Reinforcing women's social consciousness and identity through modernmedia technologies in Malaysia

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REINFORCING WOMEN'S SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND IDENTIFY THROUGH MODEN MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES IN MALAYSIA

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REINFORCING WOMEN'S SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND IDENTITY THROUGH MODERN MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES

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Introduction

Let me begin by saying that the term "women" in our discussion here refers to the female variant of the human species, and not as the other gender in a man's life or environment.

When we say "women", we are including all the young ladies, the housewives, mothers and grandmothers. We also include students, working women and professionals including women engineers, architects, teachers, lecturers, lawyers, nurses, labourers, factory hands, typists, office receptionists, female social workers, bank clerks, supermarket cashiers and all the lot whom we can categorise as the female human species.

Next, we are assuming here of a situation in society where women already have achieved various degrees of social consciousness and identity. But because we are still not satisfied with the level of social consciousness and identity that women generally have achieved, we therefore intend to reinforce, meaning to add, increase, enhance and improve quantitatively and qualitatively the level through utilisation and taking advantage of modern media technologies.

I can here only give a cursory assessment of the level of attainment of social consciousness and identity among women in Malaysia. We have not had any in-depth research on this topic yet. We also have not done any study as to the extent of reinforcement of women's social consciousness and identity which could be attributed to modern media technologies.

Women's social consciousness and identity

What do we mean by women's social consciousness and identity?

I would contend that *social consciousness* is about awarenes, or the condition of being aware among women about their existence, position, expectations and contribution in society. This awareness includes their perception about their roles, functions, duties, rights and obligations, freedom, and expected performance in the society they live.

This awareness also includes perception on how they are received or accepted by society, on opportunities for self and personal developments with respect to mental, emotional, spiritual and social enhancement which are provided and made available to them, and on opportunities for building self-esteem, confidence, social networking and building mutual social relationships, cooperation, etc. for their benefit and betterment in society in the long run.

In short, women's social consciousness is about women's understanding, knowledge, proactiveness and actions taken in relation to their existence and membership in society.

Social identity is the extension of the awareness of women regarding their existence and membership in society. It is the result of and the impact made upon and in society as outcomes of them being socially conscious. It is about women being successful in putting across a statement and message of their position and making their presence in society felt. It is about them being recognised and given due regard and recognition in relation to their place and esteem in society.

It is also about efforts at making other people i.e. males, aware of their existence and saying that they (women) too have a share in this world and life, and that women also have roles to play and possess distinctive social rights and entitlements that need to be allocated and provided for, as well as obligations and important roles which they would like to contribute and perform. It is about presenting the body character and personality of women and their intellectual and mental strengths to society - singly, individually and

in groups – and saying "Hey, look here! We are also around. We are in this together, mind you."

Index of social consciousness and identity of women

Next, I think, we need to agree on how we should indicate this level of achievement of social consciousness and identity? What are the indices or indicators to be used? What or how has been the practice to measure women's social consciousness and identity universally? We need a certain agreeable paradigm and parameters to guide us in the pursuit of reinforcing women's social consciousness and identity through modern media technologies.

Is there an index? Can an index be arrived at? If it could not and if there isn't, then how do we indicate the level of social consciousness and identity of women? How do we measure women's awareness about their social existence and position in society?

To this, I would like to suggest that we measure awareness by numbers, rates and percentages such as the list following. Comparison of such numbers through a time-line or time-frame can be used to indicate both quantitative and/or qualitative improvements and enhancements over a period .Thus, any increase in the numbers, percentages or rates, or inversely a decrease, would indicate that greater reinforcement and enhancement of women's position and identity in society have been achieved.

