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MALAYSIAN FILM INDUSTRY IN TRANSFORMATION: CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to discuss the challenges and potentials of the Malaysian film industry from the perspective of the industry players such as filmmakers and producers. Malaysian film industry is a relatively small industry that caters to the need of a population of only about 27.5 millions. In the context of globalization, this small local market presents a challenge for the government in promoting the industry as part of a creative industry with great economic potential. With the influx of films from abroad, especially from Hollywood, the industry is struggling to the hilt to survive, as the bigger portion of the audience prefers Hollywood to local productions. For the government, one way of achieving this is to promote local films at the international level. To understand this situation from inside the industry itself, this paper, using data from in-depth interviews with 10 industry players, discusses the challenges faced by the respondents and how they perceive the potential of Malaysian films to travel globally.

Keywords: *Malaysian Film Industry; Potential; Challenges; Creative Industry; Interviews.*

TRANSFORMASI INDUSTRI FILEM MALAYSIA: CABARAN DAN POTENSI

Abstrak

Makalah ini membincangkan cabaran-cabaran dan potensi industri filem Malaysia daripada sudut pandang pemain industry iaitu pembikin dan juga penerbit filem. Industri filem Malaysia merupakan sebuah industri yang dianggap kecil untuk memenuhi keperluan 27.5juta populasi rakyat Malaysia. Dalam konteks globalisasi, pasaran tempatan yang kecil ini merupakan cabaran yang perlu dihadapi oleh pihak kerajaan dalam mempromosikan industri ini dengan potensi ekonomi yang terbaik sebagai salah sebuah cabang dalam industri kreatif. Dengan kemasukan filem-filem daripada luar terutamanya Hollywood, industri perfileman tempatan terpaksa bergelut untuk merebut perhatian khalayak memandangkan khalayak lebih menggemari filem daripada produksi luar berbanding tempatan. Salah satu cara yang boleh digunakan oleh pihak kerajaan adalah dengan mempromosikan filem tempatan ke pasaran antarabangsa. Untuk memahami situasi ini, kertas ini menggunakan data daripada temubual mendalam terhadap 10 pengamal industri dalam membincangkan cabaran-cabaran yang perlu dihadapi dan bagaimana mereka melihat potensi yang ada dalam filem tempatan di peringkat global.

Kata kunci: *Industri filem Malaysia, Potensi, Cabaran, Industri Kreatif, Temubual*

INTRODUCTION

Malaysian film industry is undergoing a tremendous transformation plan. Malaysia, being a physically small country with only about 27.5 million inhabitants, according to the 2010 census result from Department of Statistics, (www.statistics.gov.my), is not an adequate market for most of its own local film production. As the country is in the process of economic-driven transformation from a developing to a high-income nation, efforts have been taken by the government to make sure that this is achieved by the year 2020. One of the obvious steps taken is to shift the nation's economic incomes from industrial-based to knowledge-economy based; this transformation involves providing higher education opportunities to the people and investing in building highly networked facilities.

Despite the fact that it is a small country, the Malaysian film audience is also

varied and fragmented. Being a multicultural society, the audience's disparate educational, ethnic, class, and economic backgrounds also divides the audience into different groups, with the mass audience (usually consisting of the working class Malays) contributing to local box-office collections. William Van Der Heide, quoting Mansor Putih (1990) argues that, "the cultural identity of Malaysian film is a constant issue [since] 90% of the audience for Malaysian films is Malay and that cinema is probably the most racially segregated activity in the country today" (2002, p. 154). In the context of globalization, this small and fragmented market presents a challenge for the government to promote the industry as part of a creative industry with economic potential.

With the influx of films from abroad, especially from Hollywood, the industry is struggling to the hilt to survive, as the substantial portion of the audience prefers Hollywood and Hong Kong films to local productions. Inevitably, Malaysian films cannot afford to be confined within its current space and must travel beyond its comfort zone. This is easier said than done as the industry itself is struggling within the South East Asian region such as countries like Thailand, Indonesia and Singapore. In embryo, to understand this situation from the inside of the industry itself, this paper will present the perspectives of local industry players with regards to the challenges and potentials of Malaysian films to be accepted and successful internationally. In order to move forward, the industry needs to listen to the voice within.

