

## **WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN MALAYSIAN CREATIVE INDUSTRY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper sets out to explore women leadership experiences and influences in the creative industry in Malaysia. Despite a growing number of researches focused on the leadership of professional working groups, with male leaders, in contrast research on women leadership has received little attention, what more in the new and upcoming creative industry. The Creative Industry refers to a range of economic activities which are concerned with the generation or exploitation of knowledge and information. They may variously also be referred to as the cultural industries covering 13 areas of activities namely advertising, architecture, the arts and antiques market, crafts, design, designer fashion, film, interactive leisure software, music, performing arts, publishing, software, television and radio. This paper narrows down the scope to women leaders working in film, digital, television and radio in Malaysia. With more and more women running the show in these sectors, there is a growing opportunity for women to control and influence the content in the programs. These women are not just industry leaders, they have the power to shape society's attitude. To understand the situation from the women leaders themselves, this paper using data from in-depth interviews, discussed the characteristics and contributing factors for women to rise as leaders in the creative media industry as well as their influence on content development and the extent of their decision-making prowess. The preliminary findings from four selected informants in this in-depth interview found that digital transformation plays a crucial role in giving a voice to women creators, and thus allowing them to create influence amongst their followers. When it comes to content creation, awareness and consciousness are heavily mentioned by both informants, it is concluded that despite effort to inject empowerment and break the cultural stereotypical mole of a 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. In order for women to rise as leaders, a support system is a secret recipe to their success.

### **Keywords:**

*Creative Industry, women's leaders, decision-making, broadcast, digital*

### **INTRODUCTION**

We could go to watch a film, spend Sunday afternoon watching your favourite soap operas on TV or be stuck in traffic while listening to your favourite radio station. Not mentioning scrolling your social media to find out about the latest news and finding recipes for dinner. We will most likely encounter a content or watch, listen and follow a woman showcasing her crafts on these platforms. While women make half of the world population, only 1 in 4 people heard or read about in news are women, only 21% are film makers and only 23% of film feature a female protagonist (UNwomen, 2020).

According to Beijing platform for action which turns twenty in 2020, cited that research spanning more than 100 countries found that 46 percent of news stories, in print, radio and television uphold gender stereotype. Behind the scenes, men still occupy 73 percent of top media management (UNWomen, 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.

In year 2000, 189 UN Member States recognized the central role of media in shifting the gender stereotypes in the inaugural Beijing Platform for Action. Women and media are part of the 12 critical areas for action and urging media everywhere to make greater contribution to women's advancement.

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 conference are to increase number of women in media especially in decision making, abandoning stereotypes, training for women leaders, professional guidelines to reduce discrimination and establishing a watch group to track progress. Women in their own entities are different from men when it comes to their learning experiences and accumulation of knowledge (Khalid Mukhtar & Siti Maziha, 2017) and hence, have their own specialisation in contributing to nation building.

The purpose of this qualitative research is to examine the influence of women leadership in the creative media industries. Shanna Li et al. (2019) found in their study that leaders have a powerful influence on the expectation and behaviours of their followers from both male and female. Leaders inspire their followers to maximise their creativity which will then lead to empowerment. Hence, the focus of the present study is the question of Women leadership and Creative Media Industries in Malaysia. We pay particular attention to the creative industry because it has emerged as one of the new industry that holds a massive potential in boosting a nation's growth and income. The culture and creative industry is one of the world's most rapidly growing economic sectors. The economic contribution of the creative industry globally is widely acknowledged. It is estimated to represent anywhere from 3% to 12% of global GDP (World Economic Forum, 2014). This makes it a powerful emerging economic sector that is being strengthened by a surge in digitalization and services.

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 (UNCTD 2008) report, Malaysia has been identified as one of the top cultural producers among developing countries. In 2009 the creative industry have 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 represents 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 a 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. This is very significant in the current situation where every global government is striving to achieve sustainability in their day-to-day dealings. Sustainability is a framework upon which specific strategies could be used to guide decision-making (Huda Ahmed Idris & Faridah, 2021). Sustainability suggests that in the decision making process societies have an obligation to ensure equalities and fairness for all, regardless of gender differences.

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.

Objectives – In line with the purpose of this study, the following questions are formulated.

1. What are the characteristics and contributing factors for women to rise as leaders in the creative media industries?
2. How they influence content development and decision making?
3. What are the factors contributing to women under-representation in media leadership in Malaysia creative media industries?
4. What are the future strategies for women leaders in the creative industries?

