

## **INDIE FILM, AN INNOVATION**

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### **Abstract**

The mainstream national film industry presents uniformity of ideas, initiatives, messages and visual aesthetic and is rather commercialized. The Indonesian Indie film is developing as an alternative movement to the mainstream film industry in the post-reform era. The paper observes the indie films industry's innovation, focusing on the people involved, ideas put forth, relationships between factors involved and the context in which indie films exists. The research is done with a cultural studies approach through interdisciplinary hermeneutic phenomenology method and interpretative-descriptive technique. The filmmaker's creativity along with the production's stakeholders in creating indie films need innovative management. Innovative management is needed in the production, distribution and consumption phases of indie films. In all the phases, indie films put forward the *values bound*. In the production and distribution phases, the economic and modernity values which include the autonomic-aesthetic values and originality can be researched on. In the consumption phase, aesthetic values, morale, economy and post-modernity are found. Included in post-modernity are radical relativity values wherein values and truth become the product of the individual and plurality with existential affirmation with respect for differences.

**Keywords:** Indie films, innovation, production phase and film consumption phase

### **1. Introduction**

Indonesia's film industry has great potential in the forms of a large consumer base and market and creative human resource. Such potential can be very useful in developing a solid national film industry through continuous efforts in improving technical qualities, ideas, initiatives, message and aesthetic. Furthermore, to support the development of the industry, a conducive socio-politic, cultural and economic environment is needed. The end of the new order brought a change in such environment through democratization and new-found openness. At the same time, there has been a trend of uniformity of idea, initiatives, message and visual aesthetic by mainstream moviemakers. There are no significant differences in the way filmmakers present their ideas. This results in the limited ways in which mainstream audience is trained in interpreting ideas put forth by the movies. Today, Indonesian independent films are developing as an alternative to the mainstream films that are often seen more as an economic commodity.

The development of indie films coincides with the lackluster performance of the Indonesian film industry wherein the numbers of cinemas and films are in decline. On the other hand, the

increasing availability of easy and affordable filmmaking technology enables more people to get involved in film production. Filmmaking no longer requires large budget and high degree of complexity. Digital visual technology enables the people to create films more easily with a much lower budget. In general, indie films are classified based on the duration format, content, and the filmmaker's style in creating short films, documentaries and experimental.

It is interesting to observe the innovation found in the indie film industry which includes the people involved, the message put forward and the relationships between related factors and contexts in which indie films exists.

## **2. Methods**

This paper presents a qualitative research with cultural studies approach through interdisciplinary hermeneutic phenomenology method and interpretative-descriptive technique. On the research objectives, phenomenology is employed to find out how the indie films' creator and production stakeholders express the idea, initiative and the message put forward with the film's text construction in the post-reform political and socio-cultural situations. The hermeneutic method is employed to research on the film's aesthetic choices and the texts' codes

The data analyzed are: (a) Primary data in the form of film text from indie films created by Bandung indie producers in post reform era. (b) Secondary data in the form of interview with stakeholders and literature reviews from books and articles. The data analysis includes these steps: (a) Data organization and transcription. (b) Bracketing (*epoché*), text reading, creating primary code without preconception. (c) Decrypting data into codes and topics; personal recount and phenomenal essence. (d) Clustering meaning, classifying data into codes and topics; organizing statements into meaningful units. And translating data, textural and structural description. (e) Decrypting phenomenal essence, integrating themes into narrative description.

## **3. Analysis and Results**

The current development of indie films is marked with the variety of formats, themes, genres, styles and the vibrant discourse and discussion that the films generate. Nearly all kinds of film can be watched in cinemas, cultural centres, galleries and the film communities in both the public and private domains. For example, the public can watch independently produced movies, documentaries, pop movies and films with and lesbian themes (Van Heeren, 2012). The highlight on indie films is not only on the technicality of the filmmaking in the production phase and on how it reaches the viewers in the distribution phase. There is growing attention on the consumption phase i.e. how the films are being viewed by the viewers. There is a "negotiation" that happens in the consumption phase between the viewers and the film's texts and this can be analyzed on different levels such as viewers, texts and the institutions that construct the texts. In the cultural studies paradigm, appreciating the film is not only determined by the production phase but also by the consumption phase (Storey, 2008).

The changes and developments in indie films as an art form are related to the production, distribution, and consumption phases. The changes and developments involve creativity and

innovation. Creativity is often regarded as the realm of the individual artists while innovation is related to organizational context (Fritzgibbon, 2001). The difference between the two is related to originality derived from differing or even opposing social processes. Creativity is the amalgamation of differing ideas or disciplines that makes use of tradition and illuminative knowledge. Realizing creativity is deemed as an innovation that involves several managerial levels. In the innovation process, creativity often requires much effort in the production phase. This is closely related to realization of ideas, the carrying out process, diffusion phase and is not only confined to idea generation. In the production, distribution and consumption phases, indie films involve aesthetic, moral and economic values. Aesthetic values include the values of the material or object and the activity. The aesthetic values are heavily influenced by a dominant class that holds the opinion that cultural relic and activities can be taken as measures of aesthetic. This is a reflection of the role of the dominant class in legitimizing and propagating political and moral values. Aesthetic values can also be related to economic values. The importance of aesthetic values is not solely on the artistic values relics but also on the economic values that they can bring. Relics with high aesthetic values can be marketed in a high price. In Emile Durkheim's concept of collective conscience, integration and stability of the people depend on how they collectively internalize values. Collective consensus of moral values becomes a precursor of a stable society. These consensus values are seen as ideology and hegemony practice, which in reality produce alternative subcultures with different system in society's system.

