

The Influence of the Documentary Film Script “Di Atas Rel Mati” on Public Empathy and Interest in Watching Documentary Films

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The documentary film *Di Atas Rel Mati* portrays the lives of students who study at Master School and the challenges they face due to the partial eviction of the school area by the government for the construction of integrated Jakarta city transportation infrastructure. In order for this film to be effectively conveyed to the audience, it must be supported by a well-developed scenario. A scenario that is clearly delivered can provide stimuli that evoke immediate emotional responses from the audience. The quality of a strong documentary film scenario has the potential to enhance public empathy toward the residents of Master School. This study aims to examine the effect of the documentary film scenario *Di Atas Rel Mati* on public empathy. The research involved 130 respondents selected through random sampling. The study employed a quantitative research approach using descriptive and verificative methods, with multiple linear regression analysis as the data analysis technique. The results indicate that cinematography, sound system, and resource persons jointly contribute 30.2% to the formation of public empathy, while the remaining 69.8% is influenced by other variables not examined in this study. A high-quality scenario is determined by effective cinematography, an appropriate sound system, and suitable resource persons. The better the quality of the scenario, the greater its potential to enhance public empathy.

Keywords: Scenario, Empathy, Marginal

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1. Introduction

Every Indonesian community has its own characteristics shaped by the geographical location of its region of origin, particularly communities living in the city of Jakarta. Initially, Jakarta was part of Bogor Regency; however, in 1999 Jakarta separated itself and declared itself a new municipality. Jakarta City is part of West Java Province, which plays an important role as a center of economy, commerce, and metropolitan activity because Jakarta is located adjacent to South Tangerang and Bogor City.

This condition subsequently forms social characteristics marked by individualism and high mobility. The emergence of these characteristics, especially individualism, causes people in Jakarta to show lower levels of empathy toward social phenomena occurring around them.

The lack of empathy among Jakarta residents can be observed through limited forms of social concern, where people tend to help others only within a narrow scope and possess minimal understanding of the actual conditions faced by those in need, without exploring the problems more deeply. As a result, misguided responses to social issues frequently emerge.

Misconceptions regarding social problems can be corrected by conveying existing realities based on facts and data through appropriate media, so that public empathy can arise naturally.

Empathy is a crucial aspect of individual personality in daily social interaction. Every individual should understand and cultivate empathy in order to foster concern for others. Empathy creates a sense of humanity and togetherness.

One example of the lack of public concern for people in need can be seen in the partial demolition of land at Lahan Troli Indonesia Jakarta for the construction of the Integrated Jakarta City Station. From April 2014 until the end of 2015, twelve land areas were demolished, based on the researcher's direct observation. This demolition slightly disrupted teaching and learning activities; however, Lahan Troli continued educational activities by using the remaining land.

Children at Lahan Troli are guided by volunteer teachers who sincerely support their learning activities. Lahan Troli operates entirely free of charge. Facilities and infrastructure costs are obtained through donors and sponsors. However, the Sekolah Masjid Stasiun, which partially uses government-owned land, was taken over for the construction of integrated station infrastructure. Mr. Nurrohim, as the founder and head of the foundation, requested the government to show concern and participate in supporting the children by granting rights to use the city government land they occupied. Nevertheless, the Jakarta city government refused to allocate the land to the Lahan Troli foundation and ultimately chose to demolish the classrooms.

In light of this issue, both the government and society should have participated in supporting the educational process of children at Lahan Troli, in order to save them from social vulnerability, as many children there possess developing potential and the ability to achieve accomplishments.

The lack of empathy from the government and society toward marginalized groups may be influenced by the poor quality of mass media in Indonesia. The mass media referred to here is television programming. Low-quality television programs are those that fail to provide educational, informational, or moral messages and instead prioritize entertainment content as the dominant element.

The informational function of television programs serves as a medium for disseminating information that transforms viewers from not knowing to knowing. The educational function acts as a learning medium by delivering explicit or implicit messages within programs. The entertainment function provides enjoyment and amusement for viewers, while the persuasive function serves as a means for advertising practitioners to promote goods or services within television programs. In addition, persuasion can influence and change audience behavior.

Television programs in Indonesia have not yet achieved a positive reputation in delivering education or quality entertainment. In fact, media in a country represent a primary force in shaping national character to advance social, national, and state welfare.

