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Women And The Media: Trends And Opportunities

By

Pia Alisjahbana
WOMEN AND THE MEDIA: TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

by Pia Alisjahbana

The Indonesian press in its development has in the 90’s grown tremendously. Technology has largely made it possible to publish various kinds of media to reach the great diversity of readers and needs, thus creating an interesting market. According to the latest information from the Serikat Penerbit Suratkabar (the Association of Press Publishers) there are 284 Publishers divided in four categories: daily newspaper, weekly tabloids, magazines and bulletins all over Indonesia.

There are 77 daily newspapers, national as well as local, and with different circulations; 88 weekly tabloids, 111 magazines: weekly, bi-weekly and monthly magazines; and 8 bulletins. Among them are publications specifically aimed at women readers: 2 tabloids and 13 magazines, which doesn’t mean that they are not included in the other publications. A tremendous growth compared to the 1970’s and the 1980’s.

Since our independence in 1945, Indonesian women had the same opportunities as men to obtain a better education and enter the job market in a great diversity of fields.

What would the opportunities be for the Indonesian women to be part of this tremendous growth of the media, not only in the print media, but also in the audio-visual media. We should be looking in the past of how Indonesian women became involved in this development of the media, print as well as audio-visual.

Opportunities for Indonesian women in the media in the past.

Looking back in the past Indonesian women, as early as at the turn of the twentieth century, began to write for the media. It was Raden Ajeng Kartini, who was fortunate as a daughter of a Javanese Regent to get a Dutch education and who spoke and wrote fluently in Dutch, sent her articles on various aspects of Indonesian culture and women, to Dutch magazines, such as the Dutch magazine De Gids and the monthly Elsevier and a Dutch magazine for women in the Netherlands East Indies called De Echo. According to Myra Sidharta, a psychologist and who has done research on the cultural History of the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia 1), Indonesian women of Chinese descent, as early as 1906, wrote for the women’s section of a newspaper written in Malay, aimed for the Chinese readers. These publications flourished until 1920.
In 1910 women began to join the editorial staff under the leadership of a Dutch lady, Laura Staal, writing for a magazine called "Poetri Hindia" (The Indian/Indonesian Lady), which appeared in the "Medan Priyayi" (The Paper for the Upper Class), newspaper, under the management of the Chief Editor, R.M.T. Adhisoerjo. In 1911, an Indonesian woman, Siti Harainja (R.A. Hendraningrat) was appointed as Chief Editor. She herself was a graduate of the Dutch Gymnasium, Koning Willem III in Jakarta (then Batavia). Her husband was then the Assistant Wedana (Assistant Administrator) of Tanah Abang, Batavia. Poetri Hindia was aimed at the upper class society, mostly Indonesians who had a Dutch education, it drew the attention of the Dutch Royal Family, the Queen Wilhelmina, and it acknowledged the Royal Patronage on its cover.

In 1912, in Medan-Sumatra, a newspaper called Soenting Melajoe, was published in Malay, by Datoe Soetan Maharadja, under the editorship of two ladies, Siti Roehana and Zoebaidah Rana Djoewita. In Pacitan, Central Java, another paper called Wanita Sworo (The Women's Voice) was published using the Javanese language, under the editorship of Siti Soendari. Both publications reflected the local interests, especially Soenting Melajoe, discussed a great deal on the old Sumatran weaving traditions. They even established a Weavers Club and an Association to Aid the Women Weavers.

In 1914 a new publication the Sekar Setaman (A Garden of Flowers) was published in Malay. It didn't live long due to departure of the editors who were pursuing a higher education in the Netherlands, mostly in the teaching profession.

When women got the opportunity to study in the Netherlands, they express their thoughts in a publication called Poetri Mardika (The Independent Woman), under the editorship of Mr. Sadikoen and Mr. R. Abdoel Rachman. The aim of this magazine was to bring "the attention to the condition of the indigenous women of the East Indies." Among others was discussed topics on monogamy and polygamy, child marriages and mixed marriages. Among its regular contributors is Siti Soendari. The Association consisting both of Dutch and Indonesian members, and was a strong advocate for the freedom for women. In 1918 a Sundanese edition appeared called Panoengtoen Istri (The Guidance for Women).

