

Documentary Content in The Digital Era (Watchdoc Documentary Content Study)

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ABSTRACT

The rise of internet technology has revolutionized how we access media, making it more accessible and affordable for individuals from all walks of life. With the advent of broadcasting tools such as cameras, even ordinary people can create news content, including journalism. Watchdoc production house has taken a unique approach to disseminating information by presenting it as documentary content instead of relying on traditional journalistic channels. This approach helps educate the public about issues often overlooked by mainstream television channels, which are often controlled by authorities. This study explores how the Watchdoc production house selects its documentary content in this information age. It draws on a descriptive qualitative research method that includes literature reviews and interviews. The research findings suggest that the selection of documentary content still holds significant sway and resonates with a broad audience. Furthermore, it addresses the public's disillusionment with traditional journalism, which frequently needs to cover issues affecting marginalized groups.

Keywords: journalism; media; documentary; watchdoc.

INTRODUCTION

The digital era has now given birth to many citizens involved in the world of journalism. They have had implications for the rise of citizens producing and distributing information to citizens again. Starting from a micro presence *blogs* like Twitter in the internet world which is a space for sharing information for audiences connected by large social networks. *Microblogs* provide *platforms* for citizens to exchange ideas and information. (Zhuang 2014) Also via *canal YouTube, Facebook, Instagram And TikTok*. It's getting easier to own a smartphone (*smartphone*) all of this has introduced new media and revolutionized the way communicators interact.

In Hamna's article (2017), states that media functions that were previously only limited to traditional media can now also be found via the internet. For example, television as a traditional medium presents entertainment programs for the audience. However, presence *YouTube* provide another alternative for viewers in watching audio-visual content that can compete with television programs. Online or digital media has become a strategic distribution channel for film or video makers and producers because it opens up a wider space for aspirations, is easily accessible to audiences and is affordable. (Rospitasari 2021) In addition, the internet provides more flexible time, unlimited resources, and can be accessed anytime and anywhere. This causes the internet and the media in it, including social media, to increasingly dominate.

According to Gurning (2018), journalism is in the new information era, namely where the public participates in organizing and disseminating their own information and entertainment which is now known as '*netizens*', is an abbreviation of "*internet citizen*" which refers to individuals who are active and involved in various activities in cyberspace or the internet. Postmodern is the era of 'information mode', that the mode of production in Marxist terminology is no longer relevant. The current era is the 'information era' or 'post-industrial era'. (Lubis 2014) A characteristic of the postmodern era is that citizens have become involved and contributed in spreading and covering news using social media. With new media, documentary filmmaking seeks new forms of representation. New media has become one of the consequences of today's advanced technology which provides many new innovations in everyday life. And documentary making offers a cost-effective and convenient way to reach the public in a more intimate way. (Lindsay 2023)

Riyayanatasya Research (2023) stated that alternative journalism practices emerged in the world of online media through platforms *YouTube*, like "*Watchdoc Documentary*" which presents a new style in journalism using a documentary film format. Rospitasari (2021) quoting Irawanto & Octastefani (2019) which has identified documentary film production mechanisms that prioritize socio-political issues, economic inequality, injustice in film communities outside Java, such as Ambon, Aceh and Bali, which have become drivers of social change. Watchdoc presents events in a different light than that usually presented by mainstream media.

Riyayanatasya (2023) concluded that Watchdoc Documentaries are an alternative media that offers a new form of journalism in the form of documentary films.

Dhandy Dwi Laksono and Andhy Panca Kurniawan, founders of the Watchdoc Documentary production house, decided to choose a different path in conveying the truth through audio-visual content in the form of documentary films. As stated by Dhandy in an interview, the making of the Watchdoc documentary is part of criticizing the television media conglomeration. They started Watchdoc in 2009 and made it a legal entity in 2011, with the realization that Dhandy and Andhy did not want to be tied to any investment commitments. That's why they founded it Watchdoc zero investors or no *venture capital*.

Previous research on Watchdoc by Husin and Akbar (2019) which states that this documentary is a way to criticize binary or two-part thinking which divides everything into two opposing categories. This film also offers a new perspective that is not completely covered by this binary logic, in fact, in some cases, documentary films can break down binary logic by deconstructing established constructions of meaning, so that there is no longer substantial resistance.

