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## Women Influence on The Practical Role of Public Relations in Iskandar Malaysia Region

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### Abstract

The role of Public Relations (PR) practitioners is often associated with the extent to which a person is able to carry out his/her responsibilities effectively. Previous studies have often linked the field of PR stereotypically to a career of women rather than men (Niel, 2016; Place, 2015). Public seldom give a negative perception towards the role of women's PR. Therefore, the aim of this study is to find out recent development of the role of women's PR, especially in Iskandar Malaysia. The effort is to learn the real phenomenon of women carries out their duties as PR practitioner. This qualitative study will further explore the issue by phenomenological approach using in-depth interviews among PR practitioners in Iskandar Malaysia. The results of the study has discovered that the importance of the attitude of women's PR is very important in implementing their relationship with society. They were found remains tightly knotted to their role as technicians rather than managers although without gender competitions. This study is expected to contribute to future improvements in the field of public relations (PR).

**Keywords:** Public Relations, Job Roles, Gender, Feminist Theory

### Research Background

This study discusses the involvement of women in Public Relations (PR) industry in which the professionals are basically quite skeptical about gender issue to give a deeper knowledge of one complexity to form understanding. However, there is no denying that there is still confusion about the definition of gender which is still debated to this day although many pro-feminist researchers often criticize the issue of discrimination in social relationship when practicing gender especially in the PR structure (Place, 2015; Daymon & Demetrious, 2014; Aldoory, 2005).

Focusing on the consideration of women practitioners in the PR industry, the practice of community relations is a female activity as it is estimated that about 70% of PR practitioners in most western countries are women (Petrovici, 2016; Edwards, 2009). For

countries like Indonesia, the PR industry is mostly dominated by women. While in Taiwan, 78% of PR practitioners are women and in Australia, women PR covered 73% of the industry (Pheung 2018; Simorangkir, 2011; Fitch & Third, 2010; Wu, 2009). The PR profession will continue to be the field of "white lily" women (Brown, 2019; Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017) because for more than two decades, there have been more women than men whereas more than 80% of students in most PR programs are women (Brown, 2019; Daughtery, 2014; Bardaro, 2009). This field is generally dominated by 2/3 women, and it is still seen as part of the 'pink' industry. Overall, it can be said that the dominance of women in this field has long existed (Ertem, 2019). However, so far no figures have been mentioned for the number of male and female PR practitioners in Malaysia (Pheung, 2018). In order to get the real figure, it needs to be done in collaboration with PR professional bodies in Malaysia and internationally (Ahmad & Idid, 2020).

Future research should look into the trend of equality of women in the PR industry more closely and explore why there is a continuing inequality of women in the PR industry (Topić et al., 2020). Gender is not only a statement of social differences between men and women, but also related to groups of subjects whose social roles are more determined by their sexual or biological differences. That is why gender stereotyping problems need to be solved (Place, 2015; Shields, 2008; Yuval-Davis, 2006). The issue of gender socialization of PR practitioners also influences the role and opportunities of career enhancement as well as perceptions of women's ability to integrate between work responsibilities and household duties (Place, 2015; Jiang and Shen, 2013; Aldoory et al., 2008; Aldoory and Toth, 2002; Grunig et al., 2001; O'Neil, 2003).

However in Malaysia, the number of women participating in this profession has gradually increased. Women working in the PR industry are always striving to improve themselves by gaining important qualifications. The entry of women in the PR industry has risen for decades even though men still dominate the management positions (Manickam, Chin & Ayub, 2016; Wu, 2009). This notable change can be seen as female PR practitioners are increasingly being promoted to lead the PR department, it seems that the glass ceiling seems to be break (Pheung, 2018).

### **Research Question**

- RQ1: Why are the characteristic plays an important factor to develop women's PR practitioner of Iskandar Malaysia?
- RQ2: How is the real phenomenon of the role of women's PR in Iskandar Malaysia on the social relations?
- RQ3: To what extent is the role of women's PR in the organization between management and technical tasks?

### **Objective of the Study**

- Objective 1: To identify the characteristic that plays an important factor to develop women's PR practitioner of Iskandar Malaysia

- Objective 2: To understand the phenomenon of the role of women's PR in Iskandar Malaysia that is closely related to social relations
- Objective 3: To study the role of women's PR the organization between the management and technical tasks

### **Purpose of The Study**

The aim of this study is to find out recent development of the role of women's PR, especially in Iskandar Malaysia. The effort is to learn the real phenomenon of women carries out their duties as PR practitioner. This qualitative study will further explore the issue by phenomenological approach using semi structured in-depth interviews among 10 PR practitioners from the agencies in Iskandar Malaysia.

