

## NATIONAL FILM INDUSTRY IN THE EYES OF NORTH SUMATRA FILM COMMUNITY FILMMAKERS <sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

The national film industry has nowadays come back on its feet after the downfall in the 1990-ies. The resuscitated of the national film industry started from the film *'Pertualangan Sherina'* and was followed by *'Ada Apa Dengan Cinta'* that hit the market with 2.700.000 audience. Other films emerged also such as *'Jelangkung'*, *'Eiffel I'm in Love'* and *'Arisan'*. These films increased the hopes for national films. Non-commercial films had also arisen such as *'Daun di Atas Bantal'*, *'Pasir Berbisik'*, and others. The enthusiastic of independent films arose and gave birth to filmmakers from outside Java Islands especially North Sumatra. Filmmakers from North Sumatra were born and were triggered to make their own independent movies. Though, it had also become a concern for these filmmakers on how they could penetrate their creation into the national film industry. This concern became interesting to be acknowledged on why they hesitated to promote their films to the national arena. It seemed that they viewed that the national film industry was a hard bargain. This researched focused on the perspective of the North Community filmmakers on how they see the national film industry.

This research was conducted in Medan and Berastagi North Sumatera where most filmmakers that were members of the film community of North Sumatera were actively doing film projects. Method used was a qualitative method, with a descriptive-qualitative method. The data collecting technique used were depth interview, documentation study and observation. More than 10 members of the film community North Sumatera were chosen as informants by purposive sampling techniques. This research was aimed to acknowledge on how the filmmakers that are joined in the film community in North Sumatra view the national film industry.

Results found in this research were divided into four categories: 1) Jakarta-centrist, the community thought that most films produced were mostly using part of Betawi language and accent, such as the way that the actors use the words *'gue'* to identify him/herself and *'lu'* to identify someone whom he/she was talking to. They rarely used the standard of Indonesian language. Jakarta way of life was also mostly seen in these national films. Films represented mostly a metropolitan way of lifestyle, such as how they interact with people, how they date, how they live. Artifacts like clothes, houses, malls, parks, traffic, and others seen in the films were also identical on things most found in Jakarta. Javanese people, especially from Jakarta, were recruited more in film productions. Even though the themes of films were about the life of people in other

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cities or towns, they still used actors or crew films from Java Island. Films rarely recruited local people. 2) Partnership with major production houses. Most informants had a belief that if they wanted to have their films shown on the big screens (theaters), they needed to be partners with a big production house which was from Jakarta. In this case, it would not be easy, because they might need to change their storyline as to become a more commercial theme and would need to agree on any interest that the production house requested. 3) The content film must be more Indonesian. This reason arose as informants admitted that Indonesia was not ready for science-fiction themes. Local wisdom stories should be explored more in films. 4) Broadcast rules had not been implemented well. Informants stated that the policy was still centralistic. This issue was seen in local television content and the watch hours.

**Keywords:** Filmmakers, Community Film, North Sumatra, National Film Industry

## INTRODUCTION

The national film industry in Indonesia has emerged from its downfall and came back with pure dignity. Films like *'Pertualangan Sherina'* then followed by *'Ada Apa Dengan Cinta'* brought back the pride of the national film industry. Audiences over than 2.000.000 watch these films on big screens. From then on, audiences from society were always eager to know what other national films would hit the film industry market. Hopes of national films arose from all around the country not only commercial filmmakers but also independent filmmakers.

Independent film is the opposite of Hollywood films, it has a unique and different format, and it is less commercial. Film as a mass communication media seemed to be a way out for the independent filmmakers to deliver messages or transmitting culture. Independent filmmakers were triggered to make more films that highlighted local wisdom stories that are unique. Filmmakers from North Sumatra were enthusiastic to make their own independent movies to preserve culture especially a culture that is on the road of extinction. Though, it had also become a concern for these filmmakers on how they could penetrate their creation into the national film industry so that their creation could be seen on a higher scale. This concern became interesting to be acknowledged on why they hesitated to promote their films to the national arena.

This research was to investigate perception on national film industry from the eyes of independent filmmakers, especially filmmakers that are members of the North Sumatra Film Makers community (KoFi SUMUT).

## METHOD

The qualitative research method was used in this article, with a descriptive-qualitative method. The descriptive-qualitative method was chosen because the authors gathered facts about perspectives from members of the North Sumatra Community filmmakers about the national film industry. This was then described in a model that represented the situation in the field. Descriptive research is to develop concepts and gather facts, accurately describe the characteristics of an individual, circumstances, symptoms, or certain groups.

