

# MARKETING COMMUNICATION STRATEGY OF NATIONAL INDIE MOVIES: A CASE STUDY OF YOGYAKARTA INDIE MOVIES

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## Abstract

*Independent films or more familiarly referred to indie films in general are films produced outside major label or company / production house (PH). Since it is not marketed through a commercial distributor line, indie film practitioners or indie filmmakers must be smart and intuitive in searching for opportunities to promote their work to a wide audience. Although there have been many indie films by Indonesian filmmakers who won numerous awards both nationally, regionally and internationally, but the funding problem often hindered their efforts to market their works, so only a handful of spectators who enjoyed the indie film. This problem was attracted the author to do research on the marketing communication strategy of national indie movies. In this article, the authors use qualitative research methods, precisely descriptive-qualitative research methods. Interview techniques, observation, library study and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) are used to collect all of research data. Data analysis using case study method. The author has conducted interviews and FGDs with two young producers who are also indie practitioners in Indonesia, namely Ifa Isfanyah (Fourcolours Films) and Ismail Basbeth (Hide Project Films). The research results show that indie filmmakers in Indonesia, especially in Yogyakarta, make film festivals (both national and international) as the main marketing medium for their works. In addition to using film festivals as a promotional event, indie filmmakers in Indonesia also use some media / other ways, through social media (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Path, and Youtube), websites that market alternative films (Layaria, ID Film Center, Kineria, VidSee, Buttonijo, nonton.com) and through press screening.*

**Keywords:** *Movie, Indie, Communication, Marketing, Yogyakarta*

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## INTRODUCTION

After the New Order era, independent movie--or better known as indie movie--growing in Indonesia. It begins with the release of *Kuldesak* (1999) that fronted by Riri Riza, Rizal Mantovani, Mira Lesmana and Nan Achnas, the other indie movies from various genres began to enliven the Indonesian movies industry. Now, with the increasingly sophisticated technology, especially with the internet with fast bandwidth and the emergence of various social media, the producers and even the field crew of an indie movie production team can easily distribute/market their works to the public.

The definition of indie movie is essentially a movie produced outside the major label, and is not made for commercial purposes; so it tends to be free from the surveillance of censorship agencies and market demands. This is what makes the filmmakers can explore certain limits that can't be reached by filmmakers commercially. As a result, the out is a film product that is honest, original, and sometimes dare to fight the mainstreams.

In relation to their distribution channels, indie movies can not (directly) be shown on commercial cinema networks, as they usually do not fit the tastes of a lay audience, and often offer special segmented themes that have unusual audience. Movies of this type need their own containers.

With streaming or video-on-demand services, art and indie movie lovers can freely watch specific films like that.

Prior to the Internet era, indie actors were able to exhibit through festivals, exhibitions of community events, and various *kineklub* (movie community) spread across campus and various places, such as *Kineforum* at Taman Ismail Marzuki, Jakarta. Now they can use various Internet platforms such as *Kineria*, *Viddsee*, *Youtube*, *Vimeo*, even through applications such as *Instagram*. It is an added value of an indie movie, if its maiden appearance takes place at a festival. Moreover, certain festivals do give the condition of the movie has never played in the media/other places before.

Based on the explanation, the authors are interested to examine how the movie producers (PH) / indie movie community to market their indie movies. Because as previously outlined, indie movies have a certain segment of audiences, because the themes and content of their movies are predominantly specific and uncommon. Funds owned by filmmakers/PH/indie movie community is certainly not as big as major label PH, whose marketing their movies through various media, and has a commercial purpose and very influenced by the tastes of the market. Many indie movies made by Indonesian filmmakers have won numerous awards both nationally, regionally and internationally. For example, Wregas Bhanuteja's *Prenjak* won the award for best movie at the world-class film festival, Cannes Film Festival. But not many Indonesians know about it, even watching the movie.