One of Watchdoc's documentary works, the film "*Sexy Killer*" has invited viewers to understand the reality of the construction of meaning that occurs in real environmental issues, which is often overlooked outside of political debate. This film has shaken the construction of meaning in the 2019 presidential election, showing that basically both political camps of presidential candidates have a role in environmental pollution and collaborating for business interests

The author is interested in researching the content Watchdoc Documentary, especially since the founders are former journalists. Why did they choose to create content in documentary form which is less popular with the public in the digital era? Most prefer entertaining content and short, fast information.

And again, in the midst of a flood of information due to the fact that everyone can have media through social media, much of the information that is circulating does not provide correct information or Hoax. Plus the increasing number of internet users, netizens those involved become influencers And buzzer makes journalism face a dilemma because people prefer to choose the news or information they want to read or watch. According to the author, it is

interesting to see how the Watchdoc production house can appear different but effectively provide information and news balance by choosing to create content in

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach, explaining the documentary content selected by Watchdoc as content that is effective in providing education and also as journalism practice through alternative media. Research data comes from literature reviews, such as scientific journals, news archives about Watchdoc, interviews and books. Apart from that, the author also took data from documentary content produced by The watchdoc the authors consider to have a large impact because of the numbers viewer a lot. The author will describe the results of this research descriptively.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Watchdoc is a documentary film production company specializing in the genre. As a private entity that adheres to the principles of democracy and socio-economic justice. Watchdoc raises questions about 'publicness' in relation to its institutional format. Even though it is a private company, Watchdoc has taken on the role usually played by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations in bringing important issues to the attention of the public. (Lindsay 2023)

In a Public Lecture on the YouTube, Dhandy Dwi Laksono explains why they chose to use a documentary format as the antithesis of media and journalism. The first reason is because documentaries have the ability to accommodate public issues in the form of nonfiction works. Documentaries are also considered an effective format for discussing current events in society. Apart from that, documentaries have a strong appeal because they are able to combine elements of journalism with beautiful cinematography, making them an attractive choice for the public.

A documentary film is a visual production, recording conditions that tell a reality without imaginative interpretation. The director in documentary content is tasked with observing events and facts in the field, recording them according to the actual image, similar to the work of a television journalist. (Erlangga 2019) Meanwhile, according to Dhandy in his interview with the media [www. Suara.com](http://www.suara.com), character documentaries are similar to journalism. Journalism is a type of socio-cultural product that is not always fixed with business logic. Like oil and water. Good journalism must be consistent, sometimes running afoul of business logic. Disciplined documentaries sometimes don't make money. The second reason for choosing a documentary is because this format can also provide entertainment, show beauty and attractive cinematography for the audience. Finally, the choice to use documentary as a medium is because the situation is not much different from the media and journalism itself, so it can still be an effective alternative. Thus, documentaries are considered a relevant and interesting choice in creating works that suit society's needs.

The author's interview on April 11 2017 with Dhandy Dwi Laksono stated:

“So the premise is like this, why is mainstream journalism becoming partisan because they have become hostage to industrial logic. You have to pay lots of people, you have to pay for a big office, you have to pay taxes. That’s how it has to be. Must target profit. So this journalism is trapped in industrial logic. Requires high maintenance. Because of high maintenance they require resources (source of income) continuously. And those resources are in the hands of those who should be criticized by journalism. The resource is in the form of advertising, in various forms. In essence, the money goes to the parties who should be criticized. Because they depend on these resources for advertising money and business contracts, they become dull and uncritical. Because they have interests. So, backpack journalism is an alternative method. In working on the information, he cut down on this hostage situation. He removes this hostage element, so that journalism doesn’t have to be as expensive. You don’t need a big office, you don’t need a lot of team support. There’s no need to pay a fortune so you’re not held hostage. Because you are not held hostage, you are expected to be more independent. So this is a strategy at the methodology level. How to do journalism? Actually it’s ideological too, but it’s an ideological statement expressed in a technical methodology. In tools. So previously coverage required 3 crews. One crew is enough. It requires team work. The doctrine of team work in the world of television is reduced to a minimum. So photography, videography, editing, scripting, research are carried out by two people.” (Interview With Dhandy D. Laksono, 2017)

So, according to Dhandy Laksono, the digital era journalism methods generally used have their own characteristics. One of its characteristics is simplicity and cost efficiency.