This study applies Grunig's theoretical framework of excellence theory. A study from a feminist perspective and a theoretical model of public relations practice that reveals the experiences of PR practitioners in the field. Using a two-way symmetrical model as the most ethical and most successfully implemented by women. Therefore, the interview questions have been integrated with the theory to construct the findings.

### **Literature Review**

Basically, the majority of PR industry comprises of women practitioners (Pheung, 2018). This PR issue involves quite a lengthy discussion in generating real meaning. It plays a role in influencing power, hierarchy and requiring agreement between individuals in society (Place, 2015; Daymon and Demetrious, 2013; Demetrious, 2008; Weaver, Motion & Roper, 2006).

According to Topic et al. (2020), if we can review the development from 1980 to 2020 Salary (Van Slyke, 1983; Cline, Toth, Turk, Walters, Johnson & Smith, 1986; Miller, 1988; Toth, 1988; Dozier, 1988; Singh & Smyth, 2000) and glass ceilings (Broom, 1982; VanSlyke, 1983; Scrimger, 1985; Cline et al , 1986; Pratt, 1986; Dozier, 1988), it turns out that many changes occur to gender discrimination. Previous studies have focused more on biological-gender differences (women and men). The study of women in the field of PR began in 1980 where the issue of gender discrimination became a priority. Since then, there has been an expansion of the theory and study of women as a sub-discipline of PR scholars especially the existence of conflict between liberal and radical feminists.

During 1990s, women's studies have begun to tend to use symmetrical communication over men and more considerate practices, negotiation styles and community relations if we look at it from a non-technical management role perspective. This has to do with radical feminist theory, which traditionally argues that men and women are different and that women's privileges should be praised rather than used to affect women's prospects (Topic et al., 2020; Rakow & Nastasia, 2009; Grunig, 2001; Daly, 1973).

The liberal feminist perspective further analyzes issues such as glass ceilings and pay gaps, job discrimination where in fact most women in organizations are in technical positions, lack coaching and lack of strength. Radical feminist perspective is more likely

to analyze the diversity in PR, direction, opportunities for women, the unique woman who has different ways to do things and criticism of liberal feminism that does not solve the problem of women. Theoretical development is involved with PR organizations and analyzes the position of women in the organization. This is clearly related to the liberal feminist perspective as it is closely related to women advancing in their careers. In addition, scholars involved in the development of feminist society relationship theory and professionalization of the field are often associated with the position of women (Topic et al., 2020). One of the main ideas behind liberal feminism is that it will be successful politically and socially when the same thing is done either both genders to the public (Krugler, 2017). Much of the research done on women in PR comes from perspective liberal feminists who focus heavily on glass ceilings, salary gaps, career opportunities and career barriers for women. Radical feminism argues that women and men are fundamentally different and these differences are then translated as examples of differences in communication styles, leadership styles and even influencing interactions within organizations (Topic et al., 2020; Rakow and Nastasia, 2009).

According to feminist theories on the exploration of constructing social gender in PR, feminist PR scholars have criticized research, policies and practices showing that women do not follow the masculine norms of society. Instead they have promoted the empowerment of women by 'challenging the status quo, social norms that have degraded women, and calling for action towards equality' (Place, 2015; Toth & Cline, 2007). Men are often perceived as more dominant, strong, and powerful while women are more stereotypical or 'feminist' and caring (Place, 2015; Aldoory & Toth, 2002; Hon, 1995). Over time, women's socialization has eroded appreciation of femininity such as the loss of caring, undervalued and inappropriate role in the role of 'technician' and subsequently discrimination (Place, 2015; Aldoory & Toth, 2002; Grunig et al., 2001; O'Neil, 2003; Aldoory & Toth, 2002; Hon, 1995). Various researches have based the basis of the study on feminist theory to revise the situation of women PR. Based on the perspective of feminist theory, it investigates the reasons behind the stereotypes of women's practitioners' organizations because of their low potential in management and only suitable for low-level technical jobs. It also explores the application of masculine traits among women practitioners striving to advance and rise in the corporate hierarchy of organizations (Pheung, 2018; Aldoory, et al., 2008; Golombisky, 2015; O'Neil, 2003; Umeogu & Ifeoma, 2012; Vardeman Winter & Place, 2017).