### **Aim**

With various shortcomings, especially fund and network problems as described earlier, the authors is interested in conducting research on the marketing communication strategy of national indie movies in one of the big cities which also become one of the *kawah candradimuka* for the reliable Indonesian filmmakers, that is in Yogyakarta; which is also the aim of this research, that is *to know the marketing communication strategy of national indie movies in Yogyakarta*.

## **Literature Review**

### **Marketing**

According to the American Marketing Association (AMA), marketing is an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders (Kerrigan, 2013: 3). So far, marketing is often perceived as ways to sell something that people do not want or need.

### **Online Marketing**

In a digital age, online marketing involves many choices. The first and most common choice, producers and distributors can market their movies through Web TV shows and social media. Websites can be managed simply; where through these sites, audiences can watch movie trailers and get information on actors/actresses and crew. Producers and distributors can also market their movies through online advertising on frequently visited websites. The emerging component of online marketing is to utilize social networking and stimulate viral effects (Ulin, 2014: 550). In other words, the utilization of social media as much as possible.

Regarding to social media, Tuten (in Lipschultz, 2015: 17) says that social media refers to a participatory, active, and dynamic online community. This community allows its members to generate, publish, control, criticize, rank, and interact with online content. Social media present and develop along with the development of smartphones. Social media can be accessed anywhere and anytime via smartphone, as long as the internet network is available. Behind its practicality and efficiency, social media can also be a double-edged sword, in which audiences can spread HOAX messages quickly and easily through social media.

## **Indie Movie**

The notion of independent movie or indie movie is essentially a movie produced outside the major label, and not made for commercial purposes; so it tends to be free from the surveillance of censorship agencies and market demands. As opposed to major movie companies, i.e. Cinema XXI, CGV Blitz, Cinemaxx and Platinum Cineplex, an indie filmmaker, of course, looking small. Limited budgets make these companies rarely use big actors/actresses. With the lack of budget, indie filmmakers actually racked their brains and "forced" their creativity through the mainstream boundaries.

The handicap of indie movies is actually a boon for many filmmakers, they are able to take risks and make movies outside the mainstream. Indie movie segments that are typically reserved for smaller audiences can be "darker," more subversive, and even politically incorrect, because they do not rely on a large number of people to see them gain a lot of money. With the advent of the indie movie movement, interest in the more diverse types of films is increasing, which again creates more opportunities for anyone to engage in the movie business (Moore, 2011: 13).

In Indonesia itself has many emerging film festivals that have been routinely held every year, be it in national and regional scope. Those film festivals are Festival Film Indonesia, Festival Film Bandung, Festival Film Dokumenter Yogyakarta, Hello;Fest Motion Art Festival, Q Film Festival, Malang Film Festival, Jogja-Netpac Asian Film Festival, Festival Film Purbalingga, and Coordination for Film Festival in Indonesia (Coffie). As mentioned by Moore above, this film festival event in Indonesia has become the perfect means and storefront for indie filmmakers to boost their reputation; as well as a venue for the introduction and preservation of their works.

## **Indie Movie Distribution**

In a way, the distribution of indie movies in Indonesia depends on the creativity, willingness, and foresight of the indie movie producer. Producers should be able to see opportunities and should be able to get as much information as possible. In today's era of technology and the internet, information on film festivals can be easily obtained.

In fact, not all indie movies get the chance to perform at film festivals. Indeed, there are some indie movies that are distributed via home video, cable TV, or the internet (eg using video-based play sites such as *Youtube*). Gregory Bernstein (2015: 270) lays out interesting opinions about the distribution of indie movies. Bernstein says that the first step in distributing indie movies is by self-distribution with the "four-wall" technique. The filmmaker can rent a home theater and open a kind of "mini cinema" to attract audiences. The audiences are the marketing tools of the movie; if the movie is interesting and gives a strong impression to the audience, usually the audience will pass it through status in their social media account. If the movie becomes viral, and if the filmmaker is lucky, the movie will be noticed by the film reviewers, who will invite the interest of the movie distributors.