METHOD

In order to find out the challenges and potentials of Malaysian films, 10 in-depth interviews were carried out among local industry players. In Malaysian context in which there is an increase in the number of local industry players, the increase unfortunately is not apparent as some of the respondents concentrate on certain niche market. For example, Chinese filmmakers are more interested in producing independent films that cater to the need of a relatively more educated population and the Chinese community itself. On the other hand, there is an acute dearth of Malaysian-Indian filmmakers as the local Indian audience still finds films from the South of Indian Continent, where most Malaysian Indian originated from, to be more palatable to them than local productions. For that reason, Malaysian-Indian filmmakers who have gone mainstream produce Malay language films and usually with famous local Malay actors to win the heart of the mass audience.

For the purpose of this paper, the in-depth interviews cover the Chinese and Indian filmmakers who have crossed into the mainstream. Mainstream here can also be considered "commercial films." (Neale, 2000, p. 9). The mainstream in Malaysian context is essentially constituted by the lower to middle class Malay audience. Having said that, the Malay audience is now fragmented as the urban (also means a large number of the middle-class) watches different types of films, which are mostly Hollywood productions compared to the rural (largely from the lower-middle class background) audience who prefers light-hearted escapism-

type of productions to festival-type materials. This means, these Chinese and Indian filmmakers make films for the mostly Malay audience.

The data for this paper is taken from in-depth interviews of 10 local industry players. Local industry players in this context include film producers and filmmakers. Admittedly, these roles are sometimes redundant or interchangeable. In fact, some of these industrial players are also actors. The respondents can be considered a representative of local industry players; the interview in effect covers three different main ethnics in Malaysia – Malay, Chinese and Indian. Two of the respondents are women, but the gender aspect will not be taken into direct consideration in this discussion. The subjects of the interview also consist of one Chinese and one Indian industry players. The data taken from the in-depth interview is qualitatively analyzed using content analysis as the method. Then, the data are presented based on the emerging and recurrent themes.

The respondents are labeled A to J for confidentiality purposes. The distribution of the respondents in terms of gender, ethnicity and role-categories are presented in the following table:

No	Label	Gender	Ethnicity	Role-Categories
1	A	Female	Malay	Producer/Director
2	B	Female	Chinese	Producer/Director/ Actor
3	C	Male	Indian	Producer/Director/ Actor
4	D	Male	Malay	Producer/Director/ Actor
5	E	Male	Malay	Producer/Director/ Actor/Screenwriter
6	F	Male	Malay	Producer/Director
7	G	Male	Malay	Director
8	H	Male	Malay	Producer/Director
9	I	Male	Malay	Producer
10	J	Male	Malay	Producer/Director/ Actor/Screenwriter

CREATIVE INDUSTRIES AND MALAYSIAN PUBLIC SECTOR INNOVATION

A shift of epistemology in cultural studies in Australia in 1990s, which is influenced by French historian Michel Foucault, results in a critical analysis of policymaking in the cultural domain (Hesmondhalgh, 2013, p. 57). A new approach is then born, “offer[ing] a distinctive model of power” (ibid.) that is different from the old system offered by Marxist system. This approach picks up

momentum in 2000s when the followers of this approach focuses on “new forms of government policy which sought to expand the role of the cultural industries” (ibid.). Hesmondhalgh also explains that these policies are often rebranded “creative industries” as some of them “deriving from the new fashion in economics of endogenous growth theory which, drawing on information society discourse, assigned a central role to idea generation, creativity and knowledge” (ibid., p.170).

Nonetheless, the term Creative Industry has its formal origin in the United Kingdom. In 1997, Tony Blair, as the newly elected Prime Minister in the Labour Government, created “a Creative Industries Task Force (CITF), as a central activity of its new Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)” (Flew, 2012, p. 9). According to Terry Flew, the task force produces The Creative Industry Mapping Document in 1998, which recognizes the growing importance of this industry for the UK economy as it employs 1.4 million people and contributes about 5% of total UK national income. One important effect of the formalization of creative industries is that it immediately becomes a salient global consciousness.

Hence, Flew also notes that there is a notable circulation of the discourse about creative industries in East Asia such as in countries like Singapore, Hong Kong, Korea, Taiwan and China. This circulation has indeed indicated the growing relevance and the importance of understanding creative industries as global industries, especially in the context of post-Fordian society. Flew also quotes World Bank economists’ (Yusof and Nabeshima) list of factors encouraging the growth of creative industries (ibid. p.43), which in our opinion, can be subsumed under the process of urbanization itself. The rapid growth of creative industries in East Asia has turned the region into a competitive bed of new forms of industrialization, and each country has their creative industries policies in place.

