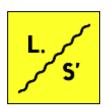
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Female Empowerment on International Women's Day 2023 Ads: Critical Discourse Analysis of Mercedes-Benz "Be One Of Many"

Maria Kristina Salelatu^{1,*} Santi Isnaini² IGAK Satrya Wibawa³

Universitas Airlangga^{1,2,3}

*Corresponding author. Email: maria_kristina1910@yahoo.com

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Abstract. Female representation in the media had been drastically changed as the women empowerment was put into the spotlight in international society, including the Western countries. The feminism movement had stimulated various creative content, including in the emotional advertisements where brands were trying to build a closer relation with their customers instead of the usual hard-selling ads. Femvertising was one of the products of women empowerment in the creative industry; in short, it referred to advertisements made with messages to support girls and women. This study was aimed to find out the discourse strategies of current femveritising in conveying female empowerment message. this article conducted a qualitative study of video ads by Mercedes-Benz titled "Be One of Many" and the findings were presented in descriptive format. The data analysis was conducted by using Sara Mills' model of Critical Discourse Analysis. The findings showed that the 2023's International Women's Day femvertising put women as their main subjects and also conveyed a specific "women support women". In conclusion, current femvertising's aim went beyond empowering oneself to be better than others or to be either the first or only woman in a profession or field, instead women should empower each other so that more women would achieve their dream and success even in the fields that are still dominated by men.

Keywords: Feminism; Female Empowerment; Femvertising; International Women's Day; Discourse Strategies

Abstrak. Representasi wanita pada media telah berubah drastis seiring dengan penempatan fokus akan pemberdayaan wanita di masyarakat internasional, termasuk pada negara-negara Barat. Pergerakan feminis telah menstimulasi berbagai konten kreatif, termasuk iklan emosional dimana brand mencoba untuk membangun relasi dengan konsumen daripada menggunakan iklan hardselling. Femvertising adalah salah satu produk dari pemberdayaan perempuan pada industri kreatif; singkatnya, berupa iklan-iklan yang dibuat dengan pesan untuk menyemangati perempuan dan wanita. Studi ini bertujuan untuk menemukan strategi wacana dari femvertising saat ini dalam membawa pesan pemberdayaan wanita. Artikel ini menggunakan studi kualiatif pada iklan video dari Mercedes-Benz dengan judul "Be One of Many" dan hasil temuan disajikan dalam format deskriptif. Analisa data dilakukan dengan menggunakan model Analisa Wacana Kritis dari Sara Mill. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa femvertising Hari Wanita Internasional 2023 tersebut menampilkan wanita sebagai subyek utama serta menyampaikan pesan "wanita mendukung wanita". Kesimpulannya, pesan dalam femvertising saat ini lebih dari sekedar menyemangati seseorang untuk menjadi lebih baik dari orang lain atau menjadi sebagai wanita pertama atau satusatunya dalam suatu profesi atau bidang. Sebaliknya, para wanita harus saling menyemangati sehingga lebih banyak wanita dapat meraih mimpi dan kesuksesan mereka bahkan di area yang masih didominasi oleh pria.

Kata kunci: Feminisme; Pemberdayaan Perempuan; Femvertising; Hari Wanita Internasional; Strategi Wacana

Introduction

Feminism has always been a very popular topic in the society as the movement is still on going and keep going stronger. The movement aimed to fight for gender equality and women empowerment continues to develop overtime and probably will still be relevant in the future. One of feminist movement is the liberal feminism in which there is an emphasis on equality, so women have to get the same opportunities (as men) in making rational choices (Irianto, 2008).

The changes in society values and norms have stimulates many transformations, including how the media represents women. As the modern world is now familiar with the feminism movement that brought the term "women empowerment", the media follows along. This relationship is interchangeable; society can affect the media and at the same time it is also possible for the media to bring global impact towards the society (Enkhmandakh & Vlajkovic, 2022).

In the development of media advertising related to the feminism concept, there is a "new" term that was introduced in the 2014 which is femvertising. Femvertising can be defined as "...advertising that employes pro-female talent, messages and imagery to empower women and girls" (Gillespie, 2016). SheKnows Media was the first one to coin the term for their awards named Femvertising Awards in 2014 to appreciate brands who could convey the message of supporting women in their advertisement.