Self-distribution can also be done via the internet. There are several websites that can be used to distribute indie movies - and usually cost relatively low-for example through *tribber.com* and *tunecore.com*. If indie movies are marketed on DVD, *CreateSpace.com* and *Redbox* can be used. Indonesian indie filmmakers often use canals on the internet to distribute their indie movies, such as via *Kineria*, *ID Film Center*, *Vidsee*, *Buttonijo*, *Layaria*, and *www.nonton.com*.

## **METHODS**

This research uses qualitative research method, precisely descriptive-qualitative method. Descriptive-qualitative method was chosen because the authors collect facts about marketing communication strategy conducted by the perpetrators of national indie movies in Yogyakarta; then afterwards trying to illustrate the facts in a model that represents the circumstances on the ground. Bajari (2015: 46) argues that one of the criteria of descriptive research is to develop concepts and collect facts, accurately describe the properties of an individual, state, symptom, or group.

In this research, the authors use data collecting technique such as interview, observation, focus group discussion (FGD), and literature study. Sources of data from this research are two indie movie producers in Yogyakarta, which according to the authors can represent indie movie world nationally

based on film creation productivity, film technical quality, and awards in movie festivals, be it at national, regional, or international, namely Ifa Isfansyah and Ismail Basbeth. Secondary data sources come from books, journals, magazines, and websites that discuss about indie movies, movie distribution, and marketing communications.

In the procedure of taking/selecting the sample of informants in this research, the authors uses purposive procedures. The purposive procedure is performed by determining the group of participants who become informants in accordance with the selected criteria relevant to a particular research problem (Bungin, 2011: 107). The purposive procedure was chosen because of the suitability of the informant with the research problem. Because the research is an indie theme, the informants interviewed and included in the FGD are indie movie producers and indie movie crew.

The validity of data tested with triangulation, reference adequacy, and checking through the discussion. Discussions with various groups who understand the research problem will provide meaningful information to the author, as well as an effort to test the validity of the research (Bungin, 2011: 266). In this discussion, the authors discuss with colleagues (fellow lecturers) who understand about the concepts of marketing communications and discuss with indie movie practitioners.

In this research, the authors used case study data analysis. In the case study analysis, the researcher was given the freedom to build the writing structure based on the studied domain and the researcher's wishes on which domain was developed (Bungin, 2011: 238). Because the data collected by the authors from the field derived from community/PH/indie movie crew quite a lot, the authors perform data analysis using community case studies analysis.

## RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Yogyakarta is one of the cities that become parameters for indie movie world in Indonesia. The young filmmakers in Yogyakarta can produce awesome indie movies that can compete at the international level. Call it indie movie produced by Ifa Isfansyah, namely *Siti*. *Siti* was awarded 3 *Piala Citra* as The Best Movie, The Best Original Screenplay Writer and The Best Music Designer at *Festival Film Indonesia* (FFI) 2015. Besides *Siti* who is a work of Ifa, Ismail Basbeth's *Another Trip to The Moon* was awarded "Tiger Awards" at the International Film Festival in Rotterdam.

After making a debut in the international cinema scene through various prestigious film festivals, the movement of these two producers in the world of Indonesian cinema has grown over time. There is a lot of works they produce; not just a movie that after watching is instantly forgotten, but a work that people can remember for a long time. Some of the movies produced by Ifa are *Garuda di Dadaku* (2009; director), *Sang Penari* (2011; director), and *Pendekar Tongkat Emas* (2014; director). Even in 2011, his movie *Sang Penari* won *Piala Citra* and established himself as The Best Director in FFI 2011.