In this research, the authors used data collection techniques in the form of interviews, observations, focus group discussions (FGD), and literature studies. The primary data source of this research was the members of the North Sumatra Community filmmakers. Secondary data sources were from books, journals, and websites that discussed films, national film industry, mass communication, and mass media. Purposive procedures were used in the context of

taking/selecting informant samples in research. A purposive procedure was carried out by determining groups of participants who were informants according to selected criteria that were relevant to a particular research problem. A purposive procedure was chosen because of the suitability of the informants with the focus of the research.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Film as one of the mass communication media has had millions of people buying tickets in theaters in a week. Hollywood movies are portrayed to have flooded the global industry films worldwide that have also consciously or unconsciously influence attitude, behaviors, and hopes for people around the world. Even though Hollywood films dominate the big screens worldwide, the film industry in Indonesia has also proven to have emerged throughout the years.

The first film that was documented in the history of national films in Indonesia was *Lady Van Java* which was produced in Bandung in 1926. Then *Lutung Kasarung*, *Si Conat*, and *Pareh* were shown to the society in 1930 (Ardianto, Komala & Karlinah, 2015). The national film industry even though suffered its downfall in the 1990-ies, it has nowadays come back on its feet. The resuscitated of the national film industry started from the film *Pertualangan Sherina* and was followed by *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta* that hit the market with 2.700.000 audience. Other films emerged also such as *Jelangkung*, *Eiffel I'm in Love* and *Arisan*. These films increased the hopes for national films. Non-commercial films had also arisen such as *Daun di Atas Bantal*, *Pasir Berbisik*, and others.

Films as one of the media for mass communication have influenced many levels in society. One of the functions of mass communication is to transmit culture, whether it is a new culture or a local wisdom that needs to be preserved. Local filmmakers outside Java have come to a point where they were obligated to make films with contents of local wisdom or culture within their own area. North Sumatra Filmmakers especially were triggered more to preserve their culture through films. Though, their films have not yet touched the national industry films. Their films were just consumed by their own local society and they still have some doubts about pursuing their films to the big screens national wide. This happened to be because of their perception of the national industry films.

This research was to find out what perception do filmmakers of the North Sumatra Community think about the national film industry. Perception itself is actually the core of communication. John R. Wenburg and William W. Wilmon defined perception as on how an organism gives a meaning of something (Mulyana, 2004). J. Cohen stated also that perception is defined as interpretation meaning from the external objective representative sensation. (Mulyana, 2004). From those statements, perception is the organization, identification, and interpretation of sensory information in order to represent and understand the presented information, or the environment.

Perception of the film industry is what was defined as social perception. Social perception is a process in identifying social objects and events that happen around our society, in this case, the perception of the national film industry. Perceptions of the national film industry vary from the public. These perceptions depend on what intention or cause they watch films in the first place. Perceptions that come from filmmakers will certainly differ from people that are not in the film industry.

As mentioned above the national film industry has once again come back on its highlight. This brought up the enthusiasm of other filmmakers around the country. Independent films productions increased and triggered filmmakers from outside Java Islands especially North Sumatra. Filmmakers from North Sumatra were triggered to make their own independent movies. While on one side these filmmakers were enthusiastic to produce more local films on the other side they were also concern on how they could penetrate their creation into the national film industry. This issue was stimulated on the perception of filmmakers. Eight members of the community filmmakers of North Sumatra were interviewed to acknowledge their perception of the national film industry.

Interviews were conducted for three days in October around Medan and Berastagi where most filmmakers' members of the community in North Sumatra stayed. They are Onny, Ilham, Daniel, Manu, Ori, Berry, Martha and Roy. Results found that the perception that emerged was pointed out into four categories, which are explained below:

### 1) Jakarta-Centrist

The community thought that most films produced were mostly using part of Betawi language and accent. This was seen in most films or electronic films (*sinetron*) in national TV station. The way that the actors use the words '*gue*' to identify him/herself and '*lu*' to identify someone whom he/she was talking to had become the main language they used in films. They rarely used the standard of Indonesian language. This way of communicating has become a culture itself, where the society around the country was very much familiar to the Jakarta way of speaking and without a doubt some people outside Jakarta had adopted the way they spoke in films.

Jakarta way of life was also mostly seen in these national films. Films represented mostly a metropolitan way of lifestyle, such as how they interact with people, how they date, how they live. Artifacts like clothes, houses, malls, parks, traffic, and others seen in the films were also identical on things most found in Jakarta.

There had been some statements from the informants that films produced involved more people from Java especially from Jakarta than from other Islands. Even though the themes of films were about the life of people in other cities or towns, they still used actors or crew films from Java. Films rarely recruited local people.