It is important to note that, that year belonged to the fourth wave of feminism. The fourth wave was said to be the period when feminist movements were making a great use of technology, specifically the internet. This is the period when "cyber-feminism", that was actually introduced since the third period, developed into "networked feminism" (Council of Europe Portal, 2023). Femvertising is a great example of the phenomenon where the feminism movement utilizes the social networks to share its idea through creative content, especially in the form of audio-visual online advertising produced to raise awareness about female issues in the society and at the same time to empower women.

Women or female empowerment itself has a very broad meaning; it depends on what is the focus of the context. Governments, companies, organizations, brands, and the people who are pro-feminist all around the world were celebrating this in their own way. In the context of this discussion, some companies and/or brands shared audio-visual advertisement to celebrate women, or in this case they made digital femvertising contents. Different advertiser can direct the focus differently, often times the focus will be adapted from their branding.

In regards to femvertising, there is a discussion about female power that is the power to change one self's or other people's attitude and perspective (Kordrostami & Laczniak, 2022). The researchers also defined two kinds of power which are "power-to" and "power-over". In the context of femvertising, "power-to" is more commonly used as it fits the goal of supporting women. The term refers to how women are in control of their own perspectives, feelings, and attitude.

International Women's Day celebration on March 8th every year is one of the notable successes of feminism. Quoted from Worldbank.org, the theme of this year 2023 International Women's Day (IWD) is "Accelerating Equality and Empowerment" while UN used "DigitALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality" as their theme (World Bank, 2023). Connecting the "power-to" concept and the 2023 IWD's theme, it



is important to identify several key terms: 'equality', 'empowerment', and 'digital'. Simplifying the concepts and adapting them to the current society, it can be said that today's femvertising convey the message of empowering women to utilize digitalization in their own perspective and way in the pursuit of gender equality.

Mercedes-Benz was one of the many brands that shared their femvertising to celebrate the International Women's Day. The brand uploaded four videos titled "Be one of many"; the first one being a general video that introduced the topic presented for the femvertising to celebrate the 2023 International Women's Day. These video were uploaded on Mercedes-Benz official YouTube account starting from March 8th to March 10th; one video each day.

Using the hashtags #mercedesbenztv #MercedesBenz #IWD2023, the brand wrote in the first video' description: "From racing to science to CEO: Women are still the exception. They make history simply because they're the first or the only woman to achieve a success... Being the first woman to achieve a success is great. But creating an environment where exceptional women can be one of many is what this day is all about" (Mercedes-Benz, 2023a) to introduce the issue addressed by its femvertising.

Mercedes-Benz highlighted stories work fields in which women are still a minority compared to men.; they were either the 'first' one or even the 'only' one in the field. Nowadays, as women have the chance to get higher education, they can also have more contribution in wider field of work and higher job position that might previously male dominated (Zotos & Tsichla, 2014).

In order to get a deep understanding of the topic, the article specifically apply the Critical Discourse Analysis model by Sara Mills' in which the discourses can be analyzed from feminist perspective. Discourse analysis itself is the term that refers to the study of linguistic functions and also the message structures in either oral or written communication (Oka, 1994; Wayan Agus Sukayana et al., 2022).

Specifically for the theme raised by Mercedes-Benz, the topic was suitable to be analysed by using the feminist theory. Supported by June Hannam's feminism criteria, as quoted by Sobari & Faridah (2016), the (1) imbalance of power between men and women in which women are put in lower position, (2) belief that women's conditions are socially constructed and changeable, also (3) emphasize on women's autonomy.

Mills' model focused not to critique the structure of the language, but rather on the positions of actors in the text, which are the subject-object, and writer-reader (in this case audience). This theory and model is the most effective analysis tool given the nature of the research analysis units, which are the three Mercedes-Benz "Be one of many" femvertising. The subject-object position functions to show the perspective limitation, narrator's representation, and how subjective defining process affected how an event is represented (Wardani et al., 2016). As for the writer-reader, the text will be analyzed on how the topic was seen from the audience's perspective.

According to the background explained above, this article will discuss about how the media currently put their women empowerment messaging through ads. The purpose of the study is identifying women empowerment message presented by Mercedes-Benz "Be one of many" femvertising videos in the celebration of International Women's Day 2023 by analysing its discourse strategies using Sara Mills' Feminist Discourse Theory. Findings and results of this study can be used to enrich the knowledge about female empowerment advertisement or femveritising. Furthermore, the result can also be used as

information for future research in the women empowerment issues, especially though media.