As examples, I am mentioning the following as possible areas where indicators can be derived:

a) In the area of citizen's rights and responsiblities:

   i. the number and percentage of eligible voters who vote in elections.

   ii. the number and its increment of women getting and receiving formal education.

   iii. the reduction in number and percentage of cases of physical abuse of women.

b) In the area of social and voluntary activities:

    i.   the percentage in improvement of quality of services provided at day-care centres.

    ii. the number of forum, seminars, talks given directly or broadcast through the electronic media which are targetted and would benefit women generally .

c) In the workplace, occupations, and careers:

    i.   the level of information technology used to increase efficiency and effectiveness of communication and provision of information to employees and staff.

    ii. the level of use of office automation to assist and simplify work methods and procedures at the modern work place so that employees become less stressed and have a more comfortable working environment.

d) In managerial and decision making positions:

    i.   the number of women in managerial and top-level decision making positions or capacities.

    ii. the level, scope and kinds of delegationary roles and tasks given to women employees and staff.

e) In education and training:

    i.   the number of courses and training given and provided to women employees especially in office automation, information technology and in the use of other modern media technologies.

    ii. the number of women trainers, tutors and consultants in the organisation employed for management development.

f) In the home:

    i.   the amount of leisure time that the working women can enjoy and have to herself as result of use of modern media technologies.

ii. the number of working women who work and have their offices at home through use of modern communication and office facilities.

Putting an index to women's social consciousness and identity

The above are just suggestions and possibilities where women's position with respect to direct use and the indirect effect of modern media technologies could be given assessment. The overall total of some or all of those could perhaps be used to form an index.

However, to gauge the extent of women's social consciousness and identity, be it through utilising modern media technologies or otherwise, eventually is about the examination and evalutaion of how much of the traditional and assumed roles and functions of women that have been reduced, compromised or replaced by other kinds of roles, functions and participation in society's general and regular activities.

We need not argue that the amount of time and energy that housewives and mothers expend in performing tasks in the kitchen and at the home laundry has traditionally been substantial. But the advent of modern kitchen aids, gadgets and equipment which are actually moden household technologies have somewhat reduced the amount of time and labour spent on home chores. This has provided women with extra or "replacement" time to do other things such as for relaxation, physical fitness activity, self development, social and career pursuits and more importantly better quality care for the family.

Similarly, the advent of modern media technologies have helped and assisted women either in their exposure to the outside world and the creation of higher profiles of them in the social perspective. It has also assisted them to become more efficient and effective in the performance of the roles, functions, duties and tasks in the home and in the office, in personal and social activities, or in economic activities, their occupations and careers generally.

Role of women in development

Women play equal and important role as men do in the social and economic development of society and the community. In Malaysia, this has been shown to be true and quite significant. Female labour force participation in Malaysia is meaningful both quantitatively and qualitatively.

However, notwithstanding what has been said, we still need to accept the fact that whether we like it or not, the traditional role of women and functions as well as the expectations placed upon them as mothers, as family tenderers and as housewives, are still in place. As eastern peoples, we still value the role played by mothers in the development of the family and in the informal transmission of universal values and mores.

But here, we must again assert that these roles and expectations are not secondary nor subsidiary to those performed by males. They are of equal value, standing and meaning. The function of women as child-bearers, feeders, nurses must still be upheld and maintained because this is nature's established prescription for human procreation and civilisation.

Rationale for reinforcing women's social consciousness and identity

Discussing the rationale for reinforcing women's social consciousness and identity, we would need to delve into the 'why' and reasons on the need to reinforce women's social consciousness and identity.

The rationale from people like us as women may not be the same as the reasons given by the other gender. But of course, we are assuming here that women present their case and rationale as a united group. Where and whenever we have various levels of thinking and also interests as women, then we woud certainly be listing a variety of rationales and justifications for the reinforcement of women's social consciousness and identity.

But first we need a brief background of the situation in Malaysia and in this regard we need to discuss with and around numbers.

The size of the female population in Malaysia currently is estimated to be about 10 million and this constitues about one half of the country's population.

Age wise, the structure of the female population is 57 % for those in the age-group of 24 years and below while the median age of the female population is in the region of 22.5 years. There has also been an increase in the proportion of the female age-group 65-74 years indicating improved female life expectancy in the country

As regards females who are working, that is in the age-group 15-64 years, there are about 48-49% of the population, although categorically females represent only one third of the labour force. "The relatively low participation of women despite the increase in their educational attainment and buoyancy of the job market was to a certain extent due to the lack of affordable and quality child-care services, and flexible working conditions of women." (Seventh Malaysia Plan, p. 622).

However, there has been an increase of female labour force participation in the tertiary sector indicating education as an enabling factor for this. Female labour force participation is still highest in the manufacturing sector followed by trade, services and agriculture respectively.