In Malaysia, the ubiquitous Government Transformation Plan (GTP) that started in 2009 has become a national consciousness. Undeniably, this plan is evidence of a public sector innovation to expedite progress, especially in terms producing knowledge-based economy and society by the year 2020. Indeed, there is a strong sense of immediacy in the plan as embodied by GTP’s motto: “People First, Performance Now.” Importantly, this new plan is also people-centric, which means it welcomes direct feedbacks from the public. Due to the nature of GTP as partly an economic plan, it has been divided into three horizons: GTP1.0 (2009 – 2012), GTP2.0 (2013-2015) and GTP 3.0 (2016-2020).

While GTP1.0 is mostly about changing the work culture and administrative structure in the public sector to ensure the smooth running of public services in Malaysia, GTP2.0 is about deepening the reform and initiating a new performance culture in the public sector. As Malaysian GTP in now in its second horizon, it is crucial for the public sector to continue being innovative by spearheading some programs to prepare for GTP3.0, in which ultimately focuses on innovation in the public sector (www.pemandu.gov.my)

One of the ways to ensure that the culture of innovation is finally inculcated within the Malaysian public sector, the government has been paying attention to the content and creative industry in Malaysia. In that vein, Malaysian government has taken several steps to ensure that the country's creative industry would expand in line with the development of creative industries in the Pacific region. According to Global Creative and Media Agency (GCMA), the Malaysian government, through its Economic Transformation Plan (ETP), hopes that by the year 2020 the Gross National Income (GNI) reaches US1 billion, with 10,300 jobs created and 45% of GNI comes from exports. This kind of opportunity is not to be missed in Malaysia's effort to become a high-income society by the year 2020 since the creative industry is the fastest growing sector in the economy for the last five years.

Under this transformation plan, The National Film Development Corporation Malaysia (FINAS), under the Ministry of Information, Communication and Culture, has been collaborating with the Malaysian Development Corporation (MDeC) in helping the creative content industry as well as planning for businesses. Innovative ideas are manifested by initiatives such as Film in Malaysia Incentive (FIMI) and Creative Malaysia; these are crucial in putting Malaysia on the global creative industries map.

In 2012, the Prime Minister of Malaysia launched a new initiative to boost the creative industry. Initially announced by the Prime Minister in 2012 budget proceedings, the government allocates RM200 million dedicated towards the growth of the creative industry in Malaysia. The new initiative involves the setting up of MyCreative Venture Sdn. Bhd. (MyCreative), which was incorporated on 20 April 2012 under the Malaysian Company Act, 1965 by the Ministry of Finance Incorporated (mycreative.com.my).

The most recent initiative generated by the government is the establishment of Film in Malaysia Incentive (FIMI). This is apt as one of the most important creative industry components in Malaysia is the film industry. According to a FINAS report, FIMI, which was launched on the 19th of February 2013, have two main objectives:

1. To encourage Malaysian film producers to create creative content that is of high quality for international and domestic markets and;
2. To attract foreign film producers carry out their filming activities in Malaysia and to turn Malaysia into an international film location.

In so doing, a 30% cash rebate of the total cost of film production and post-production will be paid to any foreign company working in Malaysia. It has always been at the heart of the government's incentive to encourage foreign companies to work in Malaysia so that Malaysian workers can learn from their foreign counterparts.

The policies and initiatives have been in place in Malaysia. Nonetheless, the voice of the industry players is rarely heard. It is therefore crucial for the

Malaysian government to take heed of what is happening within the industry in order to make sure that the industry players can benefit from the policies and initiatives and be part of the transformation plan. This paper seeks to inform policy makers of the need to bring human experience to the fore in order to humanize innovation itself. Indeed, this stand parallels with Mark Deuze's argument that "media should not be seen as somehow located outside of lived experience, [...], but rather should be seen as intrinsically part of it" (2009, p. 468).

DISCUSSION

The data presented here is important as it provides access to the internal voice of industry players itself. This is in tandem with Malaysian GTP's innovative approach that is people-centered. For this paper, 10 industry players were interviewed to find out the challenges they face in the process of economic-driven transformation mandated by the government of Malaysia. Their perspectives on how to increase the potential of locally produced Malaysian films are also obtained. For the purpose of organization, the findings from the in-depth interview will be organized according to their concerns, which are also seen as emerging themes. The questions asked are not limited to the interviewees' own production but also on film industries in Malaysia specifically and the world as a whole. Three main themes emerged; they are quality, creativity and potential of films.

