The role of film in environmental communication: An audience interpretation in Indonesia and Malaysia

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Abstract

Film is a form of communication that has the power to persuade viewers to alter their perceptions and actions in order to support the communicator's chosen media agenda. Politics is the topic that is frequently covered in movies. In the documentary The Years of Living Dangerously, the topic of global warming is viewed from the angle of societal issues, offering a fresh perspective to the audiences. The issue of environmental destruction that took place all across the world served as the theme. The concern highlighted in the movie is that its magnitude has significantly increased global greenhouse gas emissions. Deforestation in Indonesia and Malaysia was one of the topics brought up. This study aims to analyze the audience's interpretation of the role of film in communicating environmental communication. This study used the reception analysis method with the FGD data collection technique. The informants in this study are audiences in Indonesia and Malaysia. The results of this study indicate that environmental communication in Indonesia and Malaysia which discuss deforestation issues are interpreted by the public as part of social problems that are difficult to control. Meanwhile, the government is framed as a political communicator that is not transparent, causing public distrust.

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Abstrak

Film merupakan salah satu bentuk komunikasi yang memiliki kekuatan untuk membujuk pemirsa agar mengubah persepsi dan tindakannya guna mendukung agenda media yang dipilih komunikator. Politik adalah topik yang sering diangkat dalam film. Dalam film dokumenter The Years of Living Dangerously, topik pemanasan global dilihat dari sudut pandang isu-isu kemasyarakatan, sehingga menawarkan perspektif baru kepada penontonnya. Isu kerusakan lingkungan yang terjadi di seluruh dunia menjadi tema yang diangkat. Kekhawatiran yang disoroti

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dalam film ini adalah besarnya dampak buruk ini telah meningkatkan emisi gas rumah kaca global secara signifikan. Deforestasi di Indonesia dan Malaysia menjadi salah satu topik yang diangkat. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis interpretasi penonton terhadap peran film dalam mengkomunikasikan komunikasi lingkungan. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode analisis resepsi dengan teknik pengumpulan data FGD. Informan dalam penelitian ini adalah khalayak di Indonesia dan Malaysia. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa komunikasi lingkungan hidup di Indonesia dan Malaysia yang membahas isu deforestasi dimaknai oleh masyarakat sebagai bagian dari permasalahan sosial yang sulit dikendalikan. Sementara itu, pemerintah dibingkai sebagai komunikator politik yang tidak transparan sehingga menimbulkan ketidakpercayaan masyarakat.

INTRODUCTION

Environmental harm in Asian nations is caused by economic conditions that are more often utilized as a scale of development measurement to catch up with conditions attained by industrialized nations (Moser, 2010). In reality, economic development are all other forms of development, from the emergence of a nation's identity to the advancement of the legal system, the protection of human rights, and even environmental development, particularly in developing nations (Rebich-Hespanha & Rice, 2016). The vast continent of Asia is a target for exploitation by other nations, particularly the United States and several other European nations. It has unique geographical conditions and immense natural resources (Alisjahbana & Busch, 2017). Additionally, the superpowers that generate the majority of the world's economic power started to look for opportunities to invest in Asia, particularly Southeast Asia (Briandana, Dwityas, et al., 2024; Wright & Nyberg, 2017). For instance, Indonesia is one of the countries that global capitalists travel to in order to maximize their profits because of its riches of natural resources (Parahita, 2017).

Given the issue of environmental damage that has affected many nations as a result of the exploitation of natural and mineral resources, some provinces that have experienced environmental damage include Bangka Belitung with tin exploitation, Papua with Freefort exploitation, Minahasa and Nusa Tenggara with the presence of Newmont, and those that have become mining hubs (Ardian, 2019). The matter of the collapse of a residential neighborhood in Sidoharjo, East Java, as a result of Lapindo's negligence in oil and gas exploration is currently in the public eye. Similarly, Malaysia is also facing some serious of environmental problems such as landslide, haze, floods and etc (Mohamad Saleh, 2017).