## **METHODS**

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 are 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 **four** informants were extracted, out of the eight interviewed, to provide initial data for this paper. The interviews were conducted via online platform ZOOM due to the lock down.

Qualitative research has been valued because of its ability to provide depth information about a particular phenomenon. Qualitative Research is primarily 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).

## **ABOUT THE INFORMANTS**

About the informants, three informants are business owners and founder of their production houses specialising in film, documentaries and content for television and one of the informant is working for one of the major media company in the country as one of the senior leadership team member. All of them have been in the industry for more than 15 years. The business owners are also producers and directors, they are known for their women empowerment content. All four informants are award winners in their own field

Informant 1 has started directing and producing since the early 1980's, informant 2 was a local Mass Communications graduate in the 90's, informant 3 started her career as a consultant in the financial field before entering the creative industry as a drama series writer and informant 4 started her career in advertising 20 years ago in an Oil and Gas company as an advertising assistant while studying for her Bar exams. After graduating from Law School, she joined a music label. Informant 1 has directed and produce nine well known films under her belt, informant 2 has produced more than 20 titles, of which some won international recognitions, informant 3 a writer, producer and director of popular Malay drama series for free to view channel and informant 4 was often sought after in an advisory role for new businesses, especially when it involved marketing to the urban youth and was involved in the set up and launch of a few radio and TV channels.

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.

## **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 **four** women leaders' personal narratives collected during the in-depth interviews.

### **Findings for RQ1**

#### **What are the characteristics and contributing factors for women to rise as leaders in the creative media industries?**

For the **four** 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. All the informants 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. Themes that emerges from this research question are – *Digital Platform, Entrepreneurship, Support, Gender Consciousness and Opportunities*.

#### ***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 will 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. The digital realm has created a value system where women are no longer forced to stay within the concept of socially acceptable femininity. Moreover, their efforts to break these limits and express their authentic self are financially and materially rewarded.

Informant 3 highlighted that stamina is key in sustaining in this industry, it does not matter what your gender is. With the internet of things, there so much opportunities to be discovered, and resourcefulness is an essential trait.

*“resourcefulness to manage themselves in this industry to make them last longer because it’s about whether they have what’s the energy”* (informant 3)

According to a research by Idahash International Influencer Report 2017, women - rule social media, influence purchase decisions, set trends. According to our study 68% of social media influencers are female. Thus is echo’s the sentiment of the Informant 4 that opportunity is key in encouraging more women to play the leadership role, and this is what the digital platform offers, and opportunity for anyone to thrive.

*“...if you don't create that opportunity in the first place you wouldn't find someone qualified”*  
(informant 4)

### ***Entrepreneurship***

The informants also highlighted the fact that entrepreneurship plays an important factor in encouraging the rise of women leaders in the creative industry. Three 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 out 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, 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 and allows entrepreneurial mindset to thrive.

*“ 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.

Informant 3, opines that for a women to be holding the highest position in a production set , the chances of her to be the director in charge, is much higher is she owns the company. Which means that her chances of pitching and winning the position is higher.

*“ if you want to be a director, you have to come up with your own company , Unless you are appointed” (informant 3)*

### **Support**

A superior support can help and employee increased job satisfaction, improved relationship with employees, increased organisational citizenship behaviour and reduced job tension. The interviewees both 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 give her a better change to lead, giving her credibility and gaining the trust of others on her capabilities.

According to a research done by Fairygodboss and Female Quotient and Progyny (2018) to get a better understanding of the key differences between men and women when it comes to work and home life on 400 respondents, they found that men are more likely to be promoted by men, and women are more likely to be promoted by women. 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!!! and 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 especially those who are empowered and gender sensitive will ensure that women are promoted positively. 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).

Informant 3 argues that, when it comes to women advancing her career in the creative industry it’s all about the ideas. It does not matter what the gender is as long as the idea is valid and interesting, then the person will be able to sustain and garner support from their superiors and colleagues.

*“it’s about ideas who I mean it’s about um you know in the end of the day who can last long is the ones who have ideas and uh not just the ideas but also um the resourcefulness to manage themselves in this industry to make them last longer because it’s about you know whether they have the energy”* (Informant 3)

Interestingly informant 4 raised about the openness of male employees to work and accept a female boss. Without such shift in mindset and culture, the rise of women in leadership within the industry may be challenged.

*“it was actually quite commendable that he actually respected the fact he could have female boss, so that chemistry need happen in any transition or in any the industry right, to have given and take because not all men said, oh I can give in this position”* (Informant 4)

She also cited that 20% increase in women leaders, contributed by various factors not limited to male colleagues support and acceptance.