The conclusion we can deduce on the situation of women in Malaysia is that generally women have been given new platforms and opportunities to contribute to social and economic development of the country through roles and employments other than the usual, traditional ones. This is because, as has been mentioned, these women have been in receipt of modern education and training, and thereto have obtained professional qualifications and skills which enabled them to participate in new job areas.

We can have a brief list on the rationale for reinforcing women's social consciousness and identity which is as follows. With the advent of modern media technologies much of these can be realised and improved upon through the use of products, machines and equipment made possible by such technologies. We can list some of the rationales as follows:

⇒ to give greater recognition and respect to women's existence and position in society

⇒ to give greater exposure and profile to the status of women in general

⇒ to empower women, individually and in groups to make informed, better and more impactive decisions in relation to their activities

⇒ to enable women in performing their roles and tasks better by getting better education, training and development of skills

⇒ to present women's role and contributions to society more visible

⇒ to improve the social and economic profile of women

⇒ to emancipate women from traditional roles and tasks

⇒ to develop a new and more positive image of women befitting their roles in modern society.

The bottom line to all these efforts is about the recreation and reformation of the image and status of women. We need to divert the current stereotyping of women as presented in the print and electronic media as people who are only capable of promoting consumer products and goods, be their food and perishables, detergents, health products, clothings and office stationery, or hardwares such as the television set, refrigerators, computers and the like, to one that depicts more honour and dignity.

It is time that women be potrayed not as sex figures anymore and be considered as performing only secondary roles in society. Women do have their rightful place and position in society, be it political, social, economic or in other similar areas. They are a force to be reckoned with.

We need to liberate such stereotyping and mentalities and to reduce such potrayals in the popular print and electronic media. We need to present women as independent and equally capable of performing other tasks and professions which give equally superior value and volume in terms of national and social developments. Women do provide substantial contribution towards the productivity and income of the nation.

Modern media technologies like computers and the internet provide women with wider opportunities and avenues at information resourcing and referencing. They also provide for better networking and contacts between and among women of similar interests. New equipment and apparatus have opened for women other forms of jobs and careers such as in the commercial

and banking sectors, information technology and mass media industry, instead of the normal typecast or labelled careers such as becoming nurses, school teachers and general office clerks.

Modern media technologies

As with any other kinds of technology, any media technology is the product of elaborate research and development efforts. It is related with the invention of new equipment, tools and gadgets and finding as well as adopting new ways, methods and procedures which are deemed to be more effective and efficient. The objective in research and developing new technologies since time immemorial, anyway, has been the pursuit of greater efficiency and effectiveness in terms of cost, time, utilisation of resources and the like.

As the function of media is mostly towards communication, public relations and the dissemination of information and knowledge, the technologies that would be developed would then be that which would enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of communication. There is need for faster access to information and the dissemination of such information and also the need for faster and greater access of knowledge at cheaper costs.

Products which we are familiar with as result of media technology developments are the telephone, radio and television. We also have products in the print medium such as newspapers, magazines, brochures and the like. Recently, subsequent to the developments in telecommunication technology and the accompanying electronics and computer technology developments, we were introduced to products like the internet and web pages making it possible for teleconferencing, both in audio and video formats, and also in information storage and retrieval systems such as the compact discs and video discs in addition to formats like the floppy and hard discs of the computer.

Technology development on equipment for use in the broadcasting sector has enabled information and entertainment materials both pictorially and voice, to be broadcast digitally giving high resolution pictures and videos as well better clarity of sound. Other than using the standard wireless and radio,

broadcasting activity uses also the satelite and cable platforms which give better value to customers with better reception and clearer pictures.

Perceived reinforcement of women's social consciousness and identity through modern media technologies in Malaysia

How have modern media technologies reinforced women's social consciousness and identity in Malaysia?