Gender and racial or ethnic diversity in the PR profession actually depends on proactive strategies and tactics that will further enhance this career diversity (Brown, 2019). Studies on gender and leadership in PR have found that in theory, both sexes are equally capable of being leaders in the field of PR. There is a perception that women are unable to lead or are not important even though the majority of professionals are women. A female leader must demonstrate masculine leadership. Their difficulty may be in response to a patriarchal culture that tends to men who regard technical (subordinate) roles as normal or "natural." Instead men should take action and communication requires a lot of flexibility. They have a tendency to work with the same gender and dominate initiatives in PR (Erzikova, 2016).

Traditionally, women are more likely to take on management and technical responsibilities even as they advance in their careers. Women meet "secondary or direct



management activities combined with counselling roles and more senior policy makers". The role of PR managers and communication technicians has been supported through factor analysis by many studies, however this typology fails to fully reflect the experience of women in PR (Neill & Lee, 2016). PR is not a "neutral gender job, and women can capitalize their beauty". The field of PR is dichotomy whereas men in vocal minorities, working with women whose majority is silent. Women are suitable to act as technicians, not as PR managers. The media has fostered a gender image as a community relations leader by focusing on conflicts within and outside the organization. Using the metaphor of war, women as soldiers are unable to organize combat strategies like male officers, there is a strong belief that men lead this industry (Erzikova, 2016).

Women in terms of social relations are not advanced towards management positions even when women do some management tasks, they also perform more technical roles than men. Gender differences are significant as more women participate in strategic and tactical activities in the social sphere. Women are more likely to participate in active social media communication although there is no difference between men and women in terms of how often they engage in management activities related to social media. These findings are in line with previous studies on the role of social relations showing that women "do it all" (Neill, 2016). However, there is an issue of whether PR women need to behave like men (masculine) to get attention and progress (Pheung, 2018). In fact, women claim that the practice of discrimination by men causes a weak desire of women to lead in this profession. They believe that successful professional women are stuck between career and family happiness because they do not have a personal life and receive a low salary especially the conflict of perceptions about the role between husband and wife to build a family. They will be 'victims' of conflict between male colleagues, bosses and related to issues of pride and efficiency (Erzikova, 2016). Women who return to work as PR after childbirth, are often offered lower positions or ranks. Women with a degree need to remain in the organization for an average of five years if they want to be promoted to senior management (Muturi, 2019; Dozier, Sha & Okura, 2007).

In contrast to male PR practitioners, they often placed in more prominent positions of responsibility in monitoring management, formulating organizational strategies and being a consultant to top management. Meanwhile, the role of women is less important such as data collection, media calls, news release writing and event management (Pheung, 2018). Significant differences between the female-majority PR industry and the male-dominated management trend have been proven by PR researchers for years. Significant differences between women and men can be seen in the PR department of organizations, PR manager positions are given to men, and even management positions are mostly handled by men (Pheung, 2018; Aldoory, 2005; Fröhlich & Peters, 2007; Dozier & Broom, 1995). Given the diversity of the workforce is considered the responsibility of PR then it is important to study how employers need to look at diversity, the possibilities they support it and what is the role of PR in the organization (Muturi, 2019). The question arises as to what employers' perceptions of the most important field of competence especially in social media for university graduates entering the workforce (Sutherland, 2020).

As in contrast, the majority of men in the field of PR consider the field to be feminine and men working in the field need to adapt their behaviour to suit women. With the increasing number of women in PR, it is important to look at the number of women in leadership positions in the field (Krugler, 2017; Pompper & Jung, 2013). However, on the other hand women think that gender factors have greatly influenced the challenges and career success that they specifically face. Including their challenges to promotion barriers as well as salary and representation inequalities in leadership roles (Krugler, 2017). Compared to men, it was found that women are more likely to experience more satisfaction especially their experience, education and social. Studies show that female students typically gain more classroom experience and gain more valuable leadership experience (Brown, 2019). However, there are still many female PR graduates and practitioners who do not reflect on their position in the management and leadership positions of the organization, most of which are still held by men (Pheung, 2018).

### **Overview of the Development of Women's PR Study Issues among Countries**

In the United States, studies on "PR feminization" have shown that the increasing percentage of women in the activity sector indicates that gender inequality exists in the PR sector, resulting in lower wages as well as declining professional status as a result of men withdrawing from this activity (Petrovici, 2016; Mogel, 2002; Verhoeven & Aarts, 2010; Choi & Hon, 2002; Daymon & Demetrious, 2013; Rotman, 2001). The role of women began in the 1800s and 1900s in an effort to diversify their roles and expand their rights. Among them is the National Organization for Women (NOW), which is a struggle for the right to vote in the United States. This was the effort of dedicated women who dared to oppose injustice in society at that time. This movement encouraged women to take and preserve the responsibilities of men who were far from their homes on duty in the war. The public sees PR efforts in the work of women activists who work tirelessly to bring about social change. Women are considered pioneers of community relations as their job to expand their reach on voting rights and other equality issues involving publicity campaigns, funds and advocacy. These women pioneers fought for their right to be fair wives, mothers, and active members of society. Although the lifestyle they lead has not yet been normalized in our society until the women's suffrage movement, large coverage of their stories in history books will motivate women in the pursuit of this career and lifestyle (Waters, 2019; Crawford, 2001).