Methods

This article is a descriptive qualitative study that applied content analysis method. Specifically, the analysis was done by using Sara Mills' Feminist concept of Critical Discourse Analysis. The method and approach was chosen as they were effective in deeply analysing how message was conveyed through media, especially in an advertisement.

The research was conducted in a structured manner which included predetermination of topic, data collecting, data analysing, and lastly obtaining conclusion in the form of deep understanding (Semiawan, 2010). First, the predetermined topic was feminism, specifically how it was represented in today's context. International Women's Day was a perfect moment since many brands usually celebrated it by producing special advertisement.

After determining the specific topic, the researcher continued with the data collection. Generally in qualitative researches, the results were not generated from one single source, but there should be multiple forms of data, such as documents, observations, etc. which later would be analyzed (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Specifically for this research, the data collection methods were observation, documentation, and literature review.

- 1. Non-participant Observation: the researcher browsed YouTube to look for the advertisement suitable with the topic. After choosing the video ads as the object of analysis (Table 1), the researcher watched the videos several times to understand the what the videos were about.
- 2. Documentation: While watching the videos, the researcher also noted or documented the important aspects found in the videos. The documentations were in the form of transcript of the interviewees dialogues (verbal) and screenshots of several frames in the videos (visual).
- 3. Literature study: The step was done to get references about theory or concepts that are related to the obtained data. This was important because qualitative researches are context-dependent. By understanding the context, the researcher will understand "how action, event, and meaning formed from unique reality or situations where it happens" (Maxwell, 2013).

The data was collected from uploaded content by the brand's (Mercedes-Benz) official YouTube account and from the four videos of "Be one of many" series, the researcher only chose the three videos as listed in Table 1. Each of the other three videos presented a story of a woman whose profession is still dominated by man; Reema Juffali is a female race driver, Johanna "Mercia" Weiβ is a pro-gamer, and Adi Ofek is a CEO. In their respective video, they told a story of how they are seen in the spaces which are still unpopular for women to work in.



No. Video Title(s) View Count

1 Race Driver Reema Juffali | International Women's Day 2023 |

"Be one of many" 5.1K

2 Pro-gramer "Mercia" | International Women's Day 2023 | "Be
one of many" 4.5K

3 Female CEO Adi Ofek | International Women's Day 2023 | "Be
one of many" 5.9K

Table 1. Mercedez-Benz "Be one of many" videos

After the data collection, the next step was data analysing. In order to analyse the data, the researcher uses Critical Discourse Analysis method. Compared to the other CDA models, the best model to analyze femvertising (*female advertising*) will be the one who specifically include feminist perspective, hence why Sara Mills' model is chosen.

In her theory, Mills argued that femininity referred as "an imposed ideological category and which thus tended to cast women as passive victim of oppression" (Mills, 1997, p. 86).

The framework of analysis dicussed about positions of the actors within the text; the subject-object and also writer-reader (or in this case the advertiser-audience) was presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Sara Mills' Framework of CDA (Murtiningsih et al., 2017)

Level	Details
Position of Subject-Object	From who(m) and how an event is seen?
	Who is in the position of narrator (subject)?
	Who is positioned as an object in the narration?
Writer-Reader Position	How is the reader positioned in the text?
	How the reader place her/himself in the text?
	To which group/ whom does the reader identify her/himself?

In this article, researcher will analyse the female empowerment for women as subjects, female empowerment for women as objects, and female empowerment for women from the audience's position.

Lastly, there should be a step of drawing and verifying conclusion. Miles et al. (2014) stated that the "end" conclusion might not be visible until the data collection was finished and the verfication (of conclusion) could be done along with the analysis processes. In order to do so, after analysing the videos using Sara Mills' CDA, the researcher refer back to the feminism concept and checked whether the displayed data had represented the context of the research, and answered the research problems.

Finding and Discussion

Each of the three video has a woman as their main subject and also the narrator of their own life story. These videos has both verbal and visual elements, yet since the format is interview-based, the focus is mainly put on the narrative given by the women; Reema, Mercia, and Adi.