Before World War II, Indonesian women joined all kinds of women organizations. These associations published bulletins or magazines, among others Soeara Perempuan (Voice of the Woman) by the "Pergerakan Perempuan" (Women's Movement). This

1) Myra Sidharta, Women's Magazines in Indonesia: Between Hopes and Realities
organization also published in Medan a publication called the Perempoean Bergerak (Women in Action). The "Sarikat Kaoem Ibu Sumatra" (Women's Union of Sumatra) published Al Sjarq. In Manado, North Sulawesi, a newspaper was published by a women's group in aid of children's welfare called PIKAT-Pertjintaan Ibu Kepada Anak Temereroemnya (A Women's group in aid for the Children's Welfare). In Yogyakarta, Central Java, Aisyah, the women's section of the Islamic movement Muhammadiah also had a publication for its members. In Garut, West Java, the Soeara Istri Kristen (The Voice of the Christian Wives), was published by Javanese Christian Women's Association and in Jakarta, upon her return from the Netherlands after finishing her law studies, Mrs. Maria Ulfisanto as member of the Association Isteri Indonesia (Indonesian Wives Association) published its own publication. The organization of housewives called The Organization of Housewives, whose members consisted not only of Dutch, but also of Indonesian and Chinese women as well, can be found in almost every big city. And each of these organizations would publish its own publication called in Dutch: Orgaan voor de Vereeniging van Huisvrouwen (The Magazine for the Organization of Housewives), a.o. in Bogor, Yogyakarta, Palembang and other large cities.

After 1929, when the Indonesian Women's Congress published in the Indonesian language the "Isteri-Balai Soeara PPII (Persatuan Perkumpulan Isteri Indonesia) dan Soeara Kabar Boelanan Dalam Bahasa Indonesia Oentoek Kemadjoean Oemoe (The voice of the Persatuan Perkumpulan Isteri Indonesia and the monthly 'News in the Indonesian Language for the Progress of the People in General).

In the 20’s, magazines which were not tied to any organization began to appear. In 1922, a publication called Doenia Istri (Women’s World) was published by Mr. Palindih and edited by Ms. Rebecca and Ms. Siti Damilah.

At the same time in the magazine Hoa Po, published in Gresik, East Java, a women’s section appeared which provided the young Chinese ladies guidance of how to behave in public and not to make them the laughing stock by imitating Western ways. After changing proprietors this magazine became a forum for discussing Western influences on Indonesian Women. In those days men became quite critical of Indonesian women wearing Western clothes, writing and editing for the media.

Ms. The Tien Nio, in 1928, published a magazine called Doenia Istri (Women’s World), which became the precursor of the modern women’s magazine, featuring fashion pages.

In 1930 Mrs. Soewarni Djojosepoetro published a magazine called Istri Sadar (The Conscious Woman), which was a more progressive magazine in its outlook than the
other publications of the period, which limited themselves to things of interest to the housewives, such as handicraft ideas and recipes. In this magazine's opinions on various topics and ideas for fundraising were raised.

In the 1930's the Western educated Chinese published a magazine called Fu Len (Women) in Dutch, whereas the Chinese ladies who kept their eastern identities published a monthly magazine in Malay called Maandblad Istri (Women's Monthly), under the leadership of Mrs. Tjoa Hin Hoei, daughter of a well-known journalist called Kwee Tek Hoa. This magazine was also avidly read by the Indonesian readers. This magazine was very popular during the 30's and many women readers sent in their articles.

For the Indonesian women a magazine called Doenja Kita (Our World) was published by Mrs. A. Latif. Besides the usual features, such as oneastern fashions, it also carried articles on law by by Mrs. Maria Ulfah Santoso, who has studied law in the Netherlands and by Mrs. Latif's daughter, Mrs. Hernawati Diah, who was studying at Barnard College in New York, on her observation of American Housewives.

During the Japanese occupation, 1940-1945, all these publications discontinued.

After our independence in 1945, new magazines began to appear. The first one was called Soeloeh Wanita (Women's Torch), published in Malang, East Java, not long after the Women's Congress in Klaten in 1945. It's motto read:

"Womens hands reach out everywhere....; to public kitchens, orphanages, poorhouses, emergency rooms, the fields of education, economics and politics, the armed forces, in the interest of our country, the independent Republic of Indonesia."