Journalism being partisan has become hostage to industrial logic because it requires high maintenance and requires a continuous source of income. They do not make critical journalism because they depend on sources of money from advertising and business contracts.

According to Dhandy Dwi Laksono in his General Lecture on the YouTube channel, in Indonesia, especially in the context of documentary films, there are obstacles to their popularity. In a span of 76 years, only 12 documentaries were screened in commercial cinema chains. This shows how minimal the role of documentaries is in the Indonesian film industry. Apart from that, the distribution of documentaries is also a factor of elitism, because most of these films are only screened at certain festivals, and are difficult for the general public to access. Even though several documentaries have won prestigious awards at international level, they are still difficult to reach by the wider public. Under these conditions, documentaries cannot become equal rivals to established forms of journalism. Differences in quality and limited distribution make it difficult for documentaries to compete directly with conventional media which continues to develop. Therefore, Watchdoc aims to make documentaries a more acceptable and accessible spectacle for the public. To achieve this goal, two things need to be done. First, the frequency of documentary production must be increased so that it is similar to content in the media or journalism. This means it is necessary to redesign aspects of documentary production to increase the speed of production so that more issues can be raised.

The journey of creating documentary content by Watchdoc Documentary first appeared in 2009 by utilizing online platforms <http://watchdoc.co.id/>, and began appearing on the YouTube platform in 2011. Watchdoc Documentary has produced 165 documentary episodes, 715 television features, and 45 commercial and non-commercial videos. (Riyanatasya 2023) Watchdoc Documentary was founded by Andhy Panca Kurniawan and Dandhy Dwi Laksono, who are both media activists. This media presents a new style of journalism through audio-visual production, with documentary films that show various issues also raised by the media. Documentary film production has turned into a vibrant form of social movement and is part of a wider phenomenon, a mass media-based social movement. (Yesicha and Noviani 2021)

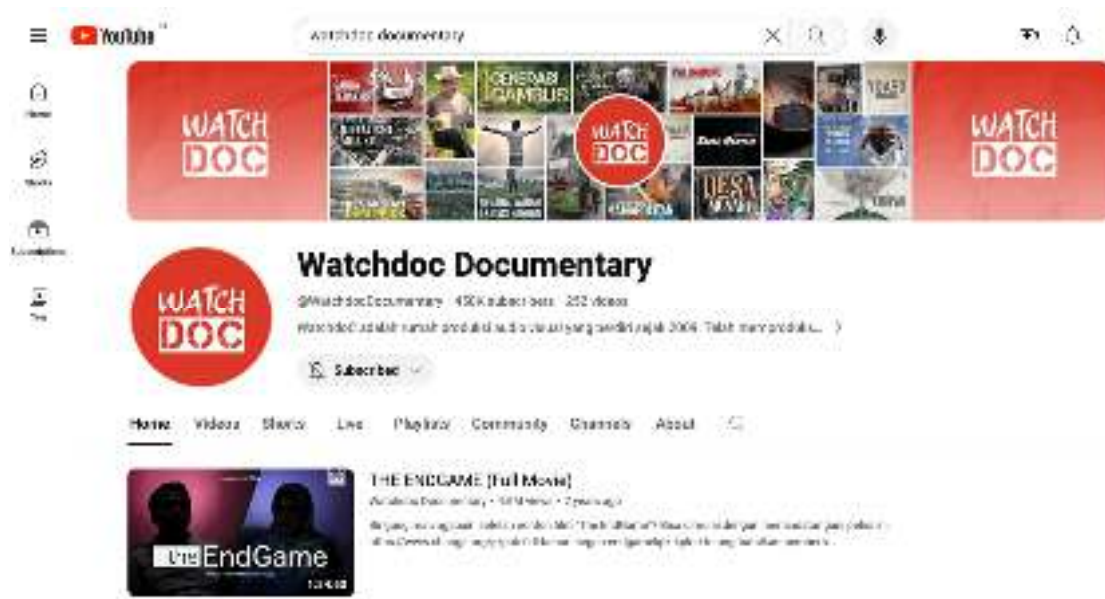


Figure 1. Watchdoc Documentary Channel - October 19, 2023
Source: YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/@WatchdocDocumentary>)