Before analysing the videos, it is important to know each woman's narrative to understand their background and how their story relate to the topic of women empowerment. In order to understand them more, the researcher did a quick google search of each of their names, especially to get the general personal background. Later, the transcript of the videos were also analysed.

Reema Al-Juffali is the first female racing driver from Saudi Arabia in Mercedes-AMG GT3. She was born on in 1992 in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Her racing career started back in 2018 and she always levelled up in the type of Championship. This year, she professionally competes in the Fanatec GT World Challenge Europe with Theeba Motorsport team (Reema Juffali - Profile, 2023).

Table 3. Reema Juffali's video transcript (Mercedes-Benz, 2023d)

Duration Transcript

From such a young age it was clear to me that I didn't like dolls and I liked cars.

My name is Reema Juffali, and I'm a race car driver. There aren't many women who race, unfortunately. There is no one in Saudi who has gone racing. So no one I knew even whether it was a female or male. You send your young boy to karting and you send the girl elsewhere.

1:17

I think there needs to be a fair chance for both from that young age. When the kids are older that's connecting to them, whether it's in schools, whether it's showing them that motorsport is not just about being a driver. There is so much to it. There are engineers, mechanics. To run a car it takes an army of people.

I think the title of being the first might be momentarily nice, but the bigger picture you want to be one amongst many.

Johanna Weiβ, also known as Mercia is a 21 years old German professional gamer. In popular term, professional gamers are reffered as e-sport players, and so is Mercia who is now an active League of Legends e-sport player. As of February 2023, her role in the SK Avarosa team is a substitute Bot Laner (Fandom Games Community, 2023).

Table 4. Mercia's video transcript (Mercedes-Benz, 2023c)

Duration Transcript

Go back to the kitchen, make a sandwich. What are you even doing on the PC? Whenever people see that there's a girl playing they are like: "She can't be good."

My name is Mercia and I'm a pro-gamer. I got introduced really late to the whole esports scene. Back then, I didn't really know that there are teams that you could play competitively. That you could actually make a career out of that. But I didn't really see any other girls doing it. So it was a really new thing to me.

1:17

SK Gaming Avarosa was established in order to offer resources and support to female players, but also the members of the LGBTQ community. The project was initiated in 2021 by the partnership of Mercedes-Benz and SK Gaming. The whole experience made me a better player, but also like a more confident person.



Because I'm always saying: "I want to be the best." but I actually don't want to be like the best only because I'm a woman, you know? I would like to compete with a lot of other women in the esports scene and then become one of the best of them, too, you know? So I hope we achieve that in future.

Adi Ofek is the leader of the Mercedes-Benz Tech Hub in Tel Aviv, Israel. In April 2000 she was the first female who joined Daimler Financial Services in Israel. Her career in management level was notably exceptional as she become Regional Credit Operations Director handling the Asia-Pacific regions in Singapore for six years. For the next three years after that, her role became the CEO of Mercedes-Benz Financial Services ("Adi Ofek: CEO of the Mercedes-Benz Tech Hub in Tel Aviv," 2023).

Table 5. Adi Ofek's video transcript (Mercedes-Benz, 2023b)

Duration Transcript

I had a question that I used to get asked: How do you get men to listen to you? And I always used to say: The problem is in the question. Why wouldn't they listen to me? If I have something good to say, they should.

My name is Adi Ofek and I'm leading the Mercedes-Benz Tech Hub in Tel Aviv. I was so young. I was 20 - what, 20, I think 27. And I had this ambition to be a leader. And now I look back and I say: "What did this young girl want?" What would I tell my younger self? Trust yourself more maybe.

1:30

When I moved to Singapore in 2007, I had a one year old and a six year old with me. At that time it was super uncommon and I remember going to my boss and telling him: "Judge me based on results and not the hours." And he said: "I'm open as long as you get the results right. I'm okay."

But I'm telling you this story because I think that the values are the foundation that makes diversity at Mercedes-Benz so amazing. **And I see more and more amazing females around me.** It's wonderful to celebrate it.

Along with the dialogue transcript, the positions presented in the shots (character placement) will also be analysed. The visual elements can also help understanding the position in which they are presented and how are the shot contribute to structure the discourse.

Subject-Object Position

The three women were put as the subject or narrator of their own videos. The audiences got the chance to listen to the story related "Be one of many" topic from the person herself. Based on the introductory sentences, there was a similar pattern of their issue which was they suffered from gender stereotypes. Their stories represent that women were stereotyped to be liking dolls and not cars, to be working in the kitchen and make food, and to be having a hard time to get men to listen to them.

