In addition to that, sexual harassment and gender inequality in the workplace are the stresses women must contend with to do their jobs as a journalist.

Research that has been conducted in nine countries (Afghanistan, Colombia, Indonesia, Iraq, Kenya, Nepal, Pakistan, Somalia and Philippines) has identified several challenges in three categories as follows:

Physical security—Women journalists are more often targets of sexual violence than male journalists. There is a need for more gender-specific preventative resources, such as training and risk assessments.

- *Verbal threats and abuse, particularly online*: Women journalists are subject to a particularly damaging brand of vitriol that includes, in high volume, explicit threats of sexual violence, personal insults and circulation of private information or demeaning images.

• *Sexual harassment, workplace and social inequality*: Gender inequality is entrenched within the media sector and societies, manifested in unequal pay, low numbers of women able to advance to the decision-making levels and tolerance or lack of protocols when it comes to sexual harassment by colleagues, sources or interviewees. Social pressure against women joining professional ranks or family obligations also disadvantages women in the field.

Hence, the impact of gendered harassment, is that women are abandoning or choosing not to pursue a career in journalism, self-censoring and experiencing psychological and physical harm. This contributes to a lack of, or insufficient, coverage of women's voices and perspectives. These outcomes have been made worse by the lack of gender-tailored support and protocols in place at media outlets, for freelancers, within the national mechanism and civil society programmes.

In addition, according to an online survey conducted by Poynter, 750 media professionals accepted long working hours, hectic schedules, pressure to do more, missed vacations, irregular shifts like early morning and late-night, staff cutback, and as a result, a significant number of journalists are planning to leave the field especially women (Geisler,2005).

i. Gender Discrimination / Gender Equity

Research conducted in Kerala, India by Prinyanka, Midhila and Karthika (2019), shows that women journalists are facing many challenges in their profession. One of the challenges is the news is constantly reported from the male point of view and every news story or investigation report is highly male-dominated and showcases the patriarchal mindset. Research also indicated that in most of the newsrooms of Kerala, people who head media organization or edit news stories are men and women journalists are required to work the night shift which is not safe for them. A lot of evidence shows that sexual harassment cases increase towards women journalists not only in India but also all over the world.

In addition, women journalists also faced gender discrimination at workplaces while assigning beat, stories and promotion for higher posts. Kanyika Shaw (2013), stated that "Thai female journalist has become assimilated into the journalistic workforce, in terms of salary, education, working conditions, and that they need no longer be regarded as a separate group. Most of the female journalists have faced some kinds of discrimination such as verbal harassment, prejudice from new sources".

ii. Participation in Decision Making

Akhileswari (1990), “female work participation in India is among the lowest in the world. The number of women in the electronic media is dramatically higher than in the print media, averaging 30-40%, a figure that no market, on one hand, has expanded opportunities for women but the kind of beats or jobs are assigned to women journalists is to keep them confined to soft-beats like handling feature writing or shallow writings”.

Rosalind Gill (2013), in his book “Gender and the Media”, wrote that early feminist media came from a number of sources and it is women who worked in journalism or broadcasting and were concerned about the lack of opportunities for women working within the media. They argued that the lack of interesting fictional roles, the absence of female newsreaders, and the poor representation of women within senior media positions had a profound impact upon how women were seen in society as a whole.”

iii. Workplace Violence / Sexual Harassment

A 2014 report of a global survey by the international news safety institute conducted among nearly 1000 female journalists revealed that nearly 2/3 of them had experienced violence in the workplace, taking in the form of intimidation threats or abuse in their work.

iv. Psychological Problems

In the year 2015, Gabriel Arana through the article “A mental–health epidemic in the newsroom” says that “A 2001 study found that upwards of 85 percent experience work-related trauma. Other research shows that 4 to 28 percent suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder over the course of their careers, and up to 20 percent experienced depression.” Even when psychological symptoms like nightmares, flashbacks, insomnia, and anxiety do not rise to the level of a disorder, they still take a toll.

