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A STUDY OF KL24: ZOMBIE'S ATTENTION

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Abstract

This research discusses how the independent Malaysian film KL24: Zombie uses the attention economy with a minimum budget to promote their film on internet. Attention has a value of real currency in business and individuals. It relates to the use of social media. Films promotion no longer needed to wait after their creation. For Malaysian films industry, attention is very crucial and it literally means to have the audience watch the film. A in depth interview with James Lee – independent film director in Malaysia been conducted in this research paper. The director only spent around RM500 on buying Facebook ads. The social media platform-YouTube allows him to keep track how long he manage to keep the audiences' attention. Viral marketing is a strategy based on social media networks to increase awareness about a brand, product, or an event before the item it launched- basically word of mouth marketing, but through social media. Malaysian film makers should start opting on imitating the similar process of marketing and start promoting their movie earlier. Although they might not have enough budgets to produce a movie at that moment, making the public aware of their upcoming movie would grab the attention of not only the potential audience but also potential investors that would want to invest their money to the movie.

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1. Introduction

Malaysian films needed more attention; it literally means to have the audience watch the film. In order to get over the thread such as the impact of foreign films, understanding and becoming a great attention grabber is essential for local filmmakers. It will not only help increase the local viewers of the local films but also expand the industry to the international level and etc. This research tries to discover how social media can help the local film industry even with a minimum budget. How filmmaker uses social media to bring up the awareness of their films.

1.1. Attention Economy

Attention is something that we give to and pay for. Now, attention has a value and a real currency in business and individuals (Davenport & Beck, 2001). In today's society, social media has become part of our life and people can access to it quite often. It is a direct-response device, compared to traditional media such as television, radio, newspaper, magazines and etc. Attention economy works best with multiple-way communication, where there will be senders and receivers of information. Plus, the whole society contributes in an attention economy. Everyone in the society is an information generator, this means that an information sender can be a receiver and a receiver can be a sender, at the same time.

Social media had changed the way people consume film. More than 380 million people globally will view online video content from internet connected devices by 2015. Furthermore, the grown of the industry will be highly determined by the consumers changing behaviour. Second or third screen been offered to viewer's attention. The film industry has to innovate to maintain viewer's attention. Attention comes from the audience, and the audience is what a film needs in order to achieve success. Thus, this proves that attention economy is important for our film industry. In social media, conversations influence and relationships are the three rules for filmmaker when planning their social media marketing (Safko, 2009). Social media has the ability and capability of grabbing attention and these attentions is one of the factors that drive the Web. As the technology and application of computer and mobile have become more advanced, people can access social networking site more easily compared to the past. Social media has become the most common and popular ways of people communicate with each other and engagement of business to be maintained (Thayne, 2012). Attention economics allows social networks to be an interactive platform for both information senders and receivers, where both parties can exchange ideas, which means their engagement has the highest performativity for both the information production and consumption process. Yet, the society has played the important role in creating, producing and innovating attention and the attention economy commands, manages and got the social process, by giving it a value and make it becomes a currency like a property (Thayne, 2012).

1.2. Why does Malaysian Film Industry need Attention Economy?

Films are such a unique and creative element; this creative field is not only traded for financial purpose but it is also a value in terms of social. Although films are referred as a work of art and it has a strong social base, films are still relevant to the perspective of the economic cycle, and at the same time, and the Malaysian film industry continues to evolve and improved. Most of the developing countries are

struggling to promote and develop their indie film industry. The country prefers the international film because of globalization and strives to benefit from it. The developing country audiences are more into the more famous film instead of local ones (Rosnan, Ismail & Daud, 2010).

Now, we can see how the changes in every film produced by others countries, from the storyline to the language, genre, and the preparation that they do before producing an amazing film to be distributed worldwide. According to Aziz, Hashim & Ibrahim (2014), storyline and language are some of the essential potentials of the country and also the local film industry as they can bring us through the local market and beyond the national level, and content can be presented easily through various languages of subtitles, especially English.

