Between Profit and Quality; A Challenge of Indonesian Cinema

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**ABSTRACT**

**Keywords:** Horror, Profit, Film production, Quality

Horror is one of the most popular film genres among Indonesians. One of the reasons the Indonesian people love watching horror movies is because of the sensation of a jump scare. Thus, the number of horror film watchers in Indonesia continues to grow. This condition may aid Indonesian film production, as practically everyone enjoys horror. However, it is also problematic because Indonesian film has struggled to enhance its quality. The objective of this study is to analyze the dilemma confronting Indonesian horror films: the trade-off between profit and quality. To assist the author in doing this analysis, Film Production Management from Bastian Cleve is applied. The findings of this study reveal that Indonesian film production faces particular challenges that must be overcome. Indonesian cinema should prioritize quality above immediate profit as improving the quality of a film can result in a higher profit. Thus, the courage to develop and compete is critical to overcoming those challenges.
Introduction

Since 2016 Indonesian films have shown positive development. A survey conducted by the Saiful Mujani Research Center (SMRC) in 16 major cities in December 2019 showed that 67 percent of young people aged 15-38 said they had watched at least one national film in theaters in the past year. While 40 percent said they watched at least three national films during the past year.

In the research, the most popular national film genres for Indonesian youth are comedy (70.6 percent), followed by horror (66.2 percent), romance (45.6 percent), and action (37.4 percent). Meanwhile, the preferred foreign film genres are action (68 percent), followed horror (65 percent), comedy (46.8 percent), romance (34.6 percent), and mystery (21.8 percent). If we look back, Indonesian
films experienced suspended animation due to the impact of the monetary crisis in the late 1990s (Kurniawan, 2021). Horror films marked the rise of Indonesian cinema through Reza Mantovani and Jose Poernomo’s *Jelangkung* in 2001.

That success made horror films turn into mushrooms. It became triggered the creation of a similar genre by another production house with a minimal budget but trying to bring in big profits. The emergence of horror films with Japanese pornographic films has even become a trend in the 2000s. Horror films have become a commodity, on the other hand, the quality is questionable.

The portrait of the low quality of horror films in Indonesia has been discussed by Larasati and Adiprasetio (2022). Both criticized how horror films from 1970 to 2019 were so lame in representing female ghosts. Setiyawan (2018) criticizes eroticism in horror films in Indonesia. He said the phenomenon of the Indonesian feature film industry with the horror genre cannot be separated from the context of commodities, which prioritize reading quantity (business value) and trend formation, rather than the quality of a film. This was confirmed by Karunianingsih (2016) who stated that the production of horror films was part of the male gaze operation. Despite bearing various negative predicates, horror film production in Indonesia continues to be carried out. In 2017, *Pengabdi Setan* has even named the highest-grossing horror film after getting 4.2 million viewers. A year later, the film *Bernafas dalam Kubur* grossed 3.3 million viewers. In 2022, 3 Indonesian horror films that gain millions of viewers, namely *KKN di Desa Penari* (9.2 million), *Pengabdi Setan 2: Communion* (6.3 million), and *Ivanna* (2.7 million).

This raises questions for researchers about the quality of films and the profits made by Indonesian horror filmmakers. Therefore, the researcher conducted this study using the Production Management Theory which was initiated by Bastian Clave.

**Method**

This research analyzed the challenges of Indonesian cinema as critics for developing their movie production. The researcher applied the Film Production Management theory from Bastian Cleve. To figure out how the critics and challenges of Indonesian cinema, the researcher did several stages in this research.
First, the author provided some challenges that happened to Indonesian cinema nowadays. Researchers observed several horror films produced by Indonesian filmmakers. The researcher also conducted a literature study on the study of horror films to see the challenges faced. Second, the author analyzed those challenges and connected them with the theory of Film Production Management from Bastian Cleve. The last, the author concluded the whole observation and gave an interpretation of the cases that happened in Indonesian cinema.

**Result and Discussion**

**Indonesian people who love horror**

Horror is one of the film genres loved by everyone, especially Indonesian people. As evidenced by data from the Film Indonesia website in recent years, horror genre films have consistently been included in the top 15 films with the most views. Additionally, one in every four films released in theaters between 2016 and 2018 is a horror film (Herlambang, 2020).

Most Indonesian people love horror films because the stories in horror films are based on real-life situations. This cinematic genre refers to films that prominently feature ghosts as characters. In this subgenre of horror films, ghost figures are always portrayed as frightening characters that instill fear in human life (Permatasari, et.al.).