*“Today what I see in the creative industry, that a lot of women have gone up became the GM, see level and they even hold the top position in creativity and so now it use be maybe 20% women involved”* (informant 4)

In order for women to succeed and stay in the workforce, her family support system must be in place. Family and motherhood are top priorities for working mothers, and when the family is taken care off, she can perform better at work.

*“ they forget to realise when women have peace, they can even contribute better they have to be really strong and also have good support system within the family whether they have the in law to stay back ...or good day care or supportive spouse like that’s it really important but it still not every women is fortunate enough to have”* (informant 4)

The fact that not every women is privileged to have a conducive family support system due to it's individual and per case basis, women fall out on the opportunity to even stay in the work force, what more reach senior leadership role as they are made to choose between family or career.

Mothers especially may experience strong feelings of guilt for having career aspirations (Guendouzi, 2006). Despite the apparent gender-neutrality of parenthood demands, they remain highly gendered; caring is still primarily seen as the mother's task (Bowlby et al., 2010).

### ***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 visibly and accessibly 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 uprise trend.

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

Informant 3, strongly feels that anyone can be a leader, regardless of gender, it's all about inspiring and positivity, a good leaders does not discriminate and will aspire to do what is right and this includes gender equality. Thus informant 3 opines that a good leader is gender conscious regardless if it's a man or woman.

*“ I think in terms of leadership, it's really individual. I mean again la, to me, there's no gender I mean if somebody has leadership skills, then therefore they will lead effectively, and it depends on how much they can inspire. ” (Informant 3)*

Informant 4, opines that women leaders does not necessarily have a higher gender consciousness, from her own personal experience, a female boss can be as insensitive.

*“I have female boss also the strong career women and she elderly, she like a man, she behave like a man actually and try to run the business like a man, and it also she very brave, she said things like ah yow, you pregnant ah. You know she doesn't have kids and she doesn't see that, even the male boss wouldn't say the things like “ (informant 4)*

## **Findings for RQ2**

### **How they influence content development and decision making in content creation?**

Themes that emerges from this research question are – *Revenue vs Ratings, Pushing Boundaries, Balancing cultural sensitivity.*

#### ***Revenue vs Ratings***

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 all 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 informant 1, 2 and 3 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 mindset and acceptance of the viewers. The ratings which then results to revenue 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 arised from informant 1, when she shared

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

Informant 3, highlighted that as much as she consciously portrays her women characters positively, she ensures that what she writes reflects reality,

*“I will write according to what I see. So contohnya macam I feel that nowadays there are more women leaders in a family unit, so I will write that. So macam contohnya some women are the breadwinners, so I will write things like yang touch on reality-based “ (informant 3)*

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's much awareness and effort on the creator side, the acceptance of the general public is still low. The audience expects an ending that is expected and accepted

### ***Pushing Boundaries***

When it comes to content, the two informants who are respected figures in the film and drama industry, 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,

*“When I create stories I always make sure that I want some of the characters or the main character to be more substance and for me that is an important thing and the people who work around me, writers who collaborate with me they share the same sentiment so it’s easy”* (Informant 2)

Informants 1 and 2 also shared that they mentor and coach 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 been 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)

Working creatively around the norm, manoeuvring 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)

Informant 3 and 4, does not feel that they need to push the envelope far, as what they are portraying in their writing and content is already reflecting close to reality.

*“...writers they write, it’s based on what what they feel that is culturally correct. I will write according to what I see. So contohnya macam I feel that nowadays there are more women leaders in a family unit, so I will write that.”* (Informant 3)

Informant 4, sees an acceptance for strong and heroic women characters. There’s an appeal to see positive, unconventional women roles.

*“I think they (men) celebrate the fact that women, you know last time was portrayed in the very feminine way but now they portrayed as more heroic. I think and men in general support that and in fact they celebrate and find sexy and appealing”* (Informant 4)

Informants 3 feels that the reason for this acceptance is because of the strong respect mothers received due to cultural and religious reason. Many culture in Asia are matriarch and mothers are placed on the pedestal, their voice matters and they make important decision making in the family.

*“So you know when your mom especially kat Malaysia, orang Melayu kan I mean they say lah mak is apa...kalau nak masuk syurga you have to cium tapak kaki mak, the mom is like the mother is like the biggest thing in in Muslim Malay culture kan” (Informant 3*

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 informants 1 and 2. Despite being someone of power, dominance and influence with a cause, they have to push and persuade. Informant 3 and 4 on the other hand observes that there's a wide acceptance and demand to see positive and strong women characters in our media, but they must be within cultural context.