In the United Kingdom, the feminist movement reflects the growth of feminist practices in the PR industry. Feminism in popular media and culture, a new feminist awareness emerged among the generation of senior women in the PR industry in the UK. This question is relevant now because historically, the PR industry in the UK has been characterized by the rejection of sex discrimination and gender employment and the lack of feminist awareness among female PR practitioners. This literature is useful in examining the complex relationship between neoliberalism and feminism, as well as neoliberalism and post feminism, and offers a way to analyze women's discourse. PR practitioners in the UK in the 1970s and 1980s, demonstrated a level of self-confidence and 'hard' self-efficacy in overcoming career barriers such as misogynistic counterparts and gender inequality (Yeomans, 2019; Yaxley, 2013; L'Etang, 2015).

In Bahrain, the increasing number of educated women in PR raises questions about practice, stereotypes and professionalism. Although the majority of PR graduates are women, there are no studies analyzing the impact of education on stereotypes and the role of Bahraini women's leadership in Arab culture. It is found that women face several types of challenges in their work in Bahrain such as cultural problems, corporate environment, relationships with colleagues, personal life, and social dominance (Ertem et al., 2019; AlSaqr, 2008). The main challenges faced by PR women in Bahrain are from a cultural perspective, corporate environment, relationships with colleagues, organizations as social dominance and marginalization of community relations functions. Bahrain has significant implications for the theoretical understanding of "power" in PR literature because it looks at PR theory from a cultural standpoint (AlSaqr, 2018; AlSaqr, 2008).

In Turkey, around 1970s most foreign companies had PR departments in Turkey, in the late 1980s and especially in the 1990s, most Turkish private companies also had PR departments. Meanwhile, only a few studies conducted in Turkey on the situation and importance of women in the field of PR, should be made a recent assessment of the role and place of Turkish women in the field of PR. The fact that women work more as technicians while men work as executives in this sector and salaries are two major problems (Ertem et al., 2019).

In Russia, public relations is best described as women's work (Alsaqr, 2018; Tsetsura, 2011). In studying gender differences on the perception of professional leadership among Russian PR practitioners, it was found that Russian women were more concerned with leadership than Russian men. However, there is still evidence of gender inequality in the division of powers in the PR profession in Russia. Russia is actually still a traditional society that equates power or leadership with men while giving women roles as household managers (Erzikova, 2016; Ochirova, 2011).

In Croatia, many research studies show that women face many obstacles in their jobs (lack of professional and private support, the effect of glass ceilings, unequal pay, etc.). However, the need for exploration of the attitudes and opinions of women in the PR industry on work culture especially networking, workplace interaction, dress code, gender 'bias', as well as their ability to see other senior women as role models is needed. It is impossible to work and thrive in the PR sector and have time to raise a family (Polić, 2020).

In Romania, the study focuses on the PR dimension and the perspective of women to identify what is meant by community relations for women working in this sector. Managing problems, supporting managers to obtain good information and responding to public opinion demands, defining and highlighting management responsibilities to anticipate environmental tendencies and using research and communication based on ethical principles as the main tool of employment. Women's orientation towards the PR sector is a consequence from the increase in community relations in recent years which continues to show the highest position. PR practices are ultimately recognized as feminine activities because PR is a propaganda domain that offers a variety of challenges, such as building strategic relationships and the spirit of initiative (Petrovici, 2016; Harlow, 1976).



A study on the PR profession among African Americans found out that Caucasian women have strong strengths that make African American men in a dilemma. This factor is due to the fact that they do not have many African American male friends to provide support and friendship. Barriers are due to the fact that they do not have role models successful and mentors in the field and no leaders can help advance their careers (Wallington, 2020).

In some countries like China and Thailand, public relations is seen pejoratively (degrading) only as a female profession in some countries, or unwanted. The perception problem of "Miss Public Relations" in China refers to equating public relations with young and beautiful women who lack training and professional skills and these women work in PR agencies to maintain "guest relations" organize activities and take care of customers and guests. In some specific contexts of conversation, "the title 'Miss' is subject to a subtext implicit prostitution" in Chinese (Sommerfeldt & Kent, 2020). PR practitioners play a specific role in their organization because they are more motivated by the inspiration of others to fulfill their responsibilities than their own desires. The majority of society is still influenced by traditional gender stereotypes. This role has existed for a long time based on the notion that social behaviour is adopted (Pheung, 2018; Choi & Hon, 2002).