According to Rusdiarti’s study in Indonesian Horror Film: Genre Dynamics, this horror genre film has emerged in Indonesia since the 1940s. The 1980s were a golden age in developing horror films in Indonesia. Even so, horror films continue to exist today. It demonstrates that horror films continue to be produced and enjoyed by Indonesian audiences, and their appeal in Indonesia cannot be disregarded.

Indonesian horror films entered a new phase in the 2000s. The generation of filmmakers has little resemblance to Indonesia’s previous history of horror films. Some are foreign film school dropouts who previously worked in advertising and producing video clips or documentary films. *Jelangkung* (2001) by Rizal Mantovani and Jose Purnomo stands out immediately, depending on the director’s strengths in photography, editing, and sound. This film heralds the audience’s return to the movies. From October 2001 to January 2002, 748,003 people in Jabotabek kept
an eye on Jelangkung. He got the Praised Award for Special Effects at the 2002 Bandung Film Festival. Edna C. Pattisina of Kompas daily even stated in her article “Welcome to the Republic of Ghosts” (Kompas, March 25, 2007) that the video had surpassed 1.5 million viewers.

Between 2001 and 2007, horror film production accounted for around 40% of total film production. Between 2006 and 2007, horror films captivated an audience of over 500 thousand people. As a result, it is unsurprising that the film appears to be commercially viable (Rusdiarti, S.R., 2009).


According to Rusdiarti (2009), as same as *Jelangkung*, a new era of horror films has infiltrated Indonesian cinema, and it no longer relies on traditional legends such as Nyai Roro Kidul or Nyi Blorong. Most of the films focus on urban youth and environmental issues, which Indonesian horror films had previously ignored. International horror films appear to have significantly influenced new Indonesian horror films. *Jelangkung* is also influenced by J-Horror (Japanese horror) films, which have gained international recognition following the success of Hideo Nakata’s *Ringu* in 1997. J-Horror films are more suspenseful and gruesome, with sophisticated and beautiful visual techniques. Teenagers and urban life have become increasingly prevalent in horror films since *Scream* (1996) became a box office smash.

Additionally, the term urban legend has begun to make its way into the discourse of Indonesian cinema, particularly horror films. The urban legend depicted in the film *Jelangkung* is that of Angker Batu, an old hospital in Jakarta haunted by a ghostly figure. She later became one of the most popular characters in Indonesian horror films, specifically Sister suck. Soon enough, the urban legend was uncovered by Indonesian film producers, who were correct in their “business

Apart from the urban legend concept, Indonesian horror films are primarily dominated by two types of ghost figures that capture the audience’s interest. These two ghost forms may be the scariest to Indonesian audiences. As evidenced by the film titles, most of which feature the two ghosts, especially the pocong ghost and the kuntilanak. The *kuntilanak* has gained more popularity as a character ghost between the two varieties of ghosts in Indonesian horror films. The description is similar, notably in the shape of a woman with long hair, long white garments, and pale white with red eyes, all accompanied by her lengthy chuckling giggle (Rusdiarti, S.R., 2009).

Cited in Film Indonesia (2018-2019), in 2018 there were seven horror films out of the top 15 with the most viewers. Meanwhile, in 2019, only four Indonesian horror genre films were in demand. Seen one by one on rating sites, these films have received positive responses from audiences and critics alike. The data can be seen below on Figure 1 and Figure 2.

![Figure 1. Indonesian film rates in 2018](filmindonesia.or.id)

![Figure 2. Indonesian film rates in 2018](filmindonesia.or.id)
From the data above (Figure 1 and Figure 2), it could be seen that horror movies dominate Indonesian film production in 2019. Indonesian people love watching horror as it provides a sense of fear, a terrible tale, and the presence of ghosts. Due to these factors, the researcher believes that filmmakers will always have a reason to create horror films. Due to those factors, the researcher views that movie directors have a point of view to make horror movies always exist. Thus, they keep creating horror movies as it is more profitable. On the one hand, it is good for them, the movie directors. On the other hand, this perception and habit impact the development of Indonesian movie production. Our film production cannot compete at the Box Office like Hollywood movies whereas Indonesia has great and talented actors such as Iko Uwais, Joe Taslim, and many more. Indonesian film producers still do not dare to experiment to develop Indonesian cinema. Thus, they keep creating horror movie as it still looks promising and profitable. The researcher views that Indonesian film producers are afraid if they make movies that can compete with Hollywood movies, their movies would not be classified as bestselling. In this case, I see that they are in dilemma.