Today, Malaysia has high potential in filmmaking. The animation is one of the examples. Malaysian animation sector actually has really good potential in this creative field. For example, not only was the most recent animation movie BoBoiBoy The Movie rated high in the box office, other animation work such as Upin dan Ipin, Bola Kampung and more was screened on channels such as Astro. Our local industry even has started to get involve in the international levels such as an animation titled Sea Level or SeeFood, produced in 2011. Malaysia filmmakers not only need to produce better quality films, they should also be thinking of marketing it internationally (Rosnan & Abdul-Aziz, 2012).

Besides, more and more production companies have started entering and investing in Malaysia, such as the Pinewood Iskandar Malaysia Studio. They have completed some foreign drama series including Marco Polo. According to The Star Online, Malaysia was also involved in the post-production sector of films like the Life of Pi which uses visual effects and CGI in the film. Besides, as Malaysia is a multicultural society, there are many kinds of the story waiting for the filmmakers to tell. Find those stories are personal to the audience and can easily touch their heart. However, as amazing as the film is, it will be nothing without attention that means that attention is really crucial when it comes to bringing a film to life. If one wants to be successful in the economy today, they have to get good attention (Thayne, 2012).

So, attention is important in every film industry especially in the Malaysian Film industry as we need to gain the attention of the Malaysians and foreign audience to support the local film. One of the importances of the attention economy in Malaysian film industry is a country's economic contribution. That means not only will the attention contribute to the film but it will also contribute to the brand e.g. Yasmin Ahmad short film and Petronas. Yasmin Ahmad short film gained attention from the local audience because of the popularity of her previous film, the success of the short film also benefitted Petronas since they were the one that sponsored the short film. Short films is a way to compete with the foreign films in the local market, expand this creative field and distribute more local films into the international field. One other example, some drama, and commercial might be sponsored by a brand or product such as smartphones, accessories and etc. Film production in any country will generate significant new employment. This included the full-time job, although most of the workers in the film industry are freelancers. It is normal in the film industry worldwide (Olsberg, 2012).

There will be job opportunities for people especially who is in a production field whenever a film is being made. The more develop the film industry is, the better it will be at gaining attention, that in return will help increase the demand for jobs in the film industry. Films can also have a positive effect on the tourism sector in Malaysia. It has been proven by a lot of studies all over the world. A tourist decisions to

travel is based on a few factors and film can be one of the main factors for tourist when they choose a destination. (Olsberg, 2012) With the locations that are used in films, viewers might be interested in visiting the place. For example, Redang Island was one of the location shot by a Hong Kong movie for Summer Holiday (Ha Yat dik Mo Mo Cha), and Lang Tengah Island for Chinese movie – Love you you. Now, the island in and around the area has been able to sustain themselves really well thanks to the tourists and visitors. We can see the impact of films and how it can contribute to the Malaysian tourism sector.

In addition, the films that produce by Malaysia also portray the culture in Malaysia which led to culture attraction to the local and foreign audience. For example, Ola Bola is one of the films that gain so much attention from the citizens because the movie showed the ethnicity in Malaysia where they unite together to play soccer. Besides, getting the people to get involve ca also help attract people to watch the film. For example, a local Chinese movie The Journey had invited the people to give out their plastic bag to the production company to make the hot air balloon for the movie; the movie was later dubbed the ‘people’s movie’ (Chan, 2014).

Culture is important in nation building, so national cultural policy formulated in aiming to maintain the Malaysian culture identity through programs which was to enhance the cultural identity, promoting national integration and unity in order to maintain the racial harmony. The attention economy was so essential in Malaysian film industry, which gives Malaysia's film a chance to stand out in the eyes of the world. At the same time, it can also help attract foreign audiences or filmmakers to come to Malaysia. Social media has played an essential role in Malaysia’s society; it has a lot of potential and active Internet and social media users. According to Go-Globe (2015), Asia region had more than 426 million active Facebook users monthly. 97.2% of these social media users accessed Facebook from their smart devices. Therefore, the local filmmakers should fully make a use of the social media to boost and sustain the engagement between them and the audience in order to get viewers’ attention on the movies. Make use of the potential of social media and the active user in our country, by using them to spread and send the word out for our local works such as short films, experimental video and etc. to platforms such as YouTube, Vidsee, national and international film festival and etc., This is how the Malaysian film industry can attract foreign distributors for the local films and expand our creative field in the future.