If we highlight the developments from 1980 to 2020, it turns out that many changes have taken place on gender discrimination. Previous studies have focused more on biological-gender differences (women and men). Issues of priority such as gender discrimination, salary issues, glass ceilings and technical assignments (Krugler, 2017). Women are actually still tied to technical tasks such as data collection, media calls, writing news releases and event management. Since then, there has been a theoretical conflict between liberal and radical feminists. While in the 1990s era there was an issue on symmetrical communication between the sexes (Topic et al., 2020).

As in other countries, the issue of women's PR is also affected by the polemic that women do not need to be at the forefront of management. Women are often victims of conflicts between male and female assignments (Erzikova, 2016). Countries that are still strong with culture and tradition as in the Arab countries still practice this culture. There is only a little relaxation in some countries that gives women freedom. However, women still hold on to technical tasks (Ertem, 2019; Alsaqer, 2018).

However in Malaysia, the issue of gender as debated by scholars is almost invisible. The results of this study proved that there are similarities in terms of promotion opportunities and other remuneration between men and women. In fact, in the field of PR in the Iskandar Malaysia Region has shown that women are more dominant in this field. Corporate culture in the organization plays an important role in shaping the personality and characteristics of a PR practitioner. Educational background, skills, experience and attitude are the basis for the selection of PR practitioners in organizations in the Iskandar Malaysia Region. Indirectly, this study also supports Pheung (2018) view, issues on feminism theory, ceiling glass and discrimination are no longer the main topic because the role of women's PR in Malaysia has reached its equilibrium level. Competition is now seen to be more open and educational;

management and income opportunities are no longer the focus of the problem. In fact, the phenomenon of women's PR in Iskandar Malaysia is more described as competitive, experienced and has characteristics. PR practitioners should do a lot of consulting activities but in Iskandar Malaysia the role of women PR is qualified to take over the position of men and they are able to perform the task. However, there are still those who are still skeptical among employers about the ability of women as managers because the stereotypical view that puts women only qualified to perform technical tasks. Therefore, the position of PR manager is still dominated by men.

From the results of research on the development of women's PR around the world can be concluded in some of the following study issues:

### **The Role of Women's PR between Feminine and Masculine**

Organizations have always been a masculine world where women are expected to be feminine (Waters, 2019; Saval, 2015; Bourdieu, 2007). Often there is a conflict between the male-dominated work culture and the prevalence of women in the issue of managing and caring for the family. PR jobs need a feminine nature to soften mutual tension and resolve tight situations. But management tasks involve external relationships and employee interactions, where the nature of assertiveness, confidence and masculine courage are paramount. This trait increases the chances of progress because being in management requires firm consideration to lead the team better (Pheung, 2018).

### **The PR Role of Women as Technicians**

Velvet Ghetto study reports that women choose themselves to be technicians and thus expect payment lower than the men mentioned in the second report 'Beyond the Velvet Ghetto' (Waters, 2019; Toth and Cline, 1989). In addition, public relations is conducted to provide information to the public, the press attention to the organization, and not as a management function which requires the construction of problem-solving skills (Petrovici, 2016).

### **The Role of PR Women in Society Relations**

The main role is the society relations as a "responsible function for establishing and maintaining relationships with society" (Petrovici 2016; Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2001). The dominance of women has long been a situation in this sector and this leads to the perception that community relations are women's work. University's scholars have conducted a specific study on PR and considered it as female occupation (Ertem, 2019). Public relations is an emotional job and more appropriate for women. Another reason is the fact that women are better at jobs that require social skills (Ertem, 2019). The stereotypical view of women as 'natural birth communicators' is often defended. While women assert their superior communication, skills compared to their male counterparts, by doing so they 'simplify' communication and other PR skills such as the organization and time management inherent in women's biology, thus potentially placing themselves as limited in other ways (Yeomans, 2019; Fröhlich, 2008). Personal branding may be one of the methods used by women to isolate themselves in the workplace, as the brand gives the impression of a superior woman or prospective employer as a professional woman (Armstead, 2015).