I am able here but to list only some general observations and perceptions where seemed to have benefitted from modern media technologies:

a) women in general are more aware of their rights, legal and moral, and also of their responsibilities in a democratic system of government;

"Measures were also taken to increase public awareness with regard to the rights of women under the law. The media played an important role in facilitating the dissemination of information pertaining to the rights of women in areas such as marriage, divorce, employment and property. This enhancement of legal literacy among women heightened awareness of their legal rights as well as of the means of enforcing their rights." (Seventh Malaysia Plan, p. 627)

b) women obtaining greater and wider coverage of their participation in government, social and community services;

"In Malaysia, the concept of participatory democracy has been commonly practised. The government often relied on a collective consensus system of administration. It often solicits active participation and representation from a wide cross-section of the Malaysia people. This arrangement is deemed necessary to enable the citizenry to participate in decision-making; for a common goal to be established; to gain voluntary contribution for solutions; and decisions made through persuasion and agreement." (S. Karthyeni & Tengku Mohd. Azzman

Shariffadeen, *Information Technology and Work in the National Development Perspective*; MIMOS, 1993).

The word "people" in the (above) quotation is meant to include also women, and this invitation towards decision making, more often than not is done and assisted by the media.

c) women obtaining greater knowledge and information of their family roles and responsibilities and tips on the better performance of these tasks. Apart from attending courses, media is a good source of information especially concerning health such as on outbreaks of childhood illnesses and transmittable diseases as well good dietary practice. With modern media technologies however, the role of media extends beyond that of an informer but could also be an interactive medium.

d) women getting more mention and exposure in the media on their achievements and successes in various fields, and hence greater respect and recognition. This covers not only stories about women in leadership positions in whatever field but also includes women aho are followers and the ordinary women at the local and village level as well.

Conclusion

I have tried to give just a brief and very general overview of the topic Reinforcing Women's Social Consciousness and Identity Through Modern Media Technologies in Malaysia. Frankly, I have not intended to be exhaustive in my presentation. I would very much accept and appreciate your questions and comments for us all to form a common opinion on the matter.

Thank you.

RAR/NPFDB/24081997

Table 1.

Eigenvalue and variances of each factor

Factor	Eigenvalue	Variance rate	Cummulative explanatory power
1	7.88245	20.4	20.4
2	6.45761	18.1	38.5
3	2.45783	6.9	45.4
4	8.26574	21.6	67.0

Table 2.

Factorial loadings for four factors

Factor 1. Incentives Reasons You Buy Computer

	Factorial Loading
Computer is a new technology	.82554
Computer is important for my children education	.78952
Computer is important for myself	.68753
Computer is a must for today's life	.50722

Factor 1 and 2 are considered as Incentives to Computer Technology. Four variables constitutes the greatest loadings on Factor 1. Computer is a new technology, computer is important for my children education, computer is important for myself and computer is a must for today's life are most associated with Factor 1 -- reasons you buy computer.

Factor 2. Incentives Reasons You learn To Use Computer

	Factorial Loading
I don't know much about computer	.82593
This is a self-development for myself	.72356
There is so much information on the Internet	.68932
Computer is important for my children education	.58823
It is a modern lifestyle	.47724

The second factor (reasons you learn to use computer) is most strongly related to the set of variables, I don't know much about computer, this is a self-development for myself, there is so much information on the internet, computer is important for my children education and it is a modern lifestyle.

Factor 3. Economic barrier

	Factorial Loading
Computer is expensive to buy	.72844
Computer programs are expensive	.71533
Computer services are expensive	.68972
Computer classes are expensive	.55674
Computer loan is not attractive enough	.43424

The third factor (economic barrier) has high loadings on computer is expensive to buy, computer programs are expensive, computer services are expensive, computer classes are expensive and computer loan is not attractive enough.

Factor 4. Cultural Barriers and Impediments

	Factorial Loading
My English command is very poor	.78923
I have to take care of my children	.77862
My family often visits me	.77632
I have to take care of my old parents	.68722
My family demands a lot of my time	.67432
I have to cook for my family	.43251

The fourth factor (cultural barriers and impediments) loads highly on my English command is very poor, I have to take care of my children, my family often visits me, I have to take care of my old parents, my family demands a lot of my time and I have to cook for my family.

Table 3

Group means of factorial loadings

	Computer User	Non-User
Reasons you buy computer	.38533	-.32817
Reasons you use computer	.21560	-.28591
Economic barriers	-.12637	.33248
Cultural barriers and impediment	-.10607	.32171

	Wilks's Lambda	F	Significant Degree
Reasons you buy computer	.87827	11.01	.2328
Reasons you use computer	.82772	8.051	.1576
Economic barriers	.93733	9.443	.0172
Cultural barriers and impediment	.98488	7.202	.0011