Berman (2014) had also mentioned paying for attention is much more important than paying for impression in the IBM article (p. 6). He clearly stated that “producers that thrive will be those that select and target markets effectively and place increasing value on paying attention to customer relationships and retention” (Berman, 2014, p. 6). In the movie industry, it is important to not only rely on paying for impressions. For example, if a filmmaker is producing a trilogy such as the Twilight Saga, they could not rely on the audiences of the first Twilight movie in the Saga to create a positive impression so that the second and third movie would gain as much audience as the first. This is due to a phenomenon known as the “unexpected hit” (Lane & Husemann, 2004). This phenomenon, as explained by Lane & Husemann (2004), is caused due to the difficulty to predict appeal of a movie as one cannot simply say that a movie that is produced with good technology, for instance, can gain more attention, thus, audiences. In this book, Lane & Husemann (2004) mentioned that sometimes a moderately produced film can also gain a lot of attention due to strong recommendations. Therefore, it is important for the filmmakers, especially Malaysian filmmakers, to emphasize on paying for attention instead of paying for the impression.

Viral depends on the participatory culture itself whereby the people of the culture would actively spread the videos and recreate similar content to gain attention (Shifman, 2011, p. 199). Malaysian filmmakers should understand that in order to be involved in the viral culture, they would need to pay attention to their potential audiences. They not only need to study the trends but also need to understand how to make their audiences feel included in their movie. The local film *Ola Bola* is a good example of how the filmmaker paid attention to their potential audiences, thus, made promoting their film easier since it was viral. *Ola Bola* revolves around the theme of unity among races. Since Malaysia is a multiracial country, the audiences felt related to the movie despite it being a movie about sports; football. This film directed by Chiu directs audiences “to celebrate our differences and unite as a nation with a collective goal. This poignant zero-to-hero story reminds us that there is beauty in our diversity and strength in our unity”. When audiences first watch the trailer or listen to their original soundtrack (OST), *Arena Cahaya* by Zee Avi, they would definitely start sharing the news about an upcoming movie, *Ola Bola*, to their family and friends. This participatory culture causes *Ola Bola*’s promotion and the movie itself to be known locally and internationally, and particularly in Taiwan, after making its international debut at the Taipei Golden Horse Fantastic Film Festival between 8 and 17 April 2016 (MalayMail, 2016).

1.3. Why Social Media?

Social media is well inferred as a set of new online media in which they share most of these attributes namely; participation, openness, conversation, community, and connectedness. He further explained participation is the contributions and feedback from the people who are keen about social media. When there are feedback and participation from people, there is openness. People are allowed to vote, comment and also share information. This gives the filmmakers an opportunity to know their audiences’ needs and desires, basically what they want to see in a film. (Mayfield, 2008) Conversation is a two-way communication where you are able to get a feedback from the person. Audiences are able to give their feedback and constructive comments that could help filmmakers to produce better films in the future. In traditional media, it was about broadcasting. The content is presented to the audience. He then explained the next point which is the community. With social media, it allows a community to formed easily and communicate effectively. Communities share the same passion. For instance, music, books or even favorite movies. Thus, with these communities on social media, filmmakers are able to reach out to their target audience based on the film genres. Last but not least, Mayfield (2008) added connectedness which is what makes social media so successful. They use links to other sites, resources and people to connect with the audience and share information about the updates of the films to the audience. Holding contests is a great way of interacting with the audiences. For instance, a superheroes movie, one kind of the contest idea would be to tell everyone “To enter, share this page, tell us what superpowers you wish you could have and why!” The contest needs to have a deadline and a fair process of picking a winner- either based on random or by the awesomeness of their answer. Of course, the winners will get amazing prizes.