QUALITY

One most common theme that has risen from the in-depth interview concerns the quality of films. In effect, all of the interviewees agree that one pressing challenge is for the Malaysian film industry to address the quality of films that are churned out every year so that government funding is spent for the right production. This is the common most important aspect that has been addressed by the government, but no proper study has been carried out to remedy the situation. Without a certain criteria of quality, the challenge faced by these industry players is to understand what is needed and required when applying for funding, as most of them are not trained filmmakers. When asked about what they meant by quality, further sub-themes emerged. They are the quality of the script (storyline and narrative), production values, technology and actors.

QUALITY OF SCRIPT, STORYLINE AND NARRATIVE

Finding a high quality film script is a global problem as this is faced by many established film industries including Hollywood, Bollywood and Hong Kong. This problem is also prevalent in Malaysia, probably due to a poor reading habit and culture among Malaysians (Lee, 2012). Indeed, all respondents believe

that this is the most common problem faced by them and that the government should not only train scriptwriters but also perhaps enhance the famished script bank. The idea of having a script bank was mooted since 1986 when the then deputy chairman and director-general of FINAS, Mohamed Zain Haji Hamzah, announced that it was the best way to overcome the problem of script shortages (New Straits Times, 1986). Nonetheless, little has been done since. Respondent F, for instance, succinctly expresses this challenge: “Our problem with our industry is always the script writing”.

As many industry players face the issue of quality script writing, the respondents believe that a study should be done to set a parameter of what a good script is all about. This varied definition is echoed in Respondent A’s answer, which regards the quality of a script as fundamental to the success of a film. For Respondent A, she argues that “I need to be inspired, and the story is the one that inspires me. And I need to inspire people who work with me”. This is in line with what Respondent G thinks: “quality needs to constitute a good and interesting narrative, a story should have high narrative values.”

Some respondents look at the quality of a script from the aesthetic angle. According to Respondent F, “quality is a matter of taste, your individual taste”. This resonates well with Pierre Bourdieu’s idea that taste is “informed by experiences relating to one’s class, cultural background, education, and other aspects of identity” (Sturken and Cartwright, 2009, p. 56). In the context of k-society, Sassatelli argues that, “the increasing role of knowledge in the processes of consumption made knowledge itself into a commodity [... which] in turn resulted in a cultural emphasis on authenticity and the spread of expert discourses about taste” (2007, p. 33). This idea is felt in Respondent D’s opinion, who explains that “not many people think of quality from the emotional side of the audience, many indeed simply think that they don’t like a certain film for what it is rather than relating it to the quality.” In this case, the audience is now “seen” as the expert of taste.

Moreover, Respondents I, H, and J articulate the idea that the quality of scriptwriting, storytelling and narrative becomes a great challenge to them as it is seen from not only the filmmaker’s but also the audience’s perspectives. In the context of hypertextuality in film culture as discussed by Janet Harbod, the perception of the quality of a film also lies in “the relational discourse of value operates across discursive domains where film as culture is produced – in marketing and journalism, the texts of advertising, promotion, reviews and features” (2002, p. 3). As the audience’s perspectives are often colored by texts beyond the films themselves, it is harder to pinpoint what their main value is. Respondent H concurs that it is easier to look at quality from the filmmakers’ perspectives as usually a quality film is defined by its “content, cinematography and the script content.” The hole in terms of the audiences’ and the filmmakers’ perception poses a challenge for the industry players, and they hope the gap can be addressed by more research on audience’s behaviors to be done. Moreover,

more research should be done in making sure that Malaysian films can be “more engaging”, according to Respondent J.

One important criterion for evaluating the quality of scripts is the originality of ideas. However, the term originality also varies from one respondent to another. According to Respondent A, originality constitutes the telling of “our story”. To this, she adds “It is okay to be ourselves, we should not be afraid”. Meanwhile, Respondent C foregrounds the idea that storytelling is crucial, and in it lies the originality of the idea, which to his mind, “the idea that you are trying to pass to the audience must be genuine. It has to be message oriented”. For all respondents, the variations that exist among them are not to be seen as drawbacks; rather it is a strength that should help to energize the industry.

QUALITY OF PRODUCTION VALUES

Production values can be gauged by looking at the overall impression of a film. This includes how a story is told or narrated. Most respondents agree that production values are important in making sure that a film is of an acceptable standard or quality.