### **Developments on Women's PR in Malaysia**

PR has been recognized as a formal field in Malaysia. Its main function is to provide information to the public and assist the country's development strategy. This makes the organization in Malaysia need professional communicators. As in other countries, more women have entered the PR profession. Although 30 percent of women joined the industry in 1977, in 2018 the percentage has increased to 60 percent. Women entering the field of PR is a manifestation of women to their presence in other field e.g medicine, engineering or banking in Malaysia. More and more undergraduate students are now choosing PR careers and are also a trend in other countries. Studies show that an increasing number of graduates and women make PR their career. However, the percentage of professional PR practitioners who are members of local or international PR bodies is still low (Ahmad & Idid, 2020; Kaur & Shaari, 2006; Kaur, 2002; Taylor, 2000).

Significant progress has been made in gender equality and women's empowerment in Malaysia. Gender inequality in the country has decreased with improvements in health, education, economic activities, and women's empowerment. The increase in social infrastructure, accompanied by rapid economic growth, also provides a possible environment for the reduction of gender gaps. One challenge, however, is to increase the share of women in higher professional positions. Others are related to the increasing participation of Malaysian women in political life at all levels that a challenge still faced by the most mature democracies (Pheung, 2018). The view that Malaysian women PR facing bias in their daily work, and there is no shortage of promotion opportunities in workplaces, generally they are not stereotyped, weak communication efficiency is unsupported. In their study of Malaysian PR practitioners, sought to examine the comparison of job-roles between the sexes: male and female practitioners, as well as whether their salaries and career prospects differ as a result of organizational bias. On the other hand, for gender-feminine differences based on gender, there is little study from the Asian context; one that features a study of Taiwanese PR practitioner leadership styles, in which the masculine gender traits significantly predict the management style of PR and male and female organizations (Pheung, 2018; Manickam et al., 2009).

In Malaysia, gender bias does not occur due to cultural diversity and company policies. Women working in the PR industry strive to improve themselves by gaining important qualifications in the hope of getting a better job. Any female PR practitioner with similar abilities can get equal opportunities in the organization. Men are more likely to make important decisions where most female PR practitioners have better skills in communication, planning, and implementation but not in decision making (Manickam et al., 2016). Studies show that in the feminist Malaysian PR industry, women practitioners now lead management positions in most PR departments of the organization. However, the 'echelon' which is a characteristic of leadership in the organization continues to favor men for senior management positions. These leadership characteristics include age, work experience, educational background, socio-economic background, and others. There are similar opportunities that are balanced and beneficial to PR practitioners. However, women continue to be neglected for senior management positions as they face work-family burdens. This reflects the fact that female practitioners are burdened twice when career choices and family facts collide.

Coordinating family life and motherhood is a complex issue between commitment to the company and customers (Pheung, 2018).

### **Methodology**

This phenomenological approach based on in-depth interviews among 5 women and 5 men PR practitioners, using a semi-structured interview protocol. The target group of the study consists of PR practitioners from agencies in the Iskandar Malaysia Region. The aim of the study is to find out specific views in the field about the real phenomenon of the aspects of women's PR in the organization in Iskandar Malaysia.

Data collection techniques and procedures as well as data analysis are among the important processes in conducting research such as through interviews, observations and analysis of documents (public records, personal documents and physical materials). Identifying the types of research problems and decide on the tools that used to collect data of an individual nature. Data will undergo a transcription process to describe meanings. The study of data is a critical aspect of a scientific methods (Othman, 2015).

### **Research Findings**

The study participants were asked with 3 major research questions related to the most important criteria that make up a female PR practitioner in Iskandar Malaysia Region, the phenomenon of the role of female PR closely related to the relationship with society and the role of female PR in management and technical function in the organization.

The initial survey is to study the reasons why many PR practitioners hold by women rather than men in Iskandar Region. The results shown that most PR practitioners in Iskandar Region are mostly monopolized by women. The position of head of department is dominated by women while only a handful of organizations are found by men. This is based on its role in the organization or priority of communication methods or management style of a person that influences management tendencies. From the results of a survey of members of the Iskandar Malaysia Corporate Communications (IMCC) affiliate, out of a total of 62 PR practitioners, 42 were women or 68% while only 20 were men or 32%. This shows that women are more dominant in PR careers in Iskandar Malaysia. When asked for the views of participants from different demographic backgrounds, each has a different opinion. Among the views on why there are more women in Iskandar Malaysia, is due to the superior nature of women who are seen as more diplomatic in communication.

Among the feedback of the interview participants stated that the reason is because the PR profession is still tied to the real role as a 'technician' which is related to media relations, preparing media statements and public complaints. Only a small part involves the role of management. About the most important criteria that shape the role of women's PR is attitude. The average clearly explains the importance of the attitude of PR practitioners.

