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FACTORS PRESSURING WORKER'S PERSONAL WELLBEING AT MEDIA WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT



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Abstract

Work and the environment of today's human life often cause stress. Media convergence has changed the media industries, which in turn, acquires new technological systems, organisational structure and patterns of production processes. Changes in the way we work in today's digital technology era continue to create work stress. One of the industries associated with extreme work stress is the creative media industry. A working culture based on business profit orientation had always been about productivity in producing creative ideas and creative products. Unfortunately, there may not be many employers who are particular about ensuring workers' mental and emotional health as part of their efforts to inculcate employee productivity. Therefore, this paper seeks to identify factors affecting the wellbeing of media workers in Malaysia, the extent to which these factors shape their wellbeing, and how these media workers manage such challenges. The qualitative research approach was executed through an online interview to collect data among media workers of several electronic and print media. Data were analysed using thematic analysis approach. The findings had identified factors influencing the wellbeing of media workforce and strategies to manage pressures within media work environment. Factors relating to production management, workplace policy, organisational leadership and technology transformation constraint are the challenges faced by Malaysian media practitioners affecting their wellbeing.

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1. Introduction

Creative Industries is one of the currently evolving and promising sectors in the global economy. Creative industries and cultural industries are often perceived as the soul of the creative economy (Daubaraite & Startiene, 2015). At the moment, it accounts for great opportunities that drive for foreign direct investment; thus, foster economic growth. According to NESTA, the creative industries sector account for 10 per cent of the UK's GDP, and around two million people work in this industry (Armstrong & Page, 2015). Sixteen per cent of all employment in London is in creative industries (Cultural Economy Development Agency, 2019).

UNESCO defines creative industries as 'industries that relate to creativity, production and commercialisation of a product. The UK government perceives creative industries as 'involving skill-based and creative talents to create wealth through the exploitation of intellectual property' (Joffe, 2010). The industries include the print and electronic media industry, namely television, radio, publishing companies and film, telecommunication, arts and culture.

In the Asian region, studies are primarily focused in Korea, Japan, Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia. Most of these countries had already established regulation, policies and guidelines concerning creative industries potentials growth and direction in their countries. Impactful efforts were established in Asian regions for developing economic prosperity for national creative industries. For instance, Indonesia's creative industries sector has increased between 7 to 9 per cent between the year 2009 to 2015, which worth 19 billion dollars (Ramadhilla & Donald, 2014).

In Malaysia, Cultural Economy Development Agency (CENDANA) was established to prepare Kuala Lumpur as a creative hub. CENDANA had classified six strategies to achieve the objectives which focus on building a strong cultural sector to champion creative jobs in a competitive market. Fair regulation and strategic planning, high-quality creative education and professional development programmes, dedicated creative business incubation and services are among the aims of the Malaysian creative industries (Cultural Economy Development Agency, 2019). With impactful economic and sociocultural opportunities for Kuala Lumpur, we need to look into the issues surrounding the talent management in local creative industries mainly related to radio, television and film industries. Hence, this paper focuses on the current condition of the Malaysian creative media industries and the wellbeing of the creative workforce.

In order to map the factors pressuring media workers at their workplace, the conceptual framework of this article is based on literature from media sociology and cultural studies tradition that explores media production and creative labour. A combination of these traditions offers a better understanding of the working life and dynamics of power in the creative industries (Hesmondhalgh, 2013) and factors that shape the creative decisions in media workplace (Karim, 2015; Karim & Ahmad, 2018). Moreover, it also suggests how technological challenge affect creative labour (Karim, 2019). By drawing on a combination of media sociology and cultural studies traditions, the next section addresses the challenge facing the Malaysian creative industries, which subsequently, shape the wellbeing of media workers.

2. Problem Statement

In the 1980s and 90s, working in the media industry was a privilege. Media workers are considered a unique workforce because they can produce creative ideas and works. However, the influence of the Internet and media convergence had gradually changed the landscape of the media industry to be more technological-oriented. Media workers lost their privilege to the Internet and digital technology. Now the Internet is crucial to the execution of work that is not only effective but also increases productivity and innovations. Media convergence has changed the media industries, which in turn, acquires new technological systems, organisational structure and production processes. Sociocultural, religiopolitical and technological factors have changed the working life in creative industries (Karim & Ahmad, 2018). The Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR 4.0) has not only also affected the health but also the emotional wellbeing of media production workers (Karim, 2019). To identify the problems relating to the wellbeing of creative media workers, we have drawn on the literature from media production and management studies that elaborate on factors that affect the wellbeing of creative media workers.