Discussion

In 2019, Watchdoc produced the 90-minute “Sexy Killer” documentary, which aired on their YouTube channel. The film, which investigates the relationship between energy companies and top Indonesian politics, was watched by more than 20 million viewers online. (Masduki 2021) In Husin and Akabar's (2019) research, the film Sexy Killer succeeded in inviting viewers to better understand the complex reality in the construction of meaning related to environmental issues which are often neglected outside the context of political debate. Describes a portrait of oligarchy in a coal mining company in East Kalimantan. Power-holding elites are heavily involved in the mining resource exploration chain. It is clearly explained how the ruling elite became the main players in the coal mining series. The reality is that the harsh reality behind this exploration is that the communities around the mine are far from prosperous. And often causes environmental disasters for the lives of local people. (Febriani 2021) Through this film, awareness was raised about the important role in the 2019 presidential election, where it was revealed that both political camps of presidential candidates had a shared responsibility

for the problem of environmental pollution. The film 'Sexy Killer' has shaken the construction of meaning surrounding the presidential election, and opened up space for the public to dig deeper and criticize the views that have been formed on environmental issues in a broader political context.

This is not the first time that Watchdoc has released a film which aims to criticize the course of a general election, after the 2014 election, Watchdoc released their first documentary film "The Ketu7uh" which premiered by holding a group viewing event at the Fatahillah museum, Kota Tua, Jakarta on August 16, which received public attention attended by around 3000 spectators.(Erlangga 2019) And this film is also a documentary that has been shown commercially in cinemas. Tells about the lives and interviews of four sources in the midst of the excitement of the democratic party. The sources are residents from the outskirts of the profession such as farmers, domestic servants, motorbike taxi drivers and sharecroppers who are struggling with limited wages, limited housing and their hopes for the future. There are two different spaces in this film, namely the space of the lives of these characters and the space of the excitement or excitement of the democratic party with two presidential candidates, namely Prabowo Subianto and Joko Widodo from 2009 until they headed to the 2014 election.

In 2021, on June 13, Watchdoc released the film "The EndGame" which has been watched by more than 4 million online viewers since the film was released. This video tells the story of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) employees who failed the National Insight Test (TWK), and the process was considered unfair and strange. Watchdoc succeeded in providing in-depth coverage which started from the mandate of Law No. In accordance with the provisions of the ASN law, the status of KPK employees has changed to ASN, and this has caused controversy. With the existence of the TWK, many KPK employees who had the best track records were eliminated because they did not pass the TWK. (Megawati and Sriyanto 2022) This film is a spectacle for the public to see from a different perspective the meaning of what is happening within the KPK Institution. This issue was raised by Watchdoc as an issue of weakening the KPK. (Riyayanatasya, 2023)

In his Public Lecture on the YouTube channel, Dhandy stated that coastal communities and farmers showed interest in watching documentary films produced by Watchdoc which raised reclamation and agricultural issues because they were considered relevant to the lives of

fishermen and farmers. Like the film *Samin Vs Semen* which tells the story of the Samin people who fought against injustice and rejected the establishment of the PT Semen Gersik cement factory in Sujolilo District, Pati, Central Java. Because the construction of the cement factory will threaten their agriculture and water sources. The Samin tribe really cares about preserving nature because they are very dependent on nature and the environment for their lives, where they are not allowed to trade and have to become farmers. So for the Samin tribe, land and water are something noble and valuable. (Kholisoh and Gurning 2018)

In order to distribute it in a wider public space, Watchdoc, Dhandy in a public lecture on the YouTube channel, explained that they chose the second method, contrary to current trends, considering the rapid distribution of content via social media. The second distribution method adopted by Watchdoc actually returns to the conventional approach via *Public Screening*. Their films are distributed through the active participation of communities who independently hold joint screening events, using 'Layar Tancap'. Implementation *public screening* for Watchdoc films has achieved significant success. For example, in 2014, they successfully held dozens of screenings of the film "Belakang Hotel". In 2021, they also managed to reach up to 1500 locations for film screenings "The End Games" which tells the story of the efforts of politicians and the government to weaken the performance of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK).