Ifa was born in Yogyakarta and finished his studies at the Institut Seni Indonesia. Obtained a scholarship from the Asian Film Academy for a directorial study at Im Kwon Taek College of Film & Performing Art, South Korea. Make some short movies playing at various international film festivals. In 2008, his short movie *Setengah Sendok Teh* was awarded for The Best Asian Short Film at The Hongkong Independent Film-Video Awards. In 2009, he was making her first long movie *Garuda di Dadaku* and managed to reach the box office by reaching 1.4 million viewers. Named as the best director in FFI 2011 for the movie *Sang Penari*<sup>55</sup>.

While the works of Basbeth are well known in the national and international scope are *Mencari Rembulan* (2015; director), *Mencari Hilal* (2015; director), and *Talak 3* (2016; director). Basbeth had a traditional music education in Bandung before finally moved and completed his studies in Communication Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta. He is active in the movie world when involved in Jogja-NETPAC Asian Film Festival (JAFF) 2006. Then in 2008 made her first short movie that is *Hide and Sleep*. Afterwards established the independent production company Hide Project Indonesia and made several alternative movie projects. In 2012, he was selected to

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<sup>55</sup> <http://jogjafilmacademy.com/id/pengajar-ifa-isfansyah/>

participate in the Berlinale Talent Campus and the Berlin International Film Festival as well as the Asian Film Academy at the Busan International Film Festival. His short movie, *Shelter*, played in Busan as well as the Rotterdam Film Festival<sup>56</sup>.

Their works and accomplishments make the authors interested in doing research in Yogyakarta. In a way, Yogyakarta became a "*kawah candradimuka*" for the creative young filmmakers. The authors decided to conduct interviews and observations in the production house (PH), which is supervised by both filmmakers, namely PH *Fourcolours* belonging to Ifa Isfanyah and in Ismail Basbeth's PH *Hide Project*. They did an awesome works and can bring the name of Indonesia worldwide.

The first concept we try to explore from this research is actually the definition or meaning of "indie" itself. Because it could be the meaning of "indie" for the layman (including the authors) is different from the meaning of "indie" perceived by the filmmakers. The authors interpret indie-or indie movie-is a movie that is not played in big cinemas in Indonesia (for example *Cinema XXI*, *Premiere*, or *CGV Blitz*). Indeed, the meaning is not wrong. In general, the notion of independent movie or indie movie is essentially a movie produced outside the major label, and not made for commercial purposes; so it tends to be free from the surveillance of censorship agencies and market demands.

Ifa mentions that indie is a "spirit" that is outside the mainstream. Indie can be interpreted as "freedom of creativity/work" which is not limited/influenced by any interest. Indie is actually not associated with the movie distributor, as the movie producers in Indonesia distribute their own movies. The producers in Indonesia manage the movie production team and distribute it to large cinemas independently, because in Indonesia there is no major movie distribution company like in USA. In USA, where the movie industry has advanced since the 70s, a movie not distributed by five major distributor companies in USA (Paramount Picture, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Inc., 20th Century Fox, Dreamworks and Universal Studios) will be considered as an indie movie. Clearly, "indie movie" in USA and "indie movie" in Indonesia are in different contexts.

If in the USA indie movie indicator is determined from the distributor, in Indonesia, indie movie is a movie that makes the creators feel free to express their thoughts and feelings without any pressure / interest from outsiders. Because if we look from the distributor side, the whole movie in Indonesia is an indie movie, because in Indonesia there is no company specialized in distributing movies.

Meanwhile, according to Basbeth, indie means "alternative", outside the mainstream. Thus, Basbeth refers to indie movies as a movies outside the mainstream; which means indie movies have different "flavors" and "nuances" with mainstream movies. If the mainstream movies have so much fan, indie movies has a special segment. Although the quantity is not as much as the mainstream movie lovers, but indie movie fans have "space" to actualize their needs for movies that are different from the movie generally.

The government plays an important role in the development of indie/alternative movies; one of them through regulation. According to Basbeth, the government has not made enough regulation to support indie filmmakers; so even though indie filmmakers are mushrooming lately, if there is no supportive regulation from the government, then its development will also be stagnant.