Stakeholders with an interest in environmental harm might utilize the media to launch campaigns or educate the general public (Briandana & Mohamad Saleh, 2022). In this situation, the media, which is a form of mass communication, can play a helpful role in achieving particular objectives (Briandana & Mohamad Saleh, 2022). The process of mass communication in essence is the process of conveying messages from the communicator to the communicant (Briandana, Hesti, et al., 2024). Mass communication theory is one of the communication processes that takes place at the level of the wider community, whose identification is determined by institutional characteristics (Wahyuni, 2017). The message is a product and commodity that has an exchange value, the sender and receiver relationship is more one-way (Titifanue et al., 2018). Film is one of the mass media, film acts as a means of communication that is used to spread entertainment, present stories, events, music, drama and other technical presentations to the public (Mansur et al., 2023).

Climate change is a change in both the pattern and intensity of climate elements over a comparable period of time (usually 30 years on average) (Yoseph-Paulus & Hindmarsh, 2018). Climate change can be a change in average weather conditions or a change in the distribution of weather events relative to the average conditions. For example, more frequent or less extreme weather events, changing seasonal patterns and increasing area of lightening prone areas. Climate change is a change in climate components, namely temperature, rainfall, humidity, evaporation, wind and cloud direction and speed (Alisjahbana & Busch, 2017).

The definition of climate change is a change in the physical conditions of the earth's atmosphere, including temperature and rainfall distribution, which have a wide impact on various sectors of human life (Alisjahbana & Busch, 2017). Lapan defines climate change as the average change of one or more weather elements in a certain area. While the term global scale climate change is climate change with reference to the earth's region as a whole. The IPCC states that climate change refers to the variation in the average climate conditions of a place or its variability that is statistically significant over a long period of time (usually decades or more. It is also clear that climate change may be due to internal or external natural processes, or man-made by continuously changing the composition of the atmosphere and land use (Susilowardhani, 2014).

From the explanation above, climate change occurs because there are indeed several factors that trigger it and because many of the triggers start from humans, resulting in some of the other groups to make a campaign about climate change that is broadcast through many social media.

In brief, sustainability communication is still new in Asian countries and has been conceptualized following the Western centric which as the communication of social, environment and economic issues from a sender to the receiver (Mohamad Saleh, 2022). The importance of looking at film as a medium for sustainability communication may be shown in the way that films' portrayals of environmental issues influence our comprehension of them and our motivation to take action (Cox & Depoe, 2015; Mohamad Saleh, 2017). According to McGreavy & Lindenfeld (2014), the stories and images seen in movies on climate change have the power to shape how the audiences perceive the world, which can have an impact on how well they can all work together to build a sustainable future. Notably, the past several decades have seen the film medium play an unavoidable role in bringing forth important environmental (Howell, 2011) and health (Sakellari, 2015) communication challenges in the context of the climate change crisis. In examining how viewers respond to climate change and science in disaster sci-fi movies emphasizes how the thoughts and cautions of climate change communication are transferred through the use of film as a communication tool (Bilandzic & Sukalla, 2019; Ridaryanthi et al., 2024). The importance of visual attractions in how climate change is portrayed in movies is highlighted by (Mansur et al., 2023).

A brand-new literary subgenre, referred to as "cli-fi," that explores the causes, consequences, and literature of climate change has emerged in the twenty-first century. Multiple media outlets, including television, film, literature, and education, reflect the emergence of sustainable developments (SDGs) and the need for sustainability communication around the world. In Hollywood film tales that stress the risks of both climate change and human extinction, the notions of climate change have increasingly become important. This tendency also applies to documentary films, which have begun making films that mirror the SDGs recently. Over the past few decades, a change in filmmaking has also been gaining steam over the causes and effects of climate change, not just in literature.