Therefore, an appropriate approach is needed to change public perspectives toward marginalized groups through proper mass communication. One form of mass communication product used in this study is film. Film is an audiovisual work composed of sequences that form a unified artistic expression for conveying messages.

The type of film employed in this study is documentary film. Documentary films present factual information and record events naturally without manipulation (Pratista, 2008).

This research utilizes a documentary film entitled *Di Atas Rel Mati* to deliver entertainment and moral messages, enabling viewers and Indonesian society to better understand the conditions of marginalized communities around Jakarta, the real situation of Lahan Troli Indonesia, and to inform the public that marginalized groups are not inherently negative, but possess potential and achievements and deserve support. The film depicts learning activities, volunteer teachers, and the background of Lahan Troli's establishment as explained by Mr. Nurrohim as the founder of Lahan Troli Indonesia.

Because documentary films capture events as they are, this production emphasizes artistic values through cinematography, sound design, and the selection of credible sources to ensure aesthetic quality and strong moral messages.

This study employs a closed-ended questionnaire as the research instrument, consisting of instruments to measure cinematography quality, sound quality, source credibility, and public empathy. In total, these instruments generate twenty statement items to be answered by respondents.

The researcher expects that through this study, audiences, particularly those in the Jabodetabek area located near Lahan Troli Indonesia, will gain a deeper understanding of the actual conditions and recognize that marginalized groups should not always be viewed negatively, as they possess potential similar to other social groups.

2. Literature Review and Problem Statement

Film

Film is a text consisting of a sequence of images that create representations of real life (Danesi, 2002). Film is also known as motion picture, a technique of combining a series of images at a constant speed to produce moving visuals (Straubhaar, 2002). According to Law No. 08 of 1992 cited in Effendi (2008), film is an artistic and cultural creation functioning as an audiovisual mass communication medium, produced based on cinematographic principles and recorded through various technological processes, with or without sound, to be exhibited through projection systems. In summary, film is a form of moving images supported by sound that narrates events and creates an integrated audiovisual experience. Pratista (2008) classifies films into documentary, fiction, and experimental films.

Documentary Film

Nichols (1991) cited in Irwanto et al. (2015) defines documentary film as an effort to retell real events using facts and data perceived as real by the filmmaker. Achlina (2011) describes documentary film as a presentation of real stories filmed in actual locations, emphasizing realism through camera work, sound, and setting. Thus, documentary films prioritize factual reality without manipulation, yet still require a script to structure the narrative.

Dimensions of Documentary Film Script

- a. Cinematography
Cinematography refers to the technique of capturing and arranging images to convey ideas and narratives visually, often described as writing with moving images (Nugroho, 2014).
- b. Sound Design
Sound design involves mixing dialogue, narration, sound effects, and music to shape mood, explain settings, clarify plots, and develop characters (Imanto, 2007; Kusumawati et al., 2015).
- c. Source Persons
Source persons are individuals who provide information naturally and credibly, presenting facts without scripted dialogue, while maintaining appropriate demeanor and communication effectiveness (Elsa, 2012; Rakhmat, 2002).

Factors Related to Documentary Film Script

- a. Script Elements
Key elements include theme, plot, source persons, location, shot types, and sound, all of which support narrative clarity and emotional engagement.
- b. Effects of Documentary Film as Mass Communication

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According to Effendy (2006), documentary films can generate cognitive effects by increasing knowledge, affective effects by influencing emotions, and conative or behavioral effects by shaping intentions and actions.

Relationship Between Documentary Film Script and Empathy

A documentary script plays a crucial role in delivering messages that encourage audience identification with subjects. Effective scripts enable emotional engagement and imitation or identification, aligning with social cognitive theory which explains how audiences model behaviors observed in mass media (Atmaja, 2000; Morrisson, 2010).

Dimensions of Empathy

- a. Affective
Empathy as an affective experience involves emotional responses that mirror others' feelings, including sympathy and shared emotional states (Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987; Hoffman, 2000; Colley, 1998).
- b. Cognitive
The cognitive dimension refers to understanding others' emotional conditions through perception, memory, and semantic processing (Feshbach, 1997; Hoffman, 2000; Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987).
- c. Communicative
The communicative dimension emphasizes the expression of empathic thoughts and emotions through words and actions, integrating affective and cognitive components (Ridley & Lingle, 1996; Bierhoff, 2002; Wang et al., 2003).