A feeling of exuberance pervaded. In the Soeloeh Wanita, 2nd year, issue 3, April 19, 1947, page 11, in an article entitled "Wanita dan pers-jurnalistiek" (Women and the Press), Rini Marhaen wrote:

"We are now in an independent country. Freedom of the press is now ours. A healthy opposition, critiques, news and the journalists' pen will revive and educate our society." 2)

Special interest publications were published. A magazine called Karja (Work), edited by Artati Soedirdjo, published by the organization called Pekerja Perempuan Indonesia (Women Workers of Indonesia).

Until 1966, we saw the rise of women's organizations. The need was felt by the Indonesian women to join organizations which suits to their interests, whether it is professionally or non-professionally. With it many publications were published, such as:

2) Prisma, 1982
Suara PERWARI (Persatuan Wanita Republik Indonesia) -- The Voice of the Women’s Association of the Republic of Indonesia. Wanita Sadar (The Conscious Woman) of the Indonesian Women’s Consciousness Movement, Mekar (Blooming), published by the PERSIT (The Association of the Army Wives), Wanita Indonesia of the Indonesian Women Movement, Saraswati of the Association of the Women of the University of Indonesia), Wanita PERSALII of the Indonesian Lawyers’ Association. They not only serve as a news bulletin, but also as a guidance for its members.

The non-organizational magazines made its appearance with the publication called Keluarga (Family), first published by Mrs. A. Latif, publisher of the former Doenia Kita. In 1957, her daughter, Mrs. Herawati Diah took over the magazine.

In 1966, the Sinar Kasih publishing company, published Mutiara (Pearl).

Trends in the 70’s and the 80’s

The late 50’s and the early 60’s many newspapers and publications were closed down, because of political reasons, a.o.. The daily newspaper Pedoman, Ties with the international world were severed. When President Suharto succeeded President Sukarno in 1965, the new order restored relations with the international world, which had been severed by President Sukarno.

With the opening up to the international world, exchange of informations and ideas began to occur. Its influence was felt. New publications appeared, the news magazine Tempo was published, heralding this new period.

In the 70’s life-styles began to change. The standard of living improved. If in the 60’s people were deprived of all the news, trends and happenings in the international world, now there was an influx of them. The readers were eager for information on the latest trends, whether it would be in fashion, health, food, lifestyle etc.

In the 70’s it was the trend for women to join the working force, especially the women who obtained a university degree. Self-employment, such as starting a business such as catering, fashion, handicraft, were very much evident among the women.

It was during this time our group published the women’s magazine femina in 1972, the editors consisted of with a University degree and who would like to share their experience with other women. Among its contributors are Prof. Dr. Haryati Soebadio, who loves to write short stories and Mrs. Martha Tilaar, who in those days ran her first beauty salon, became our guest Editor for the Beauty Column. Designers, such as Peter
Sie, Iwan Tirta, Prayudi, filled the fashion pages with their designs. Profiles of successful persons were featured, How-to columns appeared.

The need was felt for a teen-age girls magazine. There hasn’t been any before. In 1973 Gadis appeared. Until now it is the only teen-age magazine for girls. Other women magazines followed, because the market was there: Kartini, Sarinah, Pertiwi.

In the 70’s the emergence of young married couples, who educated, employed, created a need for a magazine for young parents, Ayahbunda appeared in 1976. It is a magazine for young professional couples who need to get information on how to be a good parent.

In the 80’s Jakarta as the capital city of Indonesia, expanded rapidly, due to the opening up for foreign investments, suddenly an economic boom was felt. Highrise buildings, 4 and 5 stars hotels, apartments, shopping malls, luxurious shops, fitness centers, nightclubs, exclusive restaurants appeared. Not only in Jakarta, but also in the other big cities all over Indonesia.

New publications appeared, especially business magazines. But a need for an up-market magazine was felt, and a magazine such as Matra and Dewi filled that need.

Women in the Media

With the rapid rise of publications in the 80’s, daily newspapers, magazines, tabloids, whether they cover news, entertainment, business, opportunities arose for young women to join the editorial, the marketing, the promotional, the advertising staff of those various publications.

In the 90’s the trend is felt for a more healthy lifestyle, more environmental conscious, these are all reflected in the various publications that appeared in the 90’s. This means that the writers themselves should be well-informed on the topic that they are interested in. More specialised journalists were needed in this job market.

In conclusion I would like to say that the trends for women is that many of them will be professionals and they are expected to do their jobs well. Publications can only be very interesting for the readers if the editorial staff is able to convey to them about the happenings in their world and how to cope with it.

Jakarta, May, 1995

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