Watchdoc Documentary Films receive a lot of public attention, they always target an issue from different sides, such as several issues regarding the fate of migrant workers during the pandemic, coal mining and steam power plants, reclamation, agrarian problems, evictions, water drought and so on. Such as the fate of migrant workers during the pandemic in the title "Undocumented", and the impact of coal mining which led to steam power plants on society and the environment through the documentary film 'Sexy Killer'. The problem of reclamation on the island of Bali is presented by Watchdoc in the film entitled "Kala Benoa". The issue of reclamation in DKI Jakarta through the "Fake Island Seduction". The issue of evictions that occurred in DKI Jakarta in the film "Jakarta Unfair" in 2015-2016. (Riyayanatasya, 2021)

Based on several explanations of Watchdoc documentary film production above, they can be categorized as alternative media which seems to be at odds with mainstream media

journalism practices. (Riyayanatasya 2023) They have provided information with different perspectives as a form of dedication and social responsibility and advocacy to the community.

Since its founding, Watchdoc has focused more on making audio-visual documentaries, until Watchdoc discovered the distribution pattern of their documentary content. Communities throughout Indonesia are encouraged to organize viewing events together while discussing the films that Watchdoc produces. In a statement from Andhy Panca Kurniawan, one of the founders of the Watchdoc Production House in an interview with Kompas media, 6 September 2021, they offered the Watchdoc documentary film to be screened in the community on the condition that they have to hold a discussion. Watchdoc is only a facilitator to increase public capacity.

Watchdoc has never supported, instructed, or funded these communities. They are voluntarily interested in discussing certain content because they consider it relevant to the problems they face. And according to Andhy, it turned out that this method was considered successful and effective, so Watchdoc was awarded an award *Magsaysay* from the Philippines in 2021. In the announcement of the recipients of the Magsaysay award which was announced on August 31 2021 in Manila, Watchdoc succeeded in winning the award in the category "*Emergent Leadership*" which was only formed in 2000. Although their leadership is not yet widely known outside the community. Interestingly, the committee *Magsaysay* giving this award for the first time to an institution, such as Watchdoc, and not just to an individual as usual. Awards in the field *Emergent Leadership* awarded to individuals aged forty years or younger, who have done extraordinary work in creating social change in their communities.

Ramon Magsaysay was the seventh President of the Philippines who ruled from 1953 until he died in a plane crash in 1957. Awards *Magsaysay* began to be awarded in 1958 to citizens and organizations in Asia who contribute to community services and provide solutions to problems faced in humanitarian development in the Asian region. Since this award was given, there have been 28 winners from Indonesia, including famous names such as journalist Mochtar Loebis, DKI Jakarta Governor Ali Sadikin, Indonesian President Abdurahman Wahid, writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer, and cultural writer Achmad Syafii Maarif.

CONCLUSION

Watchdoc using the documentary format as a relevant and interesting choice to accommodate public issues in the form of factual works. Using this format also allows them to discuss current events in society by combining elements of journalism and interesting cinematography. Although the documentary format has challenges in terms of popularity and limited distribution, *Watchdoc* aims to make documentaries a more acceptable and accessible spectacle for the public. As Sasono (2019) concluded in his dissertation, the *Watchdoc* organizational format has become a significant element in the debate regarding public space in Indonesia, because it shows that commercial entities have the ability to produce documentary films as a means of criticizing power. Although this has an impact on financial challenges for *Watchdoc*, it also confirms *Watchdoc*'s position as an actor in a social movement that aims to achieve social transformation, independent of its organizational form. With these principles as a foundation, *Watchdoc* produces documentary films to realize the vision of social transformation they adhere to. *Watchdoc*'s work is not only oriented towards creating openness in the public sphere, but also hopes that every form of involvement with its documentary films will be able to create change or influence public policy.

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