**Indonesian horror films and their challenges**

Indonesian cinema is now confronted with a dilemmatic condition of increasing or diminishing stress, as evidenced by an increase in the number of productions, diversity in story themes and genres, and even a decline in viewership and contrasting perspectives from young and older filmmakers (Manurung, 2016).

In closer observation, the researcher views that Indonesian cinema nowadays doesn’t want to try the experiments. The filmmakers keep creating horror movies as they think horror is more promising than any other movie genre. In this case, the researcher views Indonesian movies must develop their quality. They haven’t developed well yet. As a result, they couldn’t compete with any other genres internationally like Hollywood movies.

According to Ardiyanti (2017), she stated that to develop Indonesian cinema, there is an ideal Indonesian policy that movie production needs to concern. The ideal film policy that will enable Indonesian cinema development fully supports the film industry in Indonesia from upstream to downstream in the industrial
chain. Hesmondhalgh’s culture encompasses the manufacture, distribution, promotion, and consumption of Hesmondhalgh products. In stages of production, *Laskar Pelangi* Film’s success demonstrates that the ability to master and practice diverse concepts within the industry culture is a critical component of the film industry’s success. This is demonstrated by the popularity of the *Laskar Pelangi* film, which successfully simulated the process of simulacra and hyperrealism. As depicted in the film *Laskar Pelangi*, Simulacra is Andrea Hirata’s fictional mental building of a reality she has encountered as a writer. Films made by Miles Films and Mizan Production, and directed by Riri Riza, can manipulate reality by immersing the representation in simulation, distorting the balance between image and reality (Ardiyanti, 2017).

As have been mentioned above, horror is one of the movie genres that has attracted many viewers. However, the researcher views that horror movies as just a quick alternative that can affect quick attention from the viewers. As a result, horror movie production will get a quick profit. However, the quality of horror movies needs to be developed. The researcher views that if the movie producers have the courage to try making the bestselling movie that can compete with Hollywood, Indonesian film production will gain more profit. Indeed, not all great movies with big funds will gain profit quickly. However, if Indonesian moviemakers dare to find some funds, create the best movies with the best Indonesian actors. Hence, Indonesian cinema production will be more developed, gain more profit, and be more well-known.

“Hollywood is like an octopus with tentacles reaching around the globe,” Tom Brook wrote in his essay “How the Global Box Office is Changing Hollywood.” Hollywood’s success as a global brand did not happen immediately; it evolved. Burrowes (2011) stated, “They are good at making movies and, more importantly, they are incredibly adept at selling them.” Hollywood’s popularity did not come about as a result of making films for everyone; it came about to convince you that the film was for you.” To preserve its global influence, Hollywood had to stray from American-centric narratives; this shift occurred in the storyline and the cast composition. They must cast people from other countries in crucial roles in films with plots set in those countries. This means that scripts that may appear offensive to some viewers will be avoided. Hollywood must proceed cautiously.
It cannot afford to perpetuate outdated prejudices if it wishes to succeed in the global marketplace (Brook, 2013). Hollywoodization, a notion coined by Por Kuldip Rampal, is how Hollywood influences the film industry in Asia to adopt its production style, attire, and even name (Ibbi, A. A., 2014).

In closer observation, Indonesian movie production could not compete with Hollywood because of several reasons. Hollywood films’ storytelling can never fail to astound their fans elegantly. The term “classy” refers to the message’s clarity, directness, and ease of comprehension. The critical point is that Hollywood collaborates with the US government to distribute these Hollywood pictures worldwide (Sitompul, 2021).

Sitompul (2021) also stated that there are still many films in Indonesia that lack quality in terms of plot concepts, storytelling, filming, editing, and much more. This undoubtedly contributes to most Indonesians’ preference for foreign films. That is not to say that there are no excellent Indonesian films; in fact, there are numerous good Indonesian films, some of which have won international awards, such as the film “Pengabdi Setan,” which was selected as the ‘Best Horror Film’ at the Toronto After Dark Film Festival and has also been screened in other countries, including the United States.

