

Assessing the Effectiveness of the Documentary Film *Suster Apung* in Enhancing Audience Interest in Documentary Viewing

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Keywords: Screenplay, Empathy, Society	The documentary film <i>Suster Apung</i> tells the story of the struggle of a nurse serving in a remote area of Indonesia. This film highlights the dedication and sacrifice of medical personnel who face numerous challenges in delivering healthcare services to underserved communities. To effectively convey its message to the audience, a documentary must be supported by a well-constructed screenplay. A strong screenplay serves as a stimulus capable of eliciting immediate emotional responses from viewers. The quality of a documentary's screenplay can significantly enhance public empathy toward the individuals and communities portrayed. This study aims to examine the influence of the <i>Suster Apung</i> documentary's screenplay on public empathy, using a sample of 130 randomly selected respondents. The research employs a quantitative approach with a descriptive-verify method, analyzed using multiple linear regression. The findings indicate that cinematography, sound design, and the selection of interview subjects contribute 30.2% to the development of empathy, while the remaining 69.8% is influenced by other variables not examined in this study. The results suggest that the quality of a documentary's screenplay is shaped by effective cinematography, appropriate sound design, and relevant sources. The better the screenplay quality, the higher the potential for fostering audience empathy
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INTRODUCTION

Each community in Indonesia possesses unique characteristics shaped by the geographical origin of their region. The documentary *Suster Apung* is inspired by a true story of medical personnel working in remote areas of Indonesia, where access to healthcare remains extremely limited. This film portrays the perseverance of nurses and other healthcare workers who struggle against various constraints to assist communities in need. These conditions have indirectly contributed to shaping a society with high individualism and mobility, especially in urban areas like Jakarta. Such traits, particularly individualism, have made people less empathetic toward the social realities surrounding them.

Suster Apung not only highlights the challenges faced by healthcare professionals in remote areas but also illustrates their resilience and spirit of service. The film aims to

encourage viewers to better appreciate the contributions of medical workers and to raise awareness about the importance of equitable access to healthcare across Indonesia.

Misconceptions about social problems in society can be addressed by presenting the truth based on facts, data, and appropriate media so that empathy can arise naturally within the audience. Empathy is a critical aspect of human personality in everyday social life. Every individual should cultivate empathy within themselves to foster care and concern for others, ultimately nurturing humanity and social cohesion.

The film *Suster Apung* has received significant appreciation from various segments of society, including medical professionals, social activists, and the general public. It is seen as a tribute to nurses serving in remote areas and as a call for the government and stakeholders to pay greater attention to healthcare services in underserved regions. The documentary has also been screened at several film festivals and health seminars as an educational tool and an inspiration for young people to contribute to the healthcare sector.

The lack of empathy from both the government and society toward marginalized groups may partly stem from the poor quality of mass media in Indonesia. The media in question refers to television programming. Many television programs lack educational, informative, and moral messages, prioritizing entertainment content, which dominates most broadcasts.

Television programming is intended to serve various functions: enlightenment, to spread information and increase public awareness; education, to teach through explicit and implicit messages; entertainment, to provide joy and relaxation; and persuasion, as a tool for advertisers to promote products or services and potentially influence behavior. Unfortunately, Indonesian television has yet to fulfill its potential in delivering quality education or entertainment to audiences. Yet, the media in any country plays a vital role in shaping the character and personality of its citizens to support national welfare and social development.

Therefore, a shift in public perception toward marginalized groups is necessary through proper and effective mass communication. One form of mass communication that the researcher uses in this study is film. Film is an audiovisual work that blends sequences into a cohesive artistic expression to convey messages.

This study uses documentary film, a genre that presents factual content and captures real events without fabrication (Pratista, 2008). Specifically, the researcher uses the documentary *Suster Apung* to offer both entertainment and moral messages that inform and raise awareness about healthcare issues faced by marginalized communities in Indonesia. As documentaries naturally record real-life events, this film emphasizes artistic elements through cinematography, sound design, and the selection of interview subjects, which together enhance its aesthetic value and strengthen its moral message.