One of the informants recalled that there had been films that highlighted the people of Medan, or films that were telling stories about people from Sumatra. What they complained about was that the actors playing in those films were not originated from Medan/North Sumatra itself, but more of actors from Java especially Jakarta. They stated that it became odd since the actors did not really act as Medan/North Sumatra people but more to stereotypes of Medan/Sumatra people. Even though, the actors had done some research background on how Medan people live and interact. It still seemed to look 'fake', especially in the eyes of the North Sumatra people itself. This was because the actors could not internalize the culture of North Sumatra people.

One particular film that highlighted a story about a person from North Sumatra was '*3 Nafas Likas*'. This was an Indonesian drama film produced by Oreima Films and directed by Rako Prijanto, based on a script by Titien Watimena. This film was purposed to introduce audiences around the country of North Sumatra heroes and their patriotic acts. It was based on the true story of [Likas Tarigan](#), who later became known as Likas Gintings, wife of Let. Jend. Djamin

Gintings. It was a story about a woman from the land of 'Karo', North Sumatra that had achieved many accomplishment and successes, because she held true her promise to the three most important person in her life: her father Ngantari, her brother Njohre, and her husband Djamin. Atiqah Hasiholan played as Likas the main actress, even though her mother was from North Sumatra, though Atiqah herself was born and raised in Jakarta. Vino G. Bastian that played as Likas' husband was also an actor born and raised in Jakarta. This had proven of the informants' statements that most actors were recruited from Java, not from the originated local place. Other film stars stared in this film like [Tuti Kirana](#), [Marissa Anita](#), [Mario Irwinsyah](#), [Tissa Biani Azzahra](#), and [Jajang C. Noer](#) that were from Java.

Not only the actors or actresses that were mostly recruited from Java but also the film crew itself. Daniel, one of the informants stated that the local arts council should have autonomy. It shouldn't be based on Jakarta standard. If there would be a shooting in parts of North Sumatra, there should have some terms and condition. Daniel offered an example as it should have been for how much percentage crew from North Sumatra. Human resources that are available in the local area should be counted. Big screen films production from Jakarta often brings their own crew to take shots in Medan/ North Sumatra.

Informants were proud to say that EsEfDe production house from SFD (Sineas Film Documentary) is working on a film titled "Haji Asrama" (HAS). This Film was created to build back the spirit of North Sumatra Films nationally wide. All crew and casts were from North Sumatra.

## 2) Partnership with Major Production Houses

Most informants had a belief that if they wanted to have their films shown on the big screens (theaters), they needed to be partners with big productions house which were mostly based in Jakarta. Having a partnership with big production houses were not easy, they admitted they would need to have strong knots with someone inside the production house itself. Besides that, big production houses would play a 'role' when local films which were trying to get through the national film market by making specific regulations.

On the other hand, they were also concern about other things, especially their own content of their films. In this case, they might need to change their storyline as to become a more commercial theme and would need to agree on any interest that the production house requested.

If they were to be partners with a major production house/company, they might need to agree on some terms and conditions which would challenge their idealism in the content of the film. The new content might eliminate some crucial messages that were to be given to the audience. This concern has become one of the obstacles on why North Sumatra filmmakers hesitate to pursue their films to the big screens. North Sumatra filmmakers are members of the film community there which means that commonly produce independent films. Community filmmakers usually do not want their films to be dominated by the film industry because if so, it would have a tendency to ignore the content quality.

Onny stated it was difficult for local films to get in the national film market. This was said because there was a theatre distribution system which was very complicated. It was related to how many numbers of audiences which would watch the film. The technology standard films from local films were also a concern. The number of theatres in the local area was also a concern. There

were too many things that needed to be considered before a local film penetrates the national film market.

Table 1 is a list of some production film companies which are known throughout the country. Some are seen to be productive where some are not in producing films.