Environmental communication is a type of communication and can be divided into formal (through class in university or school) or informal (through sign reminder to hiker) (He, Blye & Halpenny, 2023). According to Flor (2004), environmental communication is the process of using communication approaches, principles, tactics, and techniques for the governance and protection of the environment. Meanwhile, Rebich-Hespanha & Rice (2016) defined environmental communication as a study of how people perceive, understand, and construct their sociocultural relationships with the natural world by using language and specific symbols as tools to influence how people act toward the environment.

In this research, the researchers examine the audience's interpretation of the documentary film The Years of Living Dangerously. The justification for choosing this film is based on the popularity of this film which has won a film award in International Green Film Award (2015) and Outstanding Documentary (2014) An American television documentary series called The Years of Living Dangerously has two seasons and is dedicated to climate change. Showtime broadcast nine episodes of the inaugural season in 2014, which lasted a full calendar year. Eight episodes from the second season were shown in 2016 on the National Geographic Channel. Teenagers from Malaysia and Indonesia who had watched the documentary made up the study's target population.

Nonetheless, despite increasing interest in research related to the role of the media in perceiving environmental messages, existing studies on understanding films from the viewer's point of view regarding environmental communication are scant (Bilandzic & Sukalla, 2019; Lee et al., 2023; Mansur et al., 2023), even amid continued debate about the role of films in influencing user behavior (Laestadius et al., 2014; Lin, 2013). Considering certain phenomena, in this case, sustainability, this research seeks to fill this gap in existing studies by empirically examining audience interpretations of films and how the film's role is in conveying environmental messages both from the audience's point of view in Indonesia and in Malaysia its effectiveness on intention and sustainable behavior of two people. The results of this research will offer a unique contribution to the interrelated fields of sustainability communication and film. In the context of developing countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia, where sustainability efforts continue to be encouraged.

METHODS

This study uses the qualitative method which is a research strategy that emphasizes the search for meaning, understanding, concepts, characteristics, symptoms, symbols, and descriptions of a phenomenon; focused and multi-method, natural and holistic; prioritizing quality, using several methods, and presented in a narrative (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). This study uses audience reception analysis. Audience reception analysis understands the audience's process of creating meaning when consuming a show. Reception analysis is used to see and understand the response, acceptance, attitude, and meaning produced or formed by the audience or readers towards a certain content or literary work (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Reception analysis is a part of audience-centered cultural studies and focuses on various types of audiences. From a theoretical point of view, two areas of research have

proven to be very influential: first, Hall's (1981) encoding-decoding model; and second, literacy and hermeneutic reception studies. Hall states that conveying meaning does not guarantee that the meaning is received according to what is intended by the encoders. This is because the messages (on television), are constructed as a sign system with different components, and are polysemous so that they have more than one set of potential meanings (Gray, 1999).

The reception study approach, also better known as reception analysis is distinct from other approaches (Livingstone, 2013). The difference lies in the point where there is an encounter between the audience and the text. Jensen and Rosengren (1990) argue that reception analysis explores how audiences contribute through the production of social meanings and cultural patterns that are generally carried out by audiences as members of specific interpretive communities.

In this reception analysis, the interpretive community is an important concept that refers to the notion of a group of people who exchange efforts in classifying and translating texts (Briandana et al., 2021). Therefore, a combination of media contents with different meanings can still be accepted by all members of society (Gillespie, 2005). Reception analysis as a supporter in audience studies stipulates that the audience does not only play a passive role but also as cultural agents who have influence in terms of generating meaning from various discourses offered by the media (Morley, 2003). The meaning carried by the media can be open and can even be responded to in an oppositional way by the audience (Briandana, 2019).

Primary data is data obtained directly from the information of informants who are knowledgeable and competent as reference material for research. The primary data collection technique for this research was structured focus group discussion. Structured FGD were conducted with informants or research sources and the interview questions were guided by the research instruments that the researcher had made based on the theory used. In addition to structured focus group discussion, the researcher made non-participant observations. Researchers are physically present at the scene, but are not involved in the activity being studied, only observe and systematically record the information obtained.