- (1) "... that I didn't like dolls and I liked cars." Reema.
- (2) "Go back to the kitchen, make a sandwich." Mercia.
- (3) "How do you get men to listen to you?" Adi

Although they were their own narrator, since they had to tell a story about their struggles, there were times in which they put women as object in the narration. The women told how people around them were treating them as women whether directly or indirectly. This could represent the highlighted issue in which women were still a minority in their fields, therefore it was still possible for them to be 'objects'.

- (1) "You send your young boy to karting and you send the girl elsewhere." Reema
- (2) "Whenever people see that there's a girl playing they are like: "She can't be good.""- Mercia
- (3) "I had a question that I used to get asked: How do you get men to listen to you?"- Adi

The quoted dialogues represented how women become the object of other people's action towards them. Not to mention how these showed how there was still stereotype embedded in the action. These dialogues also indicated that what the women did was still considered as breaking or challenging what the society was used to about women's role and ability.

Visual-wise, the women were interviewed in a room with yellow background. They were sitting on a chair and each showed relaxed posture. This could be the indicator that they were confident and under no pressure in telling this story. Noted that these women told a story about the struggle they experienced, yet they did not show any sign of sadness but rather confidence as they did survive in getting out of their struggle as women.

Table 5. Interview session shots of Reema, Mercia, & Adi. (Note: the screenshots were taken from the women's respective video)

Reema Mercia Adi

| Interpretation of the property of the prop

By not having too much properties, the character can be the focus or main subject of the video without any distractions from flashy or unnecessary decor. This could emphasize that indeed the subject is the storyteller herself. However, the studio in which these videos were shot was exactly the same for all three and it did not contribute to each



character's personality. The distinctive personality instead could be seen from their fashion style that perfectly represent their profession. Reema wore her racing suit and the other two were quite interesting. Their clothes were perfect stereotypes of what women in their profession would had usually worn.

In line with the video's title given by the brand, "Be one of many", the narrations were concluded with wishes that there would be more women participating in the three fields. This part packed the message of the entire femvertising which was that these women worked hard and therefore they can proudly tell their stories and journey. At the same time, they were confident enough in themselves that it would be great if there were many women joining them even if it meant that they would have competitors.

- (1) "I think the title of being the first might be momentarily nice, but the bigger picture you want to be one amongst many." Reema.
- (2) "I would like to compete with a lot of other women in the esports scene and then become one of the best of them, too, you know?" Mercia.
- (3)"And I see more and more amazing females around me. It's wonderful to celebrate it." Adi

Advertiser (Brand) - Audience Position

The first sentences were introduction to the issue faced by each one of them as women before continuing to actually introduce their names. By doing this, the advertiser (Mercedes-Benz) actually tried to hook the audience by the story and not the person as none of them was a celebrity and instead, they were professionals in their own field. Basically, they were not 'popular' in the general audiences, even though in their field they might be well-known.

It is no secret that any creative content should have a hook in which the audience will get attracted and continue watching. By using the issue as the hook, indirectly the advertiser put the women as 'object' of their story. It did not mean that the women were not important, but what made the video meaningful was the stories experienced by Reema, Mercia, and Johanna. This, however, did not bring any negative consequences in the context as the entire videos were still focusing on the women's life stories.

Narratively, the viewers of the video were placed as a passive audiences because the video ads were not made to be interactive in content format. The women (narrators) and the brand (Mercedes-Benz) had the dominant position as the narrative were given only from their perspectives. The viewers had no power to change the narrative as the production of the videos were finished before the viewers could give any input.

Type-wise, however, these videos are online advertising and are posted or uploaded on social media. The interactivity can be mediated through YouTube as the platform used by the brand to upload the videos. Viewers or audiences can interact by giving like/ dislike and also by writing their comments. By checking the comment section, the brand/ advertisers could evaluate how the viewers receive the message conveyed by the videos. Lastly, the videos might not be interactive as in the viewers had no input in the production process, even so, the brand actually addresses the audience quite directly at the end of the video. By putting the "Be one of many." sentence in the last seconds of the videos, Mercedes-Benz did a simple yet powerful "call-to-action" for the audience.