In this study, the researcher utilizes a closed-ended questionnaire as the research instrument, comprising tools to measure the quality of cinematography, sound design, and the relevance of the sources, as well as the level of public empathy. In total, 20 statement items are presented to respondents for evaluation. The researcher hopes that this study can help audiences, particularly those in the Greater Jakarta area (Jabodetabek), which is not far from the depicted “trolley communities” of Indonesia, to better understand their actual

conditions. This study seeks to challenge negative stereotypes about marginalized communities and to recognize their potential, equal to other social groups.

METHODS

According to Sugiyono (2013:3), a research method is a scientific way to obtain data for specific purposes and uses. Based on this definition, four essential elements must be considered: scientific approach, data, objectives, and utility. From the perspective, a research method is essentially a systematic approach to acquiring and collecting primary or secondary data, which is then used to construct a scientific work and analyze the factors related to the core problem. Ultimately, this process yields data from which conclusions can be drawn.

This study adopts a descriptive-verify method, which aims to determine the significant relationships among the variables involved, thereby clarifying the understanding of the research object. Descriptive method, as stated by Sugiyono (2012:7), is “a study conducted to describe independent variables, either on a single or multiple variables, without making comparisons or investigating relationships with other variables.” Meanwhile, the verify method, according to Sugiyono (2012:8), “refers to research conducted on a specific population or sample with the purpose of testing pre-established hypotheses.” Based on these definitions, the descriptive-verify method can be interpreted as an approach used to explain the relationships among variables by collecting, processing, analyzing, interpreting data, and drawing conclusions through hypothesis testing. In this research, the descriptive-verify method is employed to test whether the screenplay of the documentary film *Suster Apung* significantly influences public empathy toward marginalized communities, and whether the proposed hypotheses can be accepted or rejected.

This study uses a quantitative approach, as the data are presented numerically. A quantitative approach is based on the post-positivist paradigm in developing scientific knowledge. Its key characteristics include the collection and analysis of quantitative (numerical) data, the use of survey or experimental strategies, measurements and observations, and theory testing through statistical analysis. According to Kriyantono in Jalaluddin Rakhmat (2005:32), quantitative research describes or explains a problem in a way that allows the findings to be generalized. This study employs an explanatory type of research, as it aims to explain the influence of a phenomenon (the documentary film) on the targeted audience, seeking to determine the causal relationship between two or more variables.

In summary, the quantitative approach and descriptive-verify method in this study are applied to test and analyze whether the screenplay of the documentary *Suster Apung* has a significant impact on public empathy toward marginalized groups, as well as to assess the validity of the research hypotheses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In general, the findings of this study indicate a satisfactory outcome. The descriptive analysis reveals that the cinematography of the *Suster Apung* documentary has effectively conveyed the intended ideas and succeeded in capturing audience interest. A significant number of

respondents rated the cinematography dimension highly. High-quality visuals in a film are shown to elicit strong audience empathy. Furthermore, the quality of camera movements and shot sequencing significantly influences the level of empathy generated. These findings align with Nugroho (2014:11), who states that “good cinematography is the technique of capturing and combining images to form a sequence that can convey an idea.”

The descriptive results also show that, according to respondents in Jakarta, the sound design in the *Suster Apung* documentary was generally perceived as good. This is supported by high scores across various indicators within the sound design dimension. An effective arrangement of dialogue, sound quality, and musical composition enhances audience engagement and increases emotional response, particularly empathy. This finding supports Kusumawati et al. (2015:148), who stated, “Good sound design in film delivers information for a scene, explains the storyline, and helps set the mood for viewers.”

Likewise, the analysis regarding the documentary’s interview subjects (sources) indicates that they were positively received by the audience. Respondents appreciated the featured sources for their articulate communication, clarity of information, and composed demeanor during interviews, which contributed to heightened public empathy. This is consistent with Elsa (2012:22), who explained that “a good source is someone who is pleasant to see and hear when responding to questions, and who displays a natural personality. A source should be able to control gestures and emotions to maintain intimacy with the audience through eye contact.”