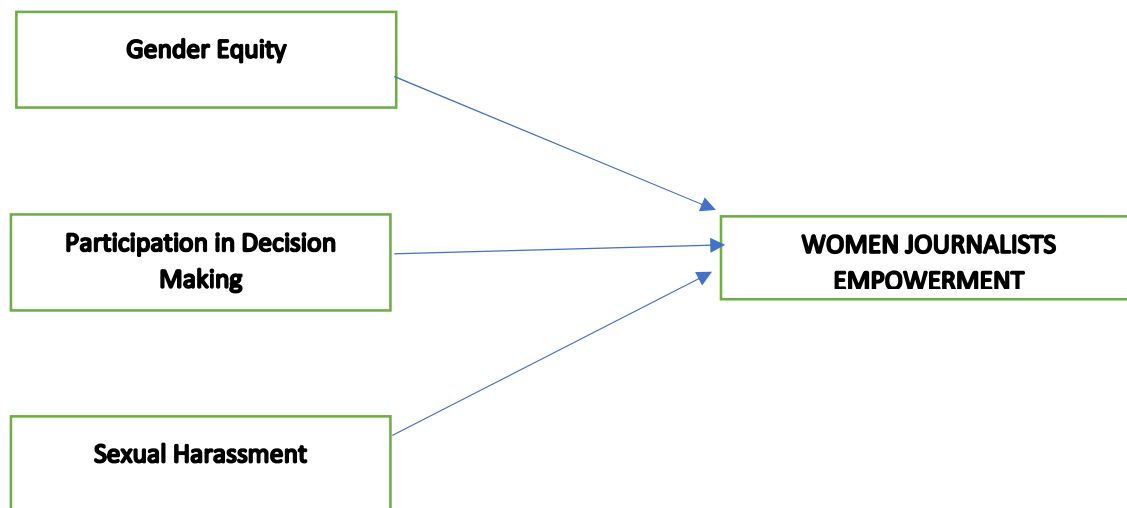
v. The Glass Ceiling

The glass ceiling became a headline-making concept, referring to invisible but impenetrable barriers artificially-wrongly preventing women from moving into decision-making positions. Women executives were assumed to be willing and able to buck male norms and create a different kind of newsroom culture, if only they could break through that barrier (Steiner,2012). Moreover, various theories were in turn broached to explain the emergence and persistence of the glass ceiling, such as institutionalised discrimination and sexism, and the contexts of specific organizations, including how they resist attempts at gender parity

8. Conceptual Framework for Research

Below is the conceptual framework for this study which illustrates the few challenges faced by women journalists in the media industry over the world. The most challenges that are faced by women journalists in the 21st century in the media industry in Malaysia will be confirmed at the end of the study. The mentioned empirical research frameworks are illustrated in the following section.

Figure 1: Women Empowerment and Challenges faced by Women Journalists in Media Industry



8.1. Hypothesis Postulated

A hypothesis is a suggested explanation of a phenomenon or reasoned proposal suggesting a possible correlation between multiple phenomena. The research frameworks as illustrated above indicate the research hypothesis testing a specific objective. The outcomes of data analyses will be examined in detail to either accept or reject the research hypothesis, in order to answer the certain specific objectives described in the first chapter. The following sections will discuss the specific research hypothesis derived from the research objectives.

H₁: There are larger gender-related differences between female and male journalists in societies that score higher on masculinity.

H₂: There are larger gender-related differences between women and men journalists in societies that score lower terms of Gender Empowerment.

H₃: There is no or little participation in decision making which cause work dissatisfaction among women journalists in the media industry, Malaysia.

H₄: Women Journalists in the media Industry in Malaysia face sexual harassment frequently.

H₅: There is a positive perception towards women empowerment in the media industry in Malaysia.

9. Methodology

This study utilised the survey research design method and a quantitative approach is used. For this purpose, structured questionnaires were used as the survey instrument. Quantitative research is that which tries to find an answer to a question through analysis of quantitative data, i.e., the data shown in figures and numbers. In this case, the logic of using this approach is to maintain real-life references and phenomena regarding the challenges faced by female journalists in the media and journalism industry in Malaysia. In addition to that, the chosen method is known for its economies in terms of time and resources. Finally, the quantitative approach is compatible with the study problems and their questions; and it enables the current study to reach and collect empirical evidence from a wider group of population

The survey sample comprises media industries registered under the National Union of Journalist (NUJ) Peninsular Malaysia and The Institute of Journalist Malaysia. The unit of analysis of this study is the journalists who are willing to share their opinions on women empowerment in the media industry.

The samples will be selected by purposive random sampling technique which was adopted to identify and include eligible respondents in the sample. At the first stage, it was decided to identify and select a convenient number of respondents using the purposive sampling technique. The number of respondents and the geographical area chosen for the present study will be determined on the basis of an estimate of the resources available to the researcher including the availability of women journalists, time and social support needed to complete the investigation. Adhering to the above procedure the data will be obtained using the questionnaire from 100 respondents. The sample size will be chosen by the researcher for this study is around 100 out of 721 registered under NUJ.

Quantitative data for this study will be obtained using a survey instrument. The researcher is employing a cross-sectional survey where data are collected at one point in time from a target

population. The survey data provide perceived causal inferences, is insightful, considered targeted, and focuses directly on the study topic (Yin, 2003). Quantitative data will be entered directly in SPSS for analysis.

The data will be analysed using descriptive statistics. After gathering all the data from the instrument, the researcher will study the collected data and edit it so that only the data relevant to the research questions and objectives will be retained. Data will be analysed using descriptive statistics like mean and standard deviation, simple linear regression analysis; multiple regressions will be used to link training and development to performance. The results will be presented by the use of tables and charts.

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