Coming back to Sara Mill's theory that audience was not an entity that merely "accept" the text, but the audience could contribute to it (Novianti et al., 2022). In this context of

"Be one of many" videos, the audience might not be able to contribute to the video production, yet the audience were actually the 'main' interpreter of the message conveyed by the video

Female Empowerment in "Be one of many" Videos

Based on the findings generated by analysing the videos using Sara Mill's model of Critical Discourse Analysis, it could be determined that the videos were indeed produced with female empowering message embbeded in them. In line with their purpose as a part of 2023's IWD celebration, the femvertising videos and their message were focused on women and their issues in today's society.

Reffering back to Sara Mill's CDA model, the videos were analysed based on the subject-object position and also the writer-audience position, specifically, the role or poistion of women that could determine how they were represented and the structure of the videos. According to Wardani et al.(2016) feminism existed along with the critic towards popular culture and mass media as well as its unfair, imbalance, and explorative constructions.

Atmam (2021) done a similar topic in which the researcher used Mill's CDA approach to analyse a program made by PSSI TV (PSSI = Indonesian Football Federation) and how it represented Indonesian female footballer. In the program, the female players were being interviewed as the subject to tell their stories about having a career in the football industry which was dominated by men. The researcher wanted to find out how feminist discourse was delivered through the interviews of PSSI TV program and also what kind of image did PSSI TV wanted to form or show to the audiences.

Both Mercedes-Benz and PSSI TV put women as the subject of their content and the women narrated their own experience in male-dominated industries. The main issue represented in the contents (as media) was how there was some kind of imbalance in several industries where women could actually take part in, but still men were dominating there. Branston & Stafford (2010) argued that what was shown in the media is the result of construction and representation processes.

Both producer (Mercedes and PSSI TV) presented real women (non-actress) who told their real experience from their own perspectives. The stories told by the women indeed happened and they showed how women's role were seen and/ or in the society. It was significant to use real women as the "model" or subjects of the media because what they experienced happen and they also really proved that they could reach their dreams regardless.

Among the female athletes, several told that they were prohibited to play football because of them being women. However, their determination make them continued pursuing their dream and now they made it as female footballers (Atmam, 2021). Just like Reema, Mercia, and Adi previously were doubted and even discouraged when pursuing their career paths, simply because there were not many women chose their professions. They also did not give up and still pursue their dream career.

That itself was a very powerful message that despite the prohobition, discouragement, etc., these women proved that with hard work, they could reach their goal and be whoever they wanted to be even in careers or profession that were "not made for women". The content producer had delivered their empowering message to their audiences, especially females, that women can be whomever they wanted to be.



Mercedes-Benz had put the spotlight to the three women and gave them the freedom to tell their stories, both their struggles and their success. There was nobody interrupting them while they were telling the stories. Mercedes-Benz gave the audiences the opportunity to be attentive and relate to the narrators' experiences directly from the women themselves as seen by their own perspectives.

Conclusion

Women empowerment will not lose its popularity as long as the issues around women are still present and the support towards them are still needed. At the end of the day, it is important to refer back to the core aim of feminism movement which is to fight for gender equality. Proven by the Mercedes Benz ads that were analyzed in the study, women empowerment now has a broader sense. It is not as simple as supporting someone to be "the first woman", "the only woman", etc. just to prove a woman's power. The videos are conveying a message to remind the viewer that there is power in number and in this era, instead of competing against each other, women should give more spaces for women in places or professions that are still dominated by man.

The society is always going to be dynamic, what is important now may not be as much in the future and vice versa. Media is one of the many aspects of life that will be influenced by any changes happening in the world as media usually represents reality. This can also happen with advertising in which the market trend will transform according to the values and norms held by the consumers. The changes are inevitable so what is important is for brand to adapt, especially for those who want to gain the consumers trust and loyalty by strengthening their branding and positioning in the market.

In conclusion, it is important for advertisers or content creators to be aware of the issues happening nowadays and also the development of issues that has been happening for some time. Just like feminism movement and its "women support women" slogan which introduced quite long time ago, yet the issues are still relevant to this day, however, it has developed. The challenge here is to make sure that the messaging is relevant to the society and the content itself can still stand out from the crowd. The keys? Understanding the issues deeply then using creativity to make the content entertaining and meaningful for the audience.

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