Cinematography, sound design, and source selection are dimensions of the screenplay variable. Based on respondents’ responses, these three dimensions show that the screenplay of the *Suster Apung* documentary is of high quality and plays a crucial role in the success of the film. This is in line with Eleanor E. Maccoby (as cited in Atmaja, 2000:7), who stated that “the ability to guide the audience toward identification with the character is a major part of screenplay writing skills.”

The results also show that respondents demonstrated a high and significant level of empathy toward marginalized communities. Empathy involves cognitive processing of what one observes in a film, followed by emotional arousal and, eventually, behavioral changes or decisions to empathize with the subject (Allport in Taufik, 2012:39). Overall, viewers’ behavior can be significantly influenced by high-quality audiovisual content, enabling messages to be effectively absorbed and leading to a satisfying viewer experience.

Using multiple linear regression analysis with SPSS 16.0, the study found that cinematography (X1) has a positive and significant effect on public empathy. This aligns with the theory by Muhammad Irawan Saputra, which emphasizes the crucial role of cinematography in shaping audience reception of narrative, characters, and their motivations. This is also supported by Aisha L. Howard (2014) in her study “Elicitation of Empathic Emotions Using Film: Development of a Stimulus Set,” which found that empathic film clips significantly drew more attention compared to neutral ones, based on both general assessments and t-tests.

Likewise, sound design (X2) has a positive and significant impact on public empathy. This suggests that a film’s auditory elements can affect a person’s emotional state, which in

turn influences their capacity for empathy. This supports Goleman and Daniel (2007), who argued that “emotional states during social interaction affect one’s response to the feelings and behaviors of others.” This finding is in line with the research of Ninda Atika Sukmawati (2014), titled “The Influence of Film on Increasing Empathy among Psychology Students at Universitas Negeri Malang,” which demonstrated that film treatment positively affected empathy levels. The significance values for the concentration test between experimental groups in that study ranged from 0.073 to 0.679 (<0.05), indicating significance across various aspects.

Similarly, the interview subject variable (X3) also has a positive and significant influence on public empathy. This supports Elsa’s (2012:22) theory that “a good source is pleasant to see and hear, displays a natural demeanor, and maintains audience intimacy through controlled gestures and eye contact.” This finding also aligns with the research of Indah Permata Sari (2015), titled “The Influence of the 'Orang Pinggiran' Show on Trans7 on Public Empathy in Air Putih, Samarinda,” which found that the program significantly influenced public empathy. The study reported a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.490$, placing it in the “moderately strong” range (0.40 – 0.599). The simultaneous test (F-test) results indicate that cinematography, sound design, and source selection collectively have a positive and significant impact on public empathy.

Furthermore, the coefficient of determination (R^2 test) yielded an R^2 value of 0.320. This means that 32.0% of the variation in public empathy can be explained by the screenplay of the Suster Apung documentary, while the remaining 68.0% is influenced by other factors not examined in this study.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research objectives and analysis results, it can be concluded that the screenplay of the documentary film Suster Apung has a positive and significant influence on public empathy toward marginalized communities. The cinematographic aspects of the film were perceived positively by the majority of respondents, with visually compelling scenes, fluid camera movements, and well-structured sequences effectively conveying the film's message. These elements demonstrate that cinematography plays a crucial role in eliciting audience empathy. In addition, the film's sound design also received favorable responses. Appropriately timed dialogue, clear audio quality, and background music that complements the narrative enhance viewers’ emotional engagement, thereby increasing the likelihood of evoking empathy among the audience.

Furthermore, the film’s interview subjects contributed significantly to the development of viewer empathy. The sources used language that was clear and relatable, communicated information effectively, and demonstrated composed and controlled behavior during interviews, all of which helped convey the intended messages on a deeper emotional level. Collectively, these three dimensions, cinematography, sound design, and the selection of interviewees, indicate that the Suster Apung documentary possesses a well-crafted screenplay that plays a key role in shaping audience perceptions and emotional responses. This study supports the hypothesis that a high-quality documentary screenplay can serve as

an effective form of mass communication in fostering awareness and empathy regarding social issues, particularly those affecting underrepresented communities.

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