### ***Balancing cultural sensitivity***

Cultural sensitivity refers to a set of skills that allows you to learn about and understand people whose cultural background is not the same as yours. In the content creation context, all the informants are aware that their culture and gender view may not be similar to the target audience. Our informants, may come from the educated, English speaking and a diverse background from the originally intended audience.

*“ It's a catch-22 where the tv station wants the character to be like this, you know you have the story but they want a woman who is like a cry baby or a whinner because they say people want to see characters like that, the audience don't want to see strong woman people in charge of programming tv station themselves are not sensitive towards these needs maybe there are but they don't have a voice in there” (informant 1)*

From her experience adapting a popular novel for television, her writers highlighted on how the novel conforms to women stereotypical characters, and predictable storyline. In their effort to balance the cultural sensitivity of the intended audience, they carefully crafted plots and characters that's empowering.

*“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)*

Informant 3 noted that women who are taking the lead in their family and becomes the main financial provider for the family, they still plays very strongly her culturally assigned role, despite being the income producer.

*“I know this family lah the woman is the breadwinner, the husband is the house husband but the woman still respects the husband like like he's the leader of the family and then and he but he takes on the role and they cooperate tau” (informant 3)*

Informant 3 also adds on that audience accepts the role reversal concept, and it is accepted for the men not execute his society's imposed duties and take on the women's duties

*“In this drama I wrote, the character is a good house husband so he cooks, So takde issue, and then we put comedy we insert comedy in it, so it becomes like a laughable matter” (informant 3)*

As the nation progresses, Informant 4 attributes that the society is more open to acceptance

role reversal between men and women. As families shift into this non-traditional provider role, there are significant changes in the families' home role, where there is an increased presence of men in fathering roles that challenge traditional expectations (Rochlen, Suizzo, McKelley, & Scaringi, 2008)

*"Because we don't judge them, if you said you are a house husband like oh my god we tabik you, because you amazing, because your ego is not shattered, it also the change in the society in accepting that women have to go work and men need to stay back look after the kids and do house chores." (informant 4)*

### **Findings for RQ3**

#### **What are the factors contributing to women under-representation in creative media industry in Malaysia.**

Themes that emerges from this research question are – ***Cultural and institutional barriers, The Confidence Gap, family commitments and motherhood***

##### ***Cultural and institutional barriers***

For informants 1 and 2, 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 in order to get buy in, especially when highlighting sensitive gender issues.

*"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 add on that people find that when 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)*

Women leaders are still minority amongst the pool of men in the creative media industry 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 the teh tarik club go to uh warung with the guys or you're drinking club go drinking with your bosses or your guys which you know you 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.

*"And 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)

Informant 4 shares her experience that she felt the pressure to conform to the stereotypical idea of masculine leadership. It was not only reflected thru her action but also to the clothes she wears to office.

*“ I need to wear pants to work, I still wear whatever I want to go to work but I only wear pants to work maybe, subconscious that I need to behave to everyone before I get accepted into that group. So I wore pants, only pants and I never had a dress or skirt that I wear to work. Maybe for the subconscious, if I wear that, I will be weak”* (informant 4)

And because of this cultural mindset, informant 3 takes a different approach and instead of trying to impose change, her writing glorifies the women’s conventional role. The messaging that a women chooses the role that she wants to play and it does not mean that she is weak just because she choose to retain in a traditional setting.

*“I wanted to portray is it's okay to be a housewife, don't look down on suri rumahtangga we wanted to show that that that it's okay to have these traditional roles but everybody has to play an equal part in the traditional role.”* (informant 3)

The cultural mindset posts 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 base behaviour. Women’s leadership style is more relationship oriented and democratic.

### ***The Confidence Gap***

A study done at 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 thru 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 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 does not pursue future opportunities, and thus hiring women into the industry a challenge. Informant 1 shared about her search in hiring women directors, where the 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.

*It's the I would say confidence, what is the macam like like the muka tebal la. 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)*

Informant 4, opined that women are not encouraged to be their authentic self, women feels the pressure to not optimised their feminine traits when it comes to leadership. This results to confident gap, when an individual have to emulate a persona which they are not.