Factors that can drive indie movies are alternative issues and ideological values are raised. If mainstream movies try to capture audiences with genres, stories and trends that are applicable and popular to the public (for example, if at one time is a trend of comedy genre movie, almost all the movies produced are comedy movies, so also with horror genre in which many contain exciting content, which once invaded the world of Indonesian movies), then indie movies bring up themes that are not common and different from the issues being liked in the community. An indie filmmaker should also have a strong ideology in designing his movies, because an indie movies must have a different content and no less quality than the mainstream movies.

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<sup>56</sup> <http://jogjafilmmacademy.com/id/pengajar-ismail-basbeth/>

In relation to the distribution closely related to marketing communications, the filmmakers of national indie movies have a similar "pattern". The majority of Indie filmmakers in Indonesia trekked their early careers through independent film festivals, both national and international. So also with Ifa and Basbeth. Ifa first made his debut as a filmmaker and his name was first known by the public through the movie *Garuda di Dadaku*. After that, he raised his career as one of the reliable producer-director in Indonesia. While Basbeth started his career in the national movie industry after he was invited by Ifa to become one of the board of one of the annual film festival in Indonesia (Jogja-NETPAC Asian Film Festival/JAFF) which is usually held every December every year.

In a way, the distribution of indie movies in Indonesia depends on the creativity, willingness, and foresight of the indie movie producer. Producers should be able to see opportunities and should be able to get as much information as possible. In today's era of technology and the internet, information on film festivals can be easily obtained. Based on interviews with Basbeth, the majority of indie/alternative filmmakers in Yogyakarta are appointed by international film festivals, i.e. the Cannes, Venice, or Berlin Film Festival. Not infrequently also the filmmakers who make debuts at international film festivals can immediately achieve the achievement.

Film festivals are the main platform in the distribution of indie/alternative movies. Through film festivals, filmmakers can simultaneously promote their movies. Especially if their movies can become the champions at a film festival. As we have seen, the selection of film festivals, especially in the international sphere, is quite strict. In fact, not all indie movies get the chance to perform at film festivals. Indeed, there are some indie movies that are distributed via home video, cable TV, or the internet (eg using video-based play sites such as *Youtube*).

Self-distribution can also be done via the internet. There are several websites that can be used to distribute indie movies - and usually cost relatively low-for example through *tribber.com* and *tunecore.com*. If indie movies are marketed on DVD, *CreateSpace.com* and *Redbox* can be used. Indonesian indie filmmakers often use canals on the internet to distribute their indie movies, such as via *Kineria*, *ID Film Center*, *Viddsee*, *Buttonijo*, *Layaria*, and *www.nonton.com*.

According to Ifa, it's good that indie/alternative film festivals are routinely done in order to become a "culture". With these routines, movie producers who regularly contribute to the annual film festival, the possibility of his works quickly recognized by a wide audience. It also made his movie opportunity ogled by "major label", in which case it was offered to be shown in commercial cinemas, an example is *Siti*. Started from an alternative movie, but later became a commercial movie in theaters.

Ifa adds that the distribution of the movie can be divided into several types. The distribution of the movie may be based on the distribution area or based on the output of the works. PH *Fourcolours* performs these two distribution methods. The works produced by PH *Fourcolours* are distributed by territory and sold on the basis of output based on the delivery list. Movies can be sold full (with subtitle), can be sold without subtitle, can be sold per frame (for the purpose of making the trailer), etc. With regards to licensing, the licenses of *Fourcolours* movies aired on television can be determined by platform (free TV, pay TV, cable TV, etc.), territory, or exclusivity.

Press Screening is also done in movie marketing. Indie/alternative filmmakers can also invite journalists from various media platforms (be they journalists from conventional media as well as journalists from social media) to attend their movie press conferences. With the news/information about their movies spread through various media, their work can be more quickly recognized and reached the community.