A study conducted by Wilcox (2012), a survey was distributed to young adults. One of the questions asked was “How social media influences your decision to see a movie in the theater?” A few answered, “It doesn’t.” While others gave more in-depth explanations that also explain the impact of social media marketing on whether or not he sees the movies in the theater. One of the respondents answered he/she will

not go for a movie that he/she never heard of it. The respondent added he/she only get movies information on the internet not in the TV. Some of the respondents said most of the time if they see a movies trailer on social media, they usually will look into it. The promotional clips such as interviews & behind the scenes around social media help to keeps the movie on the respondent's radar.

2. Problem Statement

According to Finas's website, a total of 46 local Malaysian film been produced in the year 2016, and less than 10 films made a profit. Malaysia produced films had faced hardships and haven't been getting good feedback from the audience. This criterion has actually indirectly caused the existence of the first challenge above. Malaysian audience hasn't been going for local movie as much as for foreign movie just like the Hollywood movies. According to Liew Chee Kit and Lee Weng Chuan (2012), Hollywood films' huge dominance in Malaysia has caused the local industry to be affected negatively in many ways. Sometimes it is the storyline of the movie itself. According to Aziz, Hashim & Ibrahim (2014), content are essential criteria of a film to be spread and travel in the local market. The filmmakers stressed on good storytelling in local films assist the films to travel further and beyond its limits. Local films are less preferable because the younger audience believes that local film production cannot compare with the Hollywood productions. They believe Malaysian made films are not as good as Hollywood films. (Liew Chee Kit and Lee Weng Chuan, 2012) In order to increase the revenue of local films, audience participations are crucial to contribute and make Malaysian film industry better.

3. Research Questions

The discussion above provides an understanding of the significant of attention for a film. This study will look into the influential of film promotion in social media and attention economy. The research question will be why social media is important especially for a low budget Malaysian independent film.

4. Purpose of the Study

This study aims to explore the alternative way of film promotion for Malaysian films with the usage of social media promotion. Most Hollywood blockbusters are using social media as one of the new strategies to increase the audience and film awareness.

5. Research Methods

An in-depth interview with James Lee been conducted in this research paper. He is one of the pioneer Malaysian indie filmmakers. *K124: Zombie* which was directed by him was the first Malaysian film that had crowd backing by WEBE. It is the first feature film that was released online for free viewing. The personal thought of the film's director offered a complete picture of the project. His thoughts and opinion can provide so much more details and useful information compared to the other data collection methods.

The interview questions will be semi-constructed. The semi-constructed questions allow the researcher to cover the topics that are relevant; it also gives the interviewer more freedom to elaborate more. New ideas and topics might be discovered during the interview section and it might be useful for the finding and discussion segment later on. In The Long Interview by McCracken (1988), the Grand Tour questions are the main instrument for the interview questionnaire. One of the examples of Grand Tour questions will be like “tell me about this project”. They are non-directive questions; it will not suggest any answer to the interviewer. The researcher will only interrupt the interviewer for clarifications. The interviewer leads the interview, the researcher job is to listen and make sure the interview covered the relevant topics. The researcher will directly ask about certain area only when The Grand Tour questions do not lead the interviewer to cover the topic needed.

6. Findings

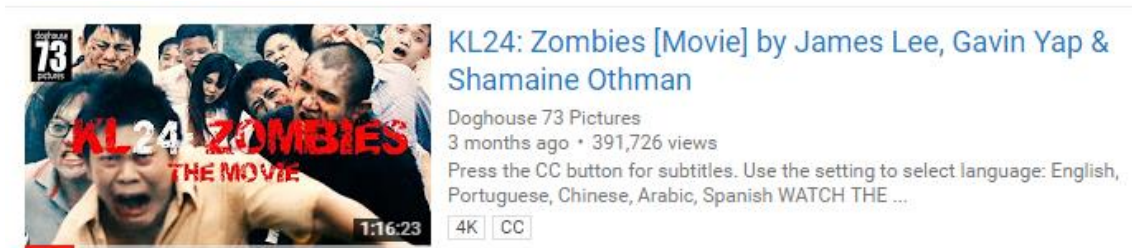


Figure 01. Screenshot from KL24: Zombie on YouTube

KL24: Zombie was first introduced