*"women end up in senior position they tend to speak the language or the way man does, let say you are in C level you're expected to man up, wears the pants" (informant 4)*

### **Family and motherhood penalty**

New research proves that "motherhood penalties" are real. According to the latest annual Bright Horizons Modern Family Index, 69% of American workers say that working mothers are more likely to take over new jobs than other employees. 60% say career opportunities are given to less qualified employees rather than qualified working mothers 72% of working mothers and fathers agree that women are at a disadvantage in their careers to start a family, while men are not.

While Informant 1 and 2 did not state family and motherhood as a barrier for women perhaps because they are single women, informant 4, who is a mother of two, cited strongly that family commitments does get in the way for women to progress in their career.

*" women not given the opportunity to shine because when they about to make their break they have family commitment, and they kind drop off along the way, a lot of them don't go on to push further to making to the top. That's very apparent, I don't know whether this is just creative industry but most the industry they do that, family come first" (informant 4)*

Informant 3, though unmarried, noticed the motherhood amongst her peers and circles.

*"that's the kind of challenges that that any woman would face now. When there's motherhood and when it comes to family especially orang perempuan yang the ones that have to care" (informant 3)*

Gender and family studies have long shown that parenting has different effects on women's and men's income. Women usually experience wage cuts with the birth of each child (Budig and England 2001; Gangl and Ziefle 2009; Gough and Noonan 2013; Yu and Kuo 2017). For example, one of the reasons that becoming a parent increases a man's income and reduces a woman's income is that it motivates men to take care of their families, but reduces the time and energy available to women for work. (Budig and England 2001; Gough and Noonan 2013; Killewald 2013).

## **Findings for RQ4**

### **What are the future strategies for women leaders in the creative industries?**

Themes that emerges from this research question are – *Education, Policy, Flexibility*

#### **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

*“so 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’s not only limited to formal education, but creating awareness by initiating conversation surrounding the topic, as per informant 2.

*“...there has to be more these kind of conversations that take place at very high levels at leadership levels “(Informant 2)*

The need to create awareness about the different jobs and roles, and to expose more women to the roles that they wouldn’t normally pursue,

*“think that there should be more women directors like myself. I don’t think that women do. There’s not a lot of women directors in the industry” (informant 3)*

This is then echoed by informant 4,

*“there always the guy who walking on the studio, there always the guy right and even the production are usually the guy and women are just the script writers and the talent “(informant 4)*

### **Policy**

There is a need for policy and program activities that 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 and policy change this progress can be stagnant and sluggish. Informant 1 highlighted that,

*“so 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 in an opinion that because we have lack of awareness in the area, it’s hard for people to be aware, most of the time they are oblivious to their choices. Thus, if there’s a policy imposed, people would be more conscious

*“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)*

While Informant 3 agrees,

*“I think you should have equally men and women working together and I you know the the government has to impose that you know...the equal” (informant 3)*

Thought imposing policy a mean of intervention, might be debatable, but policies and procedures provide a road map for change. They ensure compliance with laws and regulations, give guidance for decision-making, and streamline processes.

### ***Flexibility***

Flexitime is a practical model that focuses on achieving greater deadlines and goals than the rigor of the 9 to 5 schedule and when and where things happen. As long as the employee is performing his or her duties, it can be anywhere. In the flexitime model, good communication between employees and managers is the key to ensuring that all team members understand what and when. Informant 4 is a believer of this and feels that flexibility in time and communications helps women manage career and motherhood.

*“I actually a bit more sensitive throughout them, actually I give more flexibility to work from home or help them find or recommend baby silter nearby or give them more time to settle down, if we not settle at home and we never be settle at work. So since I had kids I am actually more responsible in that sense or more sensitive to women.” (informant 4)*

Informant 2 opined that, women too needs to be flexible and open to change. While a more condusive working hours and environment is put in place, women need to want the career progression.

*“And I think if the women want to see change, they have to step up too.” (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. The discussions are based on the in-depth interview carry out amongst seasoned women leaders in the creative industry in Malaysia. Most respondent attributes 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 while balancing cultural sensitivity are some of the ways where they exert their influence. When it comes to women potential, informants believed that women have the prospects to go beyond. Only if aspects such as policy, education and flexibility are considered seriously by the industry and the governing body to see women’s contribution as leaders in the creative media industry.

The context of this may not fall into the stereotypical definition of corporate leadership, but these women are leaders, where they speak up their minds and give a voice to others. When it comes to content creation, awareness and consciousness are heavily mentioned in the study, it is concluded that despite effort to inject empowerment and break the cultural stereotypical mole of a 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. In order for women to rise as leaders, a support system is a secret recipe to their success. Having superior’s buy in and recommendations goes a long way to seeing a women climb the file to rank of the creative media industries.

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