Another challenge that Indonesian cinema faces now is the tax incentive strategy. The Indonesian film industry is regarded as unable to compete with other countries. One of the reasons is the absence of a tax incentive strategy that supports the local film sector. Head of the Creative Economy Agency Triawan Munaf said, “Currently, Indonesia is the only country that does not have tax incentives for the industrial sector. In contrast, other countries such as Vietnam and Malaysia have implemented this strategy. Only Indonesia does not have tax advantages, such as tax allowances for producers and production houses”, said Triawan Munaf (Deny, 2016).

**Good production management**

Good production management is required when making a film. Eve Light Honthaner stated that there are six stages involved in producing a film (Honthaner, 2001). Beginning with concept development and ending with a film screening,
there are at least three steps of production, namely pre-production, production, and post-production, which are sufficient to create a good film.

Pre-production is an early step of filmmaking that must be completed; during this stage, the film's purpose, genre, and origins are determined (Prasetyo, 2011). This pre-production stage involves the first planning and preparation stages that will later serve as guidelines for the production's execution. Then, to achieve the best results, accuracy and maturity are required in planning and constructing future concepts. The pre-production stage begins with defining the vision and objective of the film, namely the sort of film, the genre of the film, the format of the film, and the film's purpose. Then divide tasks according to each person's capabilities. Preproduction is a time of order and chaos, changed plans, tentative schedules and future budget changes, screenplay alterations, and shifting structures. Finally, all the pieces are a genuinely mysterious process of things falling into place and procedures being secured. The least expensive stage of the filmmaking process is preproduction. The staff is relatively modest, and most operations take place in a production office (which requires only chairs, phones, calculators, computers, and online communication—all of which are standard office equipment and furnishings). This step lays the framework for all subsequent actions (Cleve, 2018).

According to Cleve (2018), the production manager's first step in determining a project's overall size and scope is to complete a thorough breakdown of the completed screenplay. An experienced producer or PM can get a good approximation of the size of production based on a “first-glance” reading of the screenplay—that is, how long the shooting time will be, how many cast members will be required, how much travel would be required, and how expensive the props and sets will be. On the other hand, a reliable budget estimate can be estimated only once the screenplay has been thoroughly broken down. Next, while production. While production is the process of putting everything that has been prepared in the pre-process production into action (Javandalasta, 2011). The last is post-production. After the shooting is complete, this step will involve preparing, trimming, and combining the scenes to create a story based on the breakdown and timetable created before.

Motion movies provide significant cash for many countries, but they also play a critical role in molding global perceptions of a country’s intellectual, histor-
ical, and cultural context. For example, most moviegoers would readily associate Akira Kurosawa’s Seven Samurai with Japan, Federico Fellini’s La Dolce Vita with Italy, and Peter Faiman’s Crocodile Dundee with Australia. In 2006, almost 3,000 feature films were released worldwide, grossing $23.8 billion. Moreover, the Motion Picture Association of America estimated that total global annual revenues would reach $450 billion by 2007 across all distribution channels, including video and DVD, cable, broadcast, and mobile sources (MPAA). In 2006, India had 800 distributors, the United States had 599, and China had 255 (Young, S.M. et.al., 2008). As of January 2022, “Furious 7” (2015) was the Fast & Furious franchise’s highest-grossing film domestically and internationally. The seventh edition of the series grossed over 353 million US dollars at the box office in the United States and Canada. Globally, the picture grossed more than 1.5 billion dollars. “F9: The Fast Saga” (2021) was released during the COVID-19 epidemic. It grossed 173 million dollars domestically and 721 million dollars internationally (Statista).

**Film: not just a story…**

The film is one form of popular culture consumed by the public as films can reach all aspects of life, and community both individually and collectively (Villarejo, 2007:10). According to Manon de Reeper (2016), film language refers to the language in which a film “speaks” to its viewers. The individuals who create films (the massive collaboration of directors, producers, editors, and others) desire to tell a specific tale or convey a specific idea. Even if they want only to entertain, their film almost certainly has some value, as the audience can generate meaning even when they are not present. Decoding is the term used for this. In the same way, we comprehend spoken language or written materials, we “decode” the meaning of a tale. We bring all our prior experiences and knowledge to a film and apply them instinctively to what we see — we interpret the picture according to predetermined expectations. We cannot watch a film in a vacuum; we will constantly relate what happens in the film to events in our own life. On the one hand, the film reflects our attitudes about particular topics (political, social, economic, and so forth), but it also affects our attitudes toward those subjects (Reeper, 2016).