3. Method

According to Sugiyono (2013), a research method is a scientific approach used to obtain data for specific purposes and practical applications. Based on this definition, there are four key elements that must be considered, namely the scientific approach, data, objectives, and usefulness.

Referring to the quotation above, a research method can be understood as a systematic way of obtaining and collecting primary or secondary data, which are subsequently used to compile scientific work. These data are then analyzed to identify factors related to the main research problem, leading to findings that can be interpreted and concluded.

The research method employed in this study is the descriptive–verificative method. This method aims to determine the existence of significant relationships among the variables studied, thereby providing a clearer understanding of the research object.

According to Sugiyono (2012), descriptive research is defined as “research conducted to describe independent variables, either a single variable or multiple variables (stand-alone variables), without making comparisons or examining their relationships with other variables.” Meanwhile, Sugiyono (2012) defines the verificative method as “research conducted on a particular population or sample with the aim of testing predetermined hypotheses.”

Based on these definitions, it can be concluded that the descriptive–verificative method is a research approach that seeks to explain the relationships among the variables under investigation through systematic processes of data collection, processing, analysis, interpretation, and conclusion drawing in hypothesis testing. In this study, the descriptive–verificative method is applied to examine whether the documentary film scenario *Di Atas Rel Mati* has a significant effect on public empathy toward marginalized communities, as well as to test whether the proposed hypotheses can be accepted or rejected.

The approach used in this research is a quantitative approach, as the data are presented in numerical form. Quantitative research is grounded in the post-positivist paradigm in the development of scientific knowledge. The key characteristics of quantitative research include reliance on the collection and analysis of numerical data, the use of survey and experimental strategies, the application of measurement and observation, and the testing of theories through statistical analysis. According to Kriyantono, as cited in Jalaluddin Rakhmat (2005), quantitative research is a type of research that describes or explains a problem in such a way that the results can be generalized. This study adopts an explanatory research design, as it seeks to explain an existing phenomenon and to determine the influence of that phenomenon on the intended audience, specifically by examining the effect of two or more variables.

In this research, the quantitative approach combined with the descriptive–verificative method is used to test and analyze whether the documentary film scenario *Di Atas Rel Mati* has a significant influence on public empathy toward marginalized communities, as well as to determine whether the proposed hypotheses are accepted or rejected.

4. Results and Discussion

Overall, this study shows satisfactory results. The descriptive findings indicate that the cinematography of the documentary film *Di Atas Rel Mati* is already good in conveying ideas within the film and is able to attract audience interest. The data show that many respondents gave responses in the high category for the cinematography dimension. Good imagery in a film produces good audience empathy; likewise, high-quality image movement and image sequencing influence higher levels of audience empathy. Since the cinematography in this film is considered good, this aligns with the opinion expressed by Nugroho (2014), who states that “good cinematography is the technique of capturing images and combining images so that they become a sequence capable of conveying ideas.”

The descriptive analysis also shows that, according to respondents in Jakarta, the sound design of the documentary film *Di Atas Rel Mati* is generally good. This is indicated by the large number of positive and high responses across each indicator within the sound design dimension. Proper arrangement of source dialogue, sound quality, and music enhances audience appeal and generates positive audience responses, including strong empathy. This is consistent with the view of Kusumawati et al. (2015), who state that “good sound design is sound presented in a film to provide information for a scene, explain the storyline, and regulate the mood of anyone watching.”

The descriptive analysis of the source persons in the documentary film *Di Atas Rel Mati* shows that they are generally rated as good based on respondents’ perceptions. The source persons are favored by viewers because they use appropriate language, provide clear information, and are able to control their attitudes during interviews, which contributes to strong public empathy after watching the film. This supports the opinion of Elsa (2012), who explains that “a good source person is someone who is pleasant to see and to hear when answering questions in a program, demonstrates a natural personality, and is able to control attitudes, movements, and emotions to maintain intimacy with viewers through eye contact.”