Gregory Bernstein (2015: 270) lays out interesting opinions about the distribution of indie movies. Bernstein says that the first step in distributing indie movies is by self-distribution with the "four-wall" technique. The filmmaker can rent a home theater and open a kind of "mini cinema" to attract audiences. The audiences are the marketing tools of the movie; if the movie is interesting and gives a strong impression to the audience, usually the audience will pass it through status in their social media account. If the movie becomes viral, and if the filmmaker is lucky, the movie will be noticed by the film reviewers, who will invite the interest of the movie distributors.

Responding to Bernstein's statement, the authors argue that this "four-wall" technique is very effective in becoming one of indie movie marketing communication strategies. As we know, the flow of information spread through social media can very quickly reach the audience, especially if it becomes viral. Movie audiences who spread the word about the movies he watched through social media can be a "free" promotional agents if he perceives the movie positively. But the drawback, if the audience perceives/has a negative perception of the movie, then it could also create a bad image for the movie director. In Indonesia, this "four-wall" technique is not yet a favorite for filmmakers to market their movies. Indie filmmakers in Indonesia still rely on film festivals and social media platforms to promote their movies. Also included is PH *Hide Project* which is headed by Basbeth. Basbeth still relies on film festivals and social media as a marketing medium for his works.

The next important information from the indie/alternative movie world relates to the availability of funds for the movie production process, which includes pre-production, production, and post-production. Based on the interviews with the two sources, the funding system in the movie production is done through *crowdfunding* method (funding system by collecting potential investors to donate). Broadly speaking *crowdfunding* it is funding a crowd or a joint venture. *Crowdfunding* allows tens or even hundreds of people to make a joint venture a commercial project as well as raising funds for social purposes. Generally, *crowdfunding* is "wrapped" in a web platform where the project owner meets the public with funds. Later, project owner will provide a product or service as a reciprocity. There are three parties involved in the *crowdfunding* platform, i.e. project owner, supporter (public that provides financial support), and platform providers (in Indonesia some of them are *KitaBisa*, *Wujudkan*, *AyoPeduli*, *Crowdtivate*, *gandengtangan*, and *carincara*). These three parties have their respective roles in creating an ecosystem that can support the needs of each party<sup>57</sup>.

The next way is to manage state funds, private, or cooperate with cross-art/art artists. If working with cross-creative artists, the output of an idea generated may vary; can be in the form of movies, songs, books, or fine arts. So, if the ideas that have been produced in the development stage can be followed up properly, then the main idea can be realized in several different forms of work, but the essence and the life of the work are similar. An example is the idea raised in Basbeth's *Another Trip to The Moon*. Besides being produced as a movie, *Another Trip to The Moon* is also made in the form of a book entitled *Perjalanan Lain Menuju Bulan*.

## CONCLUSION

Indie filmmakers in Indonesia, especially in Yogyakarta, make film festivals as the main marketing medium for their works. In Yogyakarta itself, every December, regularly held Jogja-NETPAC Asian Film Festival (JAFF) which is also a place for indie/alternative film communities to form a network and publish the movies they produce. In addition to using a national film festival as a marketing venue for movies, Yogyakarta indie filmmakers also join international film festivals to promote their works, i.e. film festival held in Rotterdam, Busan, Venice, Berlin, or Cannes.

In addition to using film festivals as a promotional event, Indonesian indie movie producers also uses other media to publish their works. Some of the media they used include marketing their movies through social media (*Twitter*, *Facebook*, *Instagram*, *Path*, and *Youtube*), websites/channels that market alternative movies (*Layaria*, *ID Film Center*, *Kineria*, *VidSee*, *Buttonijo*, nonton.com) and through press screening. While the funds they use for promotional costs usually come from *crowdfunding* and managing state funds, private, or cooperate with artists cross-creations/fine arts.

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<sup>57</sup> <https://id.techinasia.com/talk/mengenal-lebih-jauh-mengenai-crowdfunding>

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