The subjects in this study were young adults (aged 18-25 years) who lived in West Jakarta. The location selection is based on the concept of Morley (2003) in Briandana et al (2021:306) which states that social and economic differences possess different backgrounds and interpretations of media content. The process of choosing the samples in this research is by using the non-probability technique, where every sample may not be a representative for the whole population. The non-probability method is usually

practiced in a situation where the representative is considered ineligible (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

To take non-probability samples, purposive or judgmental sampling is a method that is adjusted to the targeted objective of the research. The samples are chosen with a consideration of variety according to its different social and cultural backgrounds. Occasionally it may be appropriate for the researcher to select his sample on the basis of his own knowledge of the population, its elements, and the nature of his research aims (Creswell, 2009).

A total of 11 students will become informants in this study, of which five are students from Indonesia and six students from Malaysia.

Table 1. Data informants

No	Code	Age	Country	Code
1	A1	25 years old	Malaysia	Informant 1
2	A2	23 years old	Malaysia	Informant 2
3	A3	21 years old	Malaysia	Informant 3
4	A4	23 years old	Malaysia	Informant 4
5	A5	22 years old	Malaysia	Informant 5
6	B1	21 years old	Indonesia	Informant 6
7	B2	21 years old	Indonesia	Informant 7
8	B3	20 years old	Indonesia	Informant 8
9	B4	21 years old	Indonesia	Informant 9
10	B5	22 years old	Indonesia	Informant 10
11	B6	20 years old	Indonesia	Informant 11

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Years of Living Dangerously lists Indonesia as one of the nations with a significant impact on climate change. There is a global shortage of green space as a result of the clearance of Kalimantan's forests. Harrison Ford built this as a director by speaking with influential people and conducting research in Indonesia to learn about the issue of removing this illegal forest.

Table 2. Indicator of analysis in films

No	Indicator	Description
1	Forest characteristics	An explanation of the characteristics of forests and as an introduction to the wealth of forests in Indonesia
2	Activist opinion on forest issues	Explanation of the problems experienced by local activists
3	The effect of deforestation on the ecosystem	Shows that deforestation directly affects the survival of living things
4	Government opinion on deforestation issues	Shows the role of officials on deforestation issues
5	Opinions of palm oil entrepreneurs on deforestation	Shows the opinion of oil palm entrepreneurs on the problem of conversion of forest land
6	Responses of forestry officials to the problem of deforestation in Indonesia	Shows the response from the minister of forestry who has authority in the area of forestry in Indonesia

The study's findings were achieved using a number of processes, including analysis that involved data simplification or reduction (data reduction), data visualization, and conclusion verification (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). This activity was completed in order to collect research data on the subject of how movies might convey environmental concerns to audiences in Indonesia and Malaysia.

Years of Living Dangerously examined how well environmental messages were received by the general people. Based on the study that was conducted, it was discovered that there were a number of audience acceptance outcomes, including responses from six people in hegemonic positions of dominance, no negotiating positions, and six people in opposition positions.

The environmental messaging in films has taken a number of techniques based on audience interpretation, including:

Assessment

The assessment at this point consists of a process of problem identification, and the outcomes of the identification establish the solutions to the difficulties faced. In this instance, youth groups have been the problem in the movies.

For me, this documentary is good, it gives an understanding to the audience regarding the problem of deforestation in Indonesia (Informant 7).

The presentation of world problems and then forests in Indonesia as a case study is a good thing in this film (Informant 8).

Films have an important role in educating the public, so films of this kind are good if shown on television (Informant 11).

Indonesia is a big country, for us Malaysians it is very interesting to make a film like this as an example, because it's rare in Malaysia to make a film like this (Informant 2).

Identification of the problem of forest destruction is the main issue in the film, hopefully in Malaysia there will be many who make this type of film (Informant 3).