**RQ1: What are the most important criteria that make up a PR female practitioner in Iskandar Malaysia Region?**

Professionalism is often associated with the more general principles and standards of professional life that are between occupational or organizational professionalism (Asunta, 2016; Evetts, 2009; Noordegraaf, 2007; Evetts 2003). Moral responsibility is a symbol of the behaviour or attitude of professionals and what suits their position in society. They formally need to state what professional moral obligations are and what behaviours are appropriate and what are inappropriate (Asunta, 2016; Lee, 2012).

There is a clear differences between the form of attitude and nature of a PR candidate that is between extrinsic values that can be seen through the attitude and intrinsic values that can be detected through its nature. Not only is it judged through its exterior but also internally. This reflects an employer's priority over the selection criteria of a PR candidate in their organization.

*"..I do not feel that gender selection is a priority because both have a balanced quality. What is important is that the behaviour of a candidate is more valuable as long as there is a desire to learn and improve their work..." (Participant A1, PR General Manager, 53 years old, male)*

The behaviour of PR practitioner does reflect the professionalism that is according to standards of professional conduct. The employer is more concerned about behaviour rather than other factors. Motivational and ability balance are very important during the learning process.

*" .. PR career is often described as a field dominated by women because some employers do not understand what the real PR role is. That does not lie in appearance but in fact it is behaviour. As employers, they need to study the character of a PR candidate.." (Participant A2, Government Strategic Communications Officer, 32 years old, male)*

Some employers overlook the importance of one's skills and consider women easier to deal with. PR ethics is consider as one accepted standards and principles of behaviour. It is important for employers to weigh between candidate's abilities and attitudes compared to its gender.

*"..I think PR selection is not related to a person's gender, but more to his character and general knowledge. In addition to writing skills and specialized knowledge in communication.." (Participant A5, Communication Executive, 40 years old, female)*

Good character comprise of communication skill and ability to develop connection to gain audience responsiveness. Employers appreciate someone who knows how to diversify their skills to meet the needs of their job.

It turns out that the most important criteria that make up PR practitioner in Iskandar Malaysia Region is about attitude. Despite having good skills and knowledge, the attitude criteria of an individual is more priority in the organization. The question of



whether women need to be masculine to compete with men is also not a major issue because women do get equal opportunities with men due to the relatively low number of men in the field of PR in Iskandar Malaysia. In reality, it is found that many women hold high positions in the corporate sector.

**RQ2: How is the real phenomenon of the role of women's PR in Iskandar Malaysia on the social relations?**

PR is considered as a career of women because of the nature of its relationship with society and there are about 70% of PR practitioners in most western countries are women. The fact that female dominance in PR has defined the social relations code as "feminine". (Pertroveci, 2016; Fitch & Third, 2010; Edwards, 2009).

However, the competition between women and men in fulfilling their role as PR managers in Iskandar Malaysia is quite subjective because their respective advantages depend on the organizational goals of the role that PR practitioners need to play. Therefore, there is no question of discrimination between the sexes in the selection of PR practitioners.

*"... PR careers are dominated by women because they are attractive, more diplomatic and have more convincing strength than men. If the level of appearance is used as a measure, then that does not meet the actual conditions of PR and it is better for them to be TV news readers ..."* (Participant A2, Government Strategic Communications Officer, 32 years old, male)

PR practitioner normally practice their influence power to develop their social relationship. Women can react as good influencer even though they didn't hold any managerial position. Good looking appearance do not guarantee one to be good PR.

*" ..PR according to gender is important because it affects character and the nature of a person. For example if we work with women, the way of associating is not the same as men due to religious and ethical limitations.."* (Participant A3, Communication Executive, 36 years, female).

PR practitioner often changes the way they communicate each other due to respect for different genders, religion and ethics usually control their behaviour especially during working hours.

*" .. I admit that PR careers in Malaysia are mostly accompanied by women compared to men. Their way of communicating is more convincing (pleasing).."* (Participant A4, Communication Manager, 35 years old, male)

Women builds relationships through their communication style. As compared to men, they are seems to have dominating conversation style especially when they play their role as managers in which they are more comfortable dominating relationships.

*" ..the selection based on gender is feared to be a discrimination against this group. This field of PR is one of the relatively open fields for both groups.."* (Participant A5,

*Communications Executive, 40 years old, female)*

Gender imbalance in public relations will lead to conflicts over differences in the workplace such as salary, title, years of experience and other social matters.