Wellbeing is a concept that relates to the satisfaction experiences and healthy lifestyle (Baharudin et al., 2019). Most studies on wellbeing concentrated on increasing productivity and workforce performance, as they assist in improving human capital quality and welfare at a workplace. Kalthum Hassan et al. (2017) outlines eight critical areas of life that signify work-life balance. Most often issues related to work, finance and spiritual. Other individual-related issues concerned on hobbies and one's self. Health, family and social are perceived as critical amongst individual and societies. Each individual usually achieves a balance work-life within these sections, particularly work and family domain. Conflict usually arises when these two domains collided against each other. Such a conflict includes emotional, psychological and social wellbeing that affects thinking, feeling and action in which influence individual behaviour. Among issues related to mental illnesses are depression, anxiety and emotional distress, which is central to cases related to work impairment (Bregman, 2019, 4). Working long hours leads to burnout instead of improving productivity or creativity. Burnout occurs specifically among people working in high demand, challenging sectors like creative industries (Bregman, 2019, 6). Working long hours and low salary negatively influence employee's job satisfaction and life satisfaction (Ryu, 2016).

A study on motivational factors and constraints related to creativity in journalistic work is another example of research into the wellbeing of media workers. Digital transformation highlighted that the media workforce is motivated by opportunities to develop new skills and competencies, including possibilities to create new product and practices (Malmelin & Virta, 2016). The result suggested that media workers are always eager to learn and adapt to new environment and opportunities. Rising advantages for a new skill and knowledge transfer raise greater competition for workforce and organisations.

Another example may be drawn from a study of post mortem of a news production meeting, which is a significant phase in developing creativity among the creative team. New ideas often develop during meetings. However, generating ideas often occur in non-formal settings. Nylund (2013) added that most production meetings particularly in newsrooms discussed on the coverage of their competitors. Ideas are

usually based on reporters' personal experiences. They usually demonstrate ideas to the producer-in-charged based on their knowledge before seeking additional assistance for added values. Such a production phase may also affect the wellbeing of media workers as it involved decision-making. The limited creative autonomy of media workers, to some extent, affect their emotional wellbeing (Karim, 2015; Karim & Ahmad, 2018).

Unpredictable schedules, especially for those working in the newsroom, increases tense, which are strongly associated with their wellbeing. Uncertainty of schedules affects worker wellbeing, particularly in influencing economic-driven insecurity that triggers work-life conflicts. Time and period are strongly associated with work and life experience that determines an individual's wellbeing (Schneidera & Harknettb, 2019). In light of these problems, the next sections outline the questions that this paper seeks to answer and the purpose of the research project.

3. Research Questions

This study asks the following questions:

- What are the factors pressuring creative media workers at their workplace?
- How do the factors affect the wellbeing of media workers?
- How does media worker manage such pressuring workplace environment?

4. Purpose of the Study

We have discussed the factors that shape the wellbeing of creative media workers in section 2, where we outline problems relating to the wellbeing of these workers. The primary aim of this study is that we seek to: 1) find out the extent to which such factors affect the wellbeing of media workers and 2) how do these workers manage such pressuring factors.

5. Research Methods

A qualitative research approach was executed among 24 media practitioners in the local media industry that represented electronic and print media to answer the research questions. These informants were chosen among those who had more than five years of work experience. Online interview form link was distributed through Whatsapp and electronic mail for a week in February 2019. We asked about the main challenges of working in media industry, and also the strength and strategies in handling work pressures. Thematic analysis based on Clarke and Braun (2013) procedure was used to construct the themes that emerged, which help us identify the challenges and strategies that media workers adopted in managing their pressures in a workplace.

6. Findings

This research identified several interest, advantages and disadvantages facing workforces in local media industries. Most people work in the media industries because of its attractiveness and opportunities in establishing networking. Media workforce dominantly enjoyed meeting people during covering events,

planned or unplanned. However, many factors affect media workers wellbeing. This paper will discuss factors affecting the wellbeing of creative media workers and their strategies for coping with such challenges.

6.1. Factors Affecting the Wellbeing

The study suggests that factors affecting the wellbeing of media workers include time constraints and the complexity of production tasks. Findings also highlighted on the workplace relations, organisational leadership and current technological challenge.

6.1.1. Time constraints and the complexity of tasks

Time is priceless in media industry, in which were always translated in terms of how good media employees perform their tasks within specific time range. In another situation, tasks are compounded that needs several level of creative work processes. The primary challenge of working in the media industry is to find and to divide time between work responsibilities and daily affairs. This problem occurs due to the packed or scheduled work factor that is usually determined by the company.

Adherence to a work schedule that demands more time is considered a significant challenge for media industry employees. The execution of tasks also requires an extended period, due to the long execution process, which also depends on the work pace at different levels of production, thus creating stress and spending less time with family. (Informant 23)

6.1.2. Workplace relationship

Workplace relationship is quite challenging to manage. An interdependent between different units (e.g., creative and technical) demanding a commitment from members of the production community is an addition to the complexity of tasks execution. In this case, various issues related to communication arise. The findings of the study identify the communication ability and leadership in managing and controlling the individual production team is critical to managing the team well. According to one informant,

Misunderstandings of information and non-compliance often occur, and it can affect the deadlines that must be complied with in the implementation of career tasks of this industry especially if there are issues that disturb emotions and peace of mind such as financial constraints (Informant 12).