Meanwhile, several informants expressed their opinions regarding the problems presented in the film related to illegal forest clearing.

This film describes the condition of the forest that is not maintained (Informant 6).

Deforestation occurs in several forest areas and including national parks (Informant 10).

The cause of clearing forest land is due to oil palm entrepreneurs who clear land illegally (Informant 9).

The issue of clearing forests is done for economic purposes only (Informant 1).

Planning

They start developing strategies and messaging during the planning stage in accordance with the issues found during the evaluation step. They decide what media to deploy in this situation in order to best respond to the planned goals.

The following step is figuring out how to arrange messages in accordance with the theme and substance after getting to know the audience. The message must be created in a style that can capture the interest of the target audience because communication is anticipated to affect audiences. In this context, the audience interprets that film is a good medium for communicating to the general public about

environmental sustainability. With many films with this theme, it will create awareness for the public to protect the environment, especially for generation Z, who are now the future generation of a country.

Film is the best media to give awareness to the public about environmental sustainability (Informant 2).

Generation Z must be made aware of environmental sustainability, because if it is not taken care of our earth will be destroyed (Informant 4).

In films, messages can be packaged that make someone move to protect the environment (Informant 8).

It is hoped that the government is aware of this problem, so that films are not only made for the people, but also for the government to act, not only for the interests of certain groups (Informant 7).

In films, the dialog is presented after the message in the form of an engaging beauty video to grab the attention of the younger generation and utilize simple language to ensure that the message is understood fully. The Years of Living Dangerously's message features include both instructive and compelling elements. The risks and effects of deforestation in the hutterite provide knowledge and education in this movie.

The message displayed in this film is very good, moreover it is packaged with a narrative that can educate the audience (Informant 3).

The disappointment in this film is that the film's point of view is more towards the government, the film should be more neutral by highlighting environmental activists and also the surrounding community (Informant 10).

The images presented in the film give a different feel, so that from a visual aspect many people are interested in watching it (Informant 7).

The visual aesthetics in this film are very good, different from other documentaries in general (Informant 6).

Production

Redundancy and canalizing are the two strategies used during the production stage of the movie The Years of Living Dangerously. The redundancy method is a way to convey information frequently or repeatedly, either directly or via media. The second

technique, known as canalizing, also involves learning who the audience is and what makes them who they are before delivering messages that are in keeping with the goals of the movie.

> *The Years of Living Dangerously is a documentary film that employs three strategies: persuasion, education, and information. By providing evidence that is summarized in deforestation of the hutan in an illegal manner, the film informs the younger generation, notably Z generation. This film persuades the audience to menjaga lingkungan through persuasive means. In an educational sense, this movie informs viewers with messages that are intended to alter behavior (Informant 11).*

Action and reflection

The audience's circumstances and situations are taken into account as this documentary evaluates media use. In terms of the media, conventional television uses digital television, YouTube, and other platforms. The issue of deforestation, which affects the entire world but is particularly acute in Indonesia, must be understood by the government.

> *It is anticipated that one of the methods to alter people's attitudes is through the message presented in the movie. It is anticipated that this documentary film's reflections may encourage people to care more about the environment in light of how badly the environment is getting (Informant 3).*

> *In my opinion, this type of documentary can provide Islamic values. Because usually a religious approach will be more relatable to the audience (Informant 10).*

Evaluation is a deliberate effort to evaluate several parts of the process of implementing and realizing the function of film. The evaluation's goal is to increase or further develop the prior successes, and it can demonstrate the efficiency with which implementers created and carried out the program. Evaluation is the only way to know whether a communication campaign is effective. The film attempted to gauge the extent of the response to the campaign at this point in order to determine its success. This answer is evident from the interaction on media.