**Table 1. List of Production Films Company**

| No | Production Films Company |    |                         |
|----|--------------------------|----|-------------------------|
| 1  | 700 Pictures             | 21 | Lenza Film              |
| 2  | Alenia Pictures          | 22 | Maxima Pictures         |
| 3  | Amanah Surga Productions | 23 | MD Entertainment        |
| 4  | Barometer Lite           | 24 | Miles Films             |
| 5  | Batavia Pictures         | 25 | Mitra Pictures          |
| 6  | Dapur Film               | 26 | Mizan Production        |
| 7  | Demi Gisela Citra Sinema | 27 | Movieglad Picture       |
| 8  | Diwangkara Film          | 28 | Perfini                 |
| 9  | E-Motion Entertainment   | 29 | Prima Entertainment     |
| 10 | East Cinema              | 30 | Rapi Films              |
| 11 | Falcon Pictures          | 31 | Screenplay Productions  |
| 12 | Fourcolours Films        | 32 | Sentra Mega Kreasi      |
| 13 | Frame Ritz               | 33 | SinemArt                |
| 14 | Genta Buana Paramita     | 34 | Soraya Intercine Films  |
| 15 | Indika Entertainment     | 35 | Starvision              |
| 16 | Indika Pictures          | 36 | Starvision Plus         |
| 17 | K2K Production           | 37 | Studio X Production     |
| 18 | Kalyana Shira Films      | 38 | Timur Bumi Sinema       |
| 19 | Karnos Film              | 39 | Tripar Multivision Plus |
| 20 | Kepompong Gendut         | 40 | Verona Pictures         |

(Source: Komalawati, 2017)

Big screens in Indonesia has been dominated by Cinema 21 that arose at the end of the 1980-ies. According to informants, there had been some protests related to the monopoly import and the theatre net. Cinema 21 has around 864 big screens that are spread throughout 36 cities in 157 location around Indonesia. It has loyal audiences that have always chosen Cinema 21 to watch

movies. Ori, one of the informant and the director of a local film titled “*JandiLa Surong*” in Brastagi stated that his film will not be targeted to Cinema 21, but more to CGV Blitz. He admitted that in his local area which is Medan, CGV was quite open to local films. Though, he also mentioned that there were some strategies to have films enter the CGV Blitz local area. CGV Blitz operates 27 theaters with 186 screens in Indonesia, accounting for up to 15% market share. This only puts them behind Cinema XXI, which has seen its share drop from 88% in 2012 to 74% today (Bachdar, 2017).

### 3) Content Films Should Be More Indonesian

Informants stated that films produced should have more stories of the Indonesian culture, folklore stories, and daily life stories. Local wisdom stories should be explored more in films. The first reason for this was because Indonesia has richness in cultures from every part of the country. These cultures are uniqueness that could bring Indonesia as one of the most remarkable places on earth with various cultures. Local wisdom that vary from one place to another add more of how Indonesia can attract curiosity around the globe.

Berry the producer of “*JandiLa Surong*” stated that the mission of this film is to arouse tourism, education, culture, and sport. This film tells about the life of M. Tempel Tarigan which was taken from a novel created by M. Tempel Tarigan with the same title. It is a drama romance story of a girl in the 1960-ies. Its first mission of this film was actually to lift up the culture and rituals that had applied inside the Karo people. As mentioned above that mass media also contributes to transmitting historical values in society. These cultural values could be learned through films as a mass media. JLS film was meant to spread the values and ideas that exist in their respective times. This is in line with Wood's statement which says that mass media brings images and stories that contribute to an awareness of identity, while at the same time forming trust and value. Haviland stated that sharing a number of perceptions and behaviors, members of a culture can also share their common cultural identity. Berry said particularly that this film highlight how girls and boys interact with each other when they like each other in the early days, especially in Karo society. He stated that it was far more different than how girls and boys interact these days. Berry was eager to let know the audience about these local cultures through this film.

The other reason why we should stick more on stories about Indonesian culture was because Indonesia was not ready for science-fiction themes. Because we do not have the technology to support those kinds of films. There are still a lot of film themes that do not fit using Computer-Generated Imagery (CGI), which is the application of computer graphics to create or contribute to images in art, printed media, video games, films, and television.

### 4) Broadcast Rules Had Not Been Implemented Well

Informants stated that the regulation of broadcasting was still centralistic. It was also stated that it was not implemented well for local areas. This issue was seen in local television content and the duration of the films or television programs.

The first point of the broadcasting regulation stated that films as the creation of arts have a strategic role in preserving the national culture, the second point was that films were communication media, the third films in the globalization era was a penetration tool. So it needed to be protected from negative content that did not suit *Pancasila* ideology. The last point was that

the developing of films should be in line with the dynamic of society and the developing of science and technology. As we can see from the above regulation, it was far more idealistic than what was going on in real life. Films were more Jakarta centralistic which influence the whole national culture.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results, the researchers found that the perceptions that arose from members of the North Sumatra filmmakers on the national film industry gave them doubts in penetrating their films to the national film market. These perception related on how they see national films as Jakarta centric, they see that big production houses/companies have a big role in the film market and industry, they see that films should have more Indonesian culture content and that the broadcasting regulation seemed to have not implemented well enough throughout the country.

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