Cinematography, sound design, and source persons are dimensions of the script variable. Based on respondents’ responses to these three dimensions, the script of the documentary film *Di Atas Rel Mati* is considered good and constitutes a very important element of the film. This is in line with Eleanor E. Maccoby cited in Atmaja (2000), who states that “the ability to guide audiences toward identification with characters is the greatest part of the skill of scriptwriting.”

Respondents’ empathy toward marginalized groups received high and significant responses. In essence, empathy involves a cognitive process when viewers reflect on conditions presented in a film that capture

their attention, which then influences their feelings as the film conveys messages in a complex manner. These feelings ultimately lead to behavioral or action changes that result in empathy toward marginalized groups (Allport in Taufik, 2012).

In general, audience behavior can experience significant change when watching audiovisual content of high quality, enabling messages to be effectively absorbed and producing satisfaction for viewers. Based on multiple linear regression analysis using SPSS 16.0, cinematography (X1) has a positive and significant effect on public empathy. This aligns with the theory proposed by Muhammad Irawan Saputra, which states that cinematography is an important factor influencing audience reception of stories, characters, and character motivations. This finding is also consistent with the study by Aisha L. Howard (2014) entitled *Elicitation of Empathic Emotions Using Film: Development of a Stimulus Set*, which found that film clips containing empathy elicited significantly higher attention than neutral clips, and individual tests showed significantly higher results compared to neutral film clips.

Furthermore, sound design (X2) has a positive and significant effect on public empathy. This indicates that sound design in a film can alter a person's mood or feelings, which subsequently influence empathy within their personality. This is consistent with the view of Goleman and Daniel (2007), who state that "an individual's emotional state when interacting with the environment influences how they respond to the feelings and behaviors of others." This finding is also in line with the study by Ninda Atika Sukmawati (2014) entitled *The Influence of Film on Increasing Empathy among Psychology Students at Universitas Negeri Malang*, which demonstrated that film treatment had an effect on increasing empathy. The significance values of the comparative test for the concentration scores of the two experimental groups ranged between 0.073 and 0.679 (<0.05).

The same applies to the source person variable (X3), which has a positive and significant effect on public empathy. This is consistent with the theory proposed by Elsa (2012:22), who explains that a good source person is pleasant to see and hear, demonstrates a natural personality, and can manage attitudes, movements, and emotions to maintain intimacy with viewers through eye contact. This finding is also supported by the study conducted by Indah Permata Sari (2015) entitled *The Influence of the Program "Orang Pinggiran" on Trans7 on Public Empathy Attitudes in Air Putih Village, Samarinda Ulu District*, which found that the program had a fairly strong influence on public empathy attitudes, with a correlation coefficient of 0.490 or 49%, placing it within the interval of 0.40–0.599, categorized as a moderately strong relationship. Based on the simultaneous test (F-test), cinematography, sound design, and source persons collectively have a positive and significant effect on public empathy. Based on the coefficient of determination test (R^2), an R^2 value of 0.320 was obtained. This indicates that 30.2% of public empathy is influenced by the documentary film script *Di Atas Rel Mati*, while the remaining 69.8% is influenced by variables not examined in this study.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that the documentary film *Di Atas Rel Mati* demonstrates a strong capacity to function as an effective medium of social communication by fostering public empathy toward marginalized communities. The overall quality of the documentary script, reflected through cinematography, sound design, and the presence of credible source persons, plays a crucial role in shaping audience responses. Well-composed visual imagery enables viewers to better understand social realities and encourages emotional engagement with the issues presented. At the same time, carefully arranged sound elements contribute to the creation of mood and atmosphere, allowing messages to be conveyed more clearly and meaningfully. The selection and presentation of source persons further strengthen the documentary's

impact by providing authentic narratives that viewers can relate to and trust. Together, these elements support the audience's ability to identify with the subjects of the film, which is essential in the development of empathy. The findings also indicate that documentary films with high audiovisual quality are more likely to stimulate cognitive understanding, emotional resonance, and communicative expressions of empathy among viewers. From a broader perspective, this study emphasizes the importance of documentary storytelling as an alternative to conventional mass media content that often prioritizes entertainment over social awareness. By presenting factual narratives in an engaging and ethical manner, documentary films can encourage reflective thinking and positive attitudinal change within society. Therefore, documentary filmmaking holds significant potential as a strategic tool for promoting empathy, social sensitivity, and public concern for marginalized groups.

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