Discussion

The deforestation crisis in Indonesia—a societal issue that is managed by a number of persons with political agendas—is the focus of the environmental communication in the movie The Years of Living Dangerously. This is evident in the way the director develops his or her point through narratives that appeal to viewers in Malaysia and Indonesia. The intricacy of communication among environmental communication actors, such as authorities, businesspeople, and environmental activists, demonstrates how challenging the issues are from an economic and political perspective.

Without a doubt, Years of Living Dangerously is a documentary movie that serves as a vehicle for environmental education. According to Rijal & Sabila (2022), there are four steps to implementing a successful environmental communication plan. The phase of assessment and planning is one of them. In this movie, it is evident that a small group of individuals with political and commercial interests have studied and planned the forest disaster situation. Deforestation is a societal issue that is challenging to address in Indonesia.

According to the audience's interpretation, environmental communication causes people who believe that the government is corrupt in this deforestation issue to respond irrationally on the emotional and spiritual levels. As a result, while it serves the government's interests, the community often takes no action to address deforestation-related issues. The role of civilization in deforestation is not discussed in this documentary, though. The discussion in this movie is strictly restricted to the opinions of individuals in positions of authority who are legitimate in social contexts. Cases of deforestation should be extensively discussed in the community. The absence of the community in the film seems to be missing so that explanations about deforestation tend to be unbalanced and more subjective to the government.

The findings of this study also offer an alternative viewpoint to Bilandzic & Sukalla (2019) research, which views the issue of natural damage from a forestry perspective and natural disasters as being caused by God. Whereas in this study, the issue of deforestation is examined from a sociological perspective, where humans are the primary cause of environmental harm. Mansur et al. (2023) research produced findings that were in line with the findings of this study, where the government's role in forest protection was subpar. In fact, when it comes to solving forest issues, the government seems to be an ineffective agency.

The results of this research also confirm that the interpretations made by Indonesian and Malaysian audiences both hope that films play a role in conveying messages about the environment. The environmental problems that currently exist are worrying for some people, so all stakeholders are expected to play a role in being

environmental. Through films, we can provide implicit and explicit messages about the environment. Of course, the documentary film studied in this research provides awareness of how worried we are about existing environmental problems. In this particular context, the informants have expressed that one of the activities in Islamic communication is environmental protection. In this instance, religious values that are in line with Islamic beliefs are given priority when messages are communicated through film media. Additionally, Indonesians place a high importance on religious principles, which are emphasized in films in an effort to protect the environment. This is due to their demographic and psychographic makeup in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was to gather information about how audiences in Indonesia and Malaysia can be made aware of environmental issues through films. The findings demonstrated that Years of Living Dangerously was a movie that successfully educated viewers about environmental issues. Responses from six persons in hegemonic positions of dominance, no negotiation positions, and six people in opposition positions made up the audience acceptance results for the movie.

Depending on how the audience interprets it, environmental messaging in films has used a variety of tactics. Identification of problems is a step in the assessment process that aids in locating solutions to the audience's problems. The movie educates viewers about global issues by using Indonesia's forests as a case study. Films play a significant part in educating the general public about environmental sustainability, particularly generation Z, which is a nation's future generation.

The film's message combines educational and captivating components to spread awareness of the dangers and consequences of Indonesian deforestation. The film should be more objective by emphasizing environmental activists and the local community in order to convey the message more effectively and get viewers to act to protect the environment. The movie's graphic design is extremely impressive. The Years of Living Dangerously's production team used the information-delivery techniques of canalizing and redundancy, which are both commonly or routinely used. The film's message is effectively packaged and educational and aims to raise awareness of the issue of deforestation among the younger population, especially the Z generation. The movie's action and observations on media consumption, such as YouTube and digital television, are taken into consideration. The government has to be aware of the problem of deforestation and use the movie's message to influence public opinion. Evaluation is a

conscious attempt to assess the success of a communication campaign with the goal of enhancing or expanding on previous accomplishments and proving the usefulness of the programme. The response on social media demonstrates the movie's popularity.

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