In the production phase, indie films have modern values of economics, aesthetic and originality. During the production phase, indie films do not follow the mainstream production process; they are not produced and distributed by big studios. Economic, social, and political condition in post-reformation era gives creators chance to decide the way to produce and distribute film to consumers without pressure. Directors and production stakeholders (creators) have their own parameter of aesthetics in style of storytelling and visualization of messages. Aesthetic, moral, and post-modernity values can be found in consumption phase of this object of study – post-modernity values that reject big narrations about the hegemony of the majority toward the minority.

Creativity is formed from management of innovation. Management of innovation are related to these elements: human, idea, transaction, and context. Indie film productions include filmmakers that generally work outside mainstream film industries and work in independent studios. Directors play the role of organizer and creator; they attempt to both materialize their ideas and become the leader for actors and those who are involved in production (Radiger, 2008). A director is demanded to understand the concept of the story, because basically making a film is translating or interpreting a script into something to watch – in a visual form or live pictures and sound, in a film screen. Beside of that, a director also needs to understand both the situation of the environment and also the psychological condition of those who are involved in the production, and he needs to know how to create a good relation with them. Directors work in all production phase; from pre-production, production, to post-production. But mostly they work in the production process, where they direct the actors and the crews. A director analyzes the script, forms the concept of main plan from technical and artistic aspects to make the script into a cinematic storytelling. A director develops the vision of the film and decides how the film would be seen later on the screen. Directors give interpretation for the sake of the appreciators with the

choice of technique and expressing style based on their subjective-interpretative perspective. To make it happen, a director is assisted by a cameramen (director of photography). A director controls artistic and dramatic aspects in film, in spite of directing technical crews and actors. He chooses and decides the crews and actors that suit the film's needs and demands. A director coordinates the creative process as an effort to achieve efficiency in work and gives directions to the crews for the creation of the artwork, so it becomes a unity as a work in cinematic storytelling.

All the people who are involved in the production of a film have the role of creators that interpret scripts and work under the directions of a director. Beside of interpreting script, the crews also produce sign usage and code of language according to their own speciality through their medium of expression (visual, motion, audio, and space). A director gives freedom in interpretation of the script and gives space for interest in production event of signs to the crews, so the medium used has become a message and identity of style of expression in the film. Interpretation of script and production event of sign from all crews are organized and fused in the eye of camera frame, according to the director's subjective-interpretation – which are then interpreted by the cameramen in the form of shots as the smallest unit of a film. The director evaluates and gives the final decision for the quality of the work of all unit involved in the production both technically and artistically. In the last part, the director directs the film editor and music arranger in a series of shot-scene-sequence, and also gives evaluation and the final decision for the quality of the work in the form of "release copy". All things that are in the "release copy" will be the things seen in the screen, which become a thing to watch. Film becomes an artwork of a cinematic storytelling with an artistic style of expression and dramatic narration of a director (Belasunda, 2012).

General concepts related to language, concepts, principals, working method and structure in mainstream films are challenged by indie films in the form of *values bound*. These values are: the economy, modernity, aesthetic, originality, morality and post-modernity. These are new concepts in understanding and making meaning out of abnormal, marginal, deviant or subordinate reality.

The ideas that want to be conveyed by a film are presented in a formulation of film text. Text formulation is done by the film creators, and when the text is received by the reader (the audience), the text will interact with the said readers. When interacting, readers engage in interpretation of the meaning (reading the content of the text), and also negotiate with it. This negotiation happens because readers bring the aspects of their cultural experience (references) to engage with code (system of sign) or signs that constructs the text (Fiske, 2007). Communications of the messages are related with production and exchanges (negotiation) of meaning that happens between sender and the reader. Through a film as a communication media in a context of generation of a meaning, an issue is negotiated with using a film language.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The creativity of filmmakers and production crews and the realization of making indie films needs innovative management. The management of innovation applies in production, transaction/distribution, and consumption phase in indie films. In all the phases, indie films put

forward the *values bound*. The economic, modernity, aesthetic, autonomy and originality values can be found in the phases of production and distribution. The values of aesthetics, morality, economics, and post-modernity can be found in the consumption phases. Included in the post-modernity are radical relativity where values and righteousness become individual product and plurality with the recognition and respect of existence and diversity.

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