One important challenge within this aspect according to most respondents is the need to address a balance in production values that policymakers seem to forget. This, for them, has resulted in an unequal distribution of grant. This imbalance is exemplified by the direct relationship between production values and with having a quality scriptwriting – a symbiosis that most respondents feel will contribute to a quality film. They claimed that a focus on one aspect, such as the special effect, has resulted in the much sought after grant being distributed not for the overall idea of a film. For that reason, Respondents A, B and J think that high quality scriptwriting should go hand in hand with the whole production values, and vice versa. On one hand, Respondent A, for instance, asserts that, “There is no point [of] having a good story, and then the picture is blurred, and people cannot deal with the sound... then you don’t do justice to the story.” On the other hand, Respondent B is of the opinion that “the base quality [is constituted] by a story [that is] well told, sound [that] is good, audio and visual that complements each other.” Indeed, Respondent B summarizes his view by saying that:

“When you speak of quality, it’s everything from the people in front of the screen, to the production values, to the visuals, to the story, and in the end the story is still the most important thing.”

In addition, Respondent E is of the opinion that high quality production values are cumulative, and should be considered in relation to “content, script, cinematography, acting, filmic languages such as the visual, nature’s language and technical.” Indeed, Respondent H’s idea seems to summarize the whole argument: “high production values will make the films look expensive.” This needs for a balance is considered an important challenge for these respondents.

QUALITY AND TECHNOLOGY

Technology here refers to any film technology used in the production of a film. Since the government is encouraging the use of the state-of-the art technology such as 3D and CGI, more money has been pumped into that aspect of filmmaking. This comes as a challenge to players in the industry, especially in making sure that an aspect of their film will utilize such technology to enable them to compete for government grant as well as the audience's attention.

In that vein, Respondent A is of the opinion that certain visual technology is crucial; however, it should be used "to enhance the excitement." This tone of voice is also felt when Respondent F says that technology such as 3D and CGI is not particularly crucial in filmmaking; however, he will use such technology if it can enhance the impression that the film is making. He proceeds by saying that "just because you can do something with technology, that doesn't mean it's an idea. Technology is just a tool." This in effect means that technology can affect the quality; more importantly, however, it should help the story and storytelling. The respondents believe that making this idea of technology understood at the policy level is a great challenge.

CREATIVITY

The second common theme that arises from the discussion with regards to the challenges and potential of transforming the film industry in Malaysia is creativity. According to almost all respondents, one great challenge that they are facing is to pass through the Censorship Board. Censorship Board in Malaysia is now known as Film Control and Enforcement Division under the Ministry of Home Affairs, which is a governing body whose genealogy is traceable in the British Administration of the Federation of Malaya (Pre-independence Malaysia) (www.moha.gov.my). As it is under one important enforcement division, respondents believe that the ambiguity of the board itself presents challenges to their creativity.

The first crucial challenge that the respondents feel with regards to the creativity of film is to find something new or unique to be included in their films. Respondent A is more positive in her view, arguing "the job for us in the industry is to push borders. We always have to come up with something new ... if not different, something fresh ... it is part of a creative process." Indeed, Respondent A says that "I told filmmakers, part of your creative process is dealing with LPF (censorship board). Respondent F is of almost the same opinion.

As creativity is crucial in creative industry, the challenge faced by these respondents is to find the right understanding of the word and to communicate that understanding to the government body concern. Respondent A, E, H, G and J say that creativity is too subjective to be determined. Yet, they lament that they are always judged by their creativity, which has no fixed criteria to be followed especially in applying for government grant.

POTENTIAL OF FILMS

This section looks at the industry players' opinions with regards to the potential of Malaysian films to travel globally. Subthemes that emerged out of the discussion on the challenges and potentials of Malaysian films to do well abroad will be discussed here.

STORYLINE

Most of the respondents stressed on the importance of a storyline when discussing the potentials for Malaysian films to travel beyond its local market. Respondent A, for instance, avers that Malaysian feature films have the potential to go beyond its national boundary if they are willing to be themselves and to embrace their own culture. Respondent A adds that "this is our culture, we have to fight for it. And make sure it's good, it's accepted, it's globalized". This response evinces the idea that local stories are relevant and if it is universalized, the global community is able accept it.

In relation to that, Respondent B stresses that "they (the filmmakers) should strive to improve the qualities of the storytelling," saying that a good story telling will open more doors for Malaysian films to travel. Respondent J, somewhat agrees with Respondent B, but adds that in an effort to take Malaysian films abroad, Malaysian films should not be "too Malaysian" that outsiders would not be able to understand. What Respondent B is saying is that too culturally specific films do not translate well universally.