Jogezal (2020) stated that making a film is a multi-step process that begins
with pre-production and continues through production and post-production. Films are made with one goal: to entertain while also being visually beautiful. The film’s social structure imparts knowledge about human interactions, communication, and culture. Films are inextricably linked to or based on human emotions and realities, which connects them to their audience, piques their interest, and influences them (Jogezeal, Faryal, 2020).

Films are make-believe. They are designed to depict reality with such realism that even stories set millennia ago in distant galaxies appear accurate and compelling. This becomes clear in historical or science fiction films, as there is no such “reality” to film in—but this is also true for stories set in everyday life and even for documentaries. Given that it requires a small “army” of technicians, performers, and other professionals to create this illusion, it is evident that there can be no “let us just go ahead and shoot” without painstaking preparation, planning, and legal work well in advance of the first day of cameras rolling (Cleve, 2018).

Generally, the production manager is spared the most nerve-wracking and stressful part of the entire process: development. The producer conceptualizes a film, develops it into a presentable package, and attempts to acquire production financing to put the film into preproduction. Filmmaking is all about business and the possibility of earning enormous sums of money. This phrase may sound harsh and cynical to an inexperienced filmmaker, yet it truly depicts the entertainment industry’s dealings and mentality (Cleve, 2018).

Furthermore, Cleve (2018) stated that to begin, the producer looks for material that has the potential to become a successful (i.e. financially successful) movie picture. An original screenplay, novel, stage play, short story, book, magazine, true story, pop song, or another motion picture may serve as inspiration. Whichever source it comes from, the producer must buy or option the rights to it prior to creating the film. When intellectual property is optioned, there is typically a time restriction (typically one year with the option of an additional 12 months) during which the producer must be prepared to pay the total amount of the previously agreed-upon full price. This does not imply the producer must immediately begin shooting, but it does mean he must entirely acquire the property.

The emergence of quality horror films in Indonesia, such as "Pengabdi Se-
Tan, which won international awards, raises high hopes for domestic horror film production. Moreover, Indonesia is a country that has an abundance of urban legend horror stories. Packaging stories and ghost characters in the form of quality films certainly has a good impact on the horror film industry, which is still in great demand. With a good production process, a film will appear in the best form as well. This certainly invites many audiences to watch without the need to use erotic strategies as in previous horror films. If so, Indonesian horror films will continue to exist and produce. Quality and profit are not words that should be contradicted.

Cost equal quality?

It is undeniable that cost is a very important element in making a film. So far, many horror films have been produced because apart from being one of the most popular films, they also require a small budget. In one production, most Indonesian horror films only cost around 2.5 billion rupiahs, a fairly cheap amount for a film (Lingga, 2019). Until 2017, the Indonesian horror film that cost the most was Jailangkung (2017) with a cost of 10 billion rupiahs (Jaelani, 2017). This number is much higher than the production of blockbusters in the same year, such as Pengabdi Setan (2 billion). Of course, this does not include promotional costs, the numbers can be very fantastic. However, film revenues in 2017 were very large, such as Jailangkung 2017 which grossed 93.9 billion, Pengabdi Setan (147 billion), and The Dolls 2 (45.1 billion). The cost of making in the years that followed became more interesting to watch because horror films became films that were taken seriously. The strategy of eroticism by presenting hot movie stars is no longer used, Indonesian horror films are increasingly relying on the core story and maximum production. In 2022, the largest film production costs will be solved by KKN di Desa Penari with a budget of up to 15 billion. Several other film titles—although not all of them are nominally disclosed—also cost a lot of money, such as Ivanna (12 billion). The Dolls 3 movie even spent 2 billion just for making dolls. Meanwhile, Pengabdi Setan 2: Communion improves its quality as the first Indonesian horror film to use IMAX technology. This makes horror films even more classy.
Conclusion

Indonesian filmmakers are caught in a dilemma. They are confronted with a challenge: provide quality service or earn a profit. On the one hand, the researcher believes that Indonesian film production is improving in terms of quality. They do, however, have a great deal of courage to accept the risk. The stakes are high: making the most acceptable picture possible with the best actors and production techniques. Essentially, Indonesian film manufacturing can go further by increasing their quality and innovation to increase their profit and appeal on a global scale.

There has been a lot of improvement in the quality of Indonesian horror film production in recent times. Fantastic production costs, visual effects, audio quality, and various other strategies raise hopes that horror becomes a genre that really counts. Horror films are no longer produced due to low cost considerations but produce quality works.

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