Furthermore, issues relating to communication also involve the perception of society, especially the audience who perceived the declining of media product values. Media products are highly dependent on their audience feedback and responses to media. Therefore, a media product can lose its value and quality if the rating decreases, thus causing the company to lose a source of revenue from advertisers. As one informant put it,

Product values are declining from the perspectives of consumer or buyer. They do not see the media industry as a valuable product with current needs (Informant 22).

Hence, to improve the quality of media product lies in a collective effort of the production community, which highly dependent on good workplace relation in any media organisation (Karim, 2015).

6.1.3. Organisational leadership

Leadership and work environment are among the factors pressuring media worker emotional wellbeing. Ignorance from the management is another contributing factor to the psychological effects of a media worker. One informant also argue,

The challenge needs to be faced with the involvement from the top level to the grassroots because this issue will get worse if it is looked down upon or does not get proper attention. It may also be due to the social atmosphere in the workplace (Informant 1).

6.1.4. Technological challenge

In the wake of media convergence and social media, media organisation adopted social media platforms as a new wing for marketing and promotions. The safety threat from an online community and legal enforcement contributed to several communication challenges. In facing citizen journalists, cynical commentaries or feedback often becomes a form of threat for media workers. The pressure has risen due to the increasing demands of media companies to deal with digital challenges.

Media workforce also facing the changing trends and implications of media convergence and media concentration study. The merger and acquisition of media and non-media entities, as well as structural transformation in media business competition, has its significance. As one informant said,

We need to be prepared for situations where all the tasks that were previously done by many people and now only need a few people to do it (Informant 20).

Another informant suggests media workers had improvised to respond to the media report, and the way news/stories are produced from outdoor locations locally or abroad.

This demand includes 'mobile journalism practices or 'Mobile Journalism' (MOJO) coupled with environmental pressures' (Informant 11).

The impact of digital technologies such as the use of the algorithm, software, programming, and data-processing techniques by media organisations to determine news/ story leave a massive gap among media workers, especially in many developed countries of the world (Jamil, 2020). Malaysia is one of these countries, of which media workers need to improve their skills to face such a technological challenge in creative industries.

6.2. Strategies to Manage the Pressures

Work stress can be controlled if a worker able to manage tasks well. Findings from this study found that there are a variety of strategies to gain work-life balance. These strategies firmly rooted in human/self-management, which interconnected with excellent leadership and strategic planning as well as dealing with a technological challenge.

6.2.1. Human/self-management

Managing oneself and others are vital to media organisation and industries. Human/self-management sees people, not as a source of income like what the political economy scholars argue.

Instead, the human/self-management treats other persons as the vicegerent (*khalifah*) on earth, including creative labour who should/ought to be managed and self-manage themselves at their workplace (Karim et al., 2017). According to one of the informants,

The media industry is very challenging, especially in terms of finance, time and deadlines. Self-management and mental strength are essential so that stress levels can be controlled. Learn to control the mind and complete mental and physical endurance (Informant 7).

6.2.2. Leadership and strategic planning

Excellent leadership and strategic planning on any tasks regardless of the size of the project must be monitored closely.

Sometimes deadlines just do not make sense (unachievable) with the existing workforce (size). The management needs to do planning without burdening the staff at the same time, fulfilling the client's needs (Informant 11)

The psychological factor is stressful and contributes to overly binding work culture. Managing workload and burn out is paramount to avoid severe mental and health issues. As one informant argues,

In any job, there will be various issues and challenges, and as employee, we should deal with those challenges and issues (workload) wisely because working in the media at this time is very challenging for us (Informant 10).

6.2.3. Dealing with technology

Every organisation needs to be sensitive to the challenges faced by media workers, notably when their tasks may be replaced by artificial intelligence (AI). In the surge of the Internet and technology and media convergence, media companies face many operational issues to the extent of dismissals of the workforce as their businesses no longer able to generate revenue.

Media practitioners in this era need multi-tasking in line with the presence of IR 4.0, strong at heart and more open-minded to compete with citizen journalists, bloggers and netizens (Informant 15).

Not only these media workers had to deal with new technologies brought about by IR 4.0, but also need to manage their emotion. Despite assisting media organisation manage the information, stories and news, IR 4.0 also has several implications for media workers, which affect the emotional wellbeing of these workers (Karim, 2019).

7. Conclusion

This study has established key factors that are internal and external to the working life of media workers. These include time constraints and the complexity of production tasks, workplace relations, organisational leadership and technological challenge. Communication is vital to ensure a pleasant workplace environment, in particular, the relationship among leaders and between their subordinates within the production team and across units. Communication and strategic planning are the most common factor in ensuring work-life balance. A healthy workplace culture depends highly on strategic planning. In the operational process of media product (time management, autonomy and technology) influence

employee behaviour, which in turn, affect their work performance and quality. Producing the best journalistic content or a programme is crucial for the survival of parties, the employee as well as media organisation. Human/self-management, ethical leadership and governance are among the best practices for enhancing creative media workers' mental and physical wellbeing.

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