The universality of the story is considered of utmost importance for Respondent I who believes that "the subject matter is also important. The story that either the audience can relate to or not." Moreover, this universal story should "tap into areas of my own culture", echoing Respondent J's idea that local films have a lot of potentials because there are a lot more local stories to be told.

On the other hand, Respondent F is of the opinion that Malaysian films are not "original" anymore. For him, this is due to the fact that Malaysian culture does not encourage originality and instead the issue is exacerbated by "what they (producer, director, and scriptwriter) do is they see something and they try to imitate it, or emulate it."

LANGUAGE

The issue of language used in a film has garnered some popularity among respondents. The majority of respondents believe that even though language is not considered a crucial element of marketability for Malaysian film to do well abroad, it does help to have subtitles in films. The subtitle helps the film to travel beyond national boundaries.

According to Respondent A, her film has attracted foreign markets as the buyers see the Malay language as beautiful and different from their own. Nonetheless, she admits that her films do get better attention from distributors

and the international market if one version of the film is in English. This opinion is shared with Respondent B, C and I who add that the choice of language is crucial but it depends hugely on the marketing strategy itself. They are of the opinion that having an English subtitle does help; so the main language of the film should remain the Malaysian language.

GENRE

Another important subtheme that emerges from the discussion of the potential of Malaysian films to travel abroad is the choice of genre. According to most respondents, a genre is usually seen as the audience's expectation of a certain film conventions. For example, if it is a comedy, the audience expects to laugh. The audience will be disappointed if a comedy fails to make them laugh. Therefore, for the respondents, understanding and focusing on a certain genre is of paramount importance in making sure that their films can be accepted by local and international audience. David Cronenberg, in an interview in *Empire* magazine succinctly expresses his agreement that working within a genre is safe, declaring, "Even Coppola and Scorsese [...] making a genre picture [...] there was enough an audience" (2012, p. 124). We believe that all these ideas about what a genre is refers to what Steve Neale considers as a "generically marked film", which to him "indicate[s] films which rely heavily on generic identification by an audience" (2000, p. 28).

Most respondents believe that understanding a genre's expectation is crucial in making sure the success of their films at the box-office. Respondent I prefers to think of the genre in the context of marketing. This is to ensure that "any of our films can avoid cannibalizing one another." What Respondent I is saying is that each filmmaker should consider which genre suits him or her best. Otherwise, there will be an over-abundance of the same genre films in local market. For Respondent I, his own company will work on "any kind of genre that is actually can be appealing, [sic] can be different and unique".

Meanwhile, Respondent G is of the opinion that Malaysian film industry as a whole, should focus on a particular genre in order to introduce the industry abroad. Citing examples from neighboring countries like Thailand whose main focus is the horror films, Malaysian film industry should find its own niche. This sentiment is also shared by Respondent J who sees having a niche is a critical factor to penetrate markets abroad. He believes that certain genre such as comedy does not travel well, unlike the horror or action genres.

BUDGET AND PROMOTION

One last recurring subtheme that has emerged when talking about a film's potential is budget and promotion. Most respondents do not distinguish budget from promotion, as they believe that both are interchangeable.

According to Respondents B, G and H, their limited budget has been an issue

in marketing their films abroad. Their concern is that the industry only sees films that are successful abroad from international film festival's perspective, which means, films that have won awards are considered successful. For them, success should also be defined by looking at its commercial values, which means how well the film does in the open market itself. Some respondents believe that festival-constructed films are not usually popular among local audiences.

Respondent D also believes that the relationship between a quality film and the global audience acceptance is ambiguous and vague; thus, making it difficult for Malaysian film producers to target the global audience. Interestingly, Respondent J sees the lack of budget can hinder the creativity of a director. The repercussion of this is that the budget has hamstrung their effort to find international distributors, believing that what they have produced have not met even their own standard.

CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed some challenges and potentials of Malaysian film in trying to infiltrate the international markets. The discussion is based on in-depth interviews carried out among some Malaysian film industry players in an effort to empower them within an industry that is increasingly dehumanizing. Most respondents focus on the importance of quality and creativity in determining the success of Malaysian films abroad. Nonetheless, as most Malaysian films are still struggling to meet the minimum standard, quality and creativity are seen as the greatest challenges faced by Malaysian filmmakers. For these respondents, concerns regarding the quality of script, production values and technology are reflected as their main challenges. In terms of potential, the respondents believe that Malaysian film industry has the potential to go beyond its locality if aspects like storyline, genre niche, and budget and promotion are seriously considered by the industry itself and the relevant governing body.

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