*"..My opinion is...women are more dominant as PR because most employers believe that women is more 'gentle', more 'pleasant to people' and socially easy to build networking or more friendly than men who can attract male and female audiences..."(Participant A6, Assistant General Manager Corporate, 45 years, female)*

The appearance can be seen through the face, and non-verbal means of communication are very prominent among women and people more easily attracted with gentle character.

Phenomenon of women's PR role in Iskandar Malaysia is in fact closely related to the relationship with the community. However, most organizations are still unclear about the real role of a PR because they consider the PR career as a stereotype or perform the duties of a technician.

**RQ3: To what extent is the role of women's PR in the organization between management and technical tasks?**

Biased views on women have increased and incorporated stereotypes into women with better communication skills and therefore they should remain in a technical position (Topic et al., 2020).

Results of analysis among PR practitioners in Iskandar Region also shows that only a small part of women hold the role of Senior Manager. They head the Communications Department or hold key positions in the organization. Includes making recommendations to management before making a big decision and also arranging the organization's external relations (engagement). The rest are holding Executive level who still carry out the technical affairs of the Communications Department and implement all the planning or specialization according to their respective skills.

*"..This PR job is not only work in the office, but also outside the office. Especially when dealing with customers until late night and on weekends, sometimes even involved a long travelling abroad. Security factors and challenges are among the reasons why gender greatly influences the selection of PR candidates.." (Participant A3, Communications Executive, 36 years old, female)*

There are many obstacles that women PR have to face, especially when forced to work beyond the time and location of duty. Their willingness to sacrifice is one of the reasons they are being hired.

*" ..As a woman I do not feel that the field of PR is only dominated by women. Some of them are still men, especially as the head of the PR department elsewhere. " (A4 Participant, Communication Manager, 35 years old, male)*

Even though women dominate PR positions, but men still get the opportunity to be managers. Thus, perceptions still affect that women good on technical skills and creativity, but in contrast men is good in planning, making decisions and handle crisis.

*" ..I think that women become PR because they have high persuasive power not because of appearance and most of them are the head of the PR department.. "*  
(Participant A6, Assistant General Manager, 45 years old, female)

Women are said to have better persuasive power than men. The advantage of PR lies in their abilities and attitudes but not their appearance. In fact, PR is about winning the negotiation.

As a result of researching the role of PR, most of the role of PR in Iskandar Region, namely most women PR practitioners are involved as technicians which performing traditional media relations tasks, preparing speech texts and media statements. In general, they are still tied to the real task and are not directly involved in the decision-making process. This is based on the number of PR practitioners who on average are executive or intermediate level. The role of women PR in organizations in Iskandar Malaysia is clearly on average still performing technical tasks compared to management due to the perception of top management towards women in the organization as executors of communication tasks that have become a stereotypical form of view towards this group.

### **Discussions and Conclusion**

In this study, the questions about the true characteristics of PR women, women's attitudes in building community relations and how the technical tasks and management of PR women in Iskandar Malaysia have been discussed. Thus, the role of PR Women in Iskandar Malaysia has its uniqueness and gives a new dimension in the field of PR.

There are four main factors have been identified in contributing to the issue of gender equality in PR practitioners among women in Iskandar Malaysia. First, the attitude of PR practitioners is the most important criterion from the perspective of employers in Iskandar Malaysia even though they have good skills and knowledge. Secondly, there is no evidence of discrimination against women in the field of PR in Iskandar Malaysia and they have the same opportunities as men instead many women hold high positions in the corporate sector. Thirdly, employers are still unclear about the true role of PR because they assume a PR career as stereotyping or performing the duties of a technician for instance traditional media relations, preparing speech texts and media statements and they are exempted in the decision-making process. Fourth, the role of women's PR in Iskandar Malaysia on social relations in Iskandar Malaysia is actually closely related with the community.

As a conclusion, it is generally found that women are said to be more dominant in the field of PR in Iskandar Region because the persuasive factor exceeds the ability of men. This scenario refers to the nature and character compared to the level of appearance. This research focuses more on the role of PR and how it becomes the backbone of the organization. However, men are more likely to be leaders in the organization even if they do not master this career field.

Theoretically, the theory of excellence has stated that there is indeed a value of public relations in the quality of symmetrical communication with the public in the strategic planning of the organization but in fact this study proves not many women PR are actually involved in the decision-making process.

The contributions of these studies will clarify the gender contradiction elements influencing PR career. Therefore, to improve the perception of the employers on the issue of gender of PR practitioners in Malaysia in particular, then future research needs to be done to examine the real scenario on the composition of PR practitioners among organizations and the actual role of PR practitioners. It will help to reduce imbalance issue of PR practitioners in organization and both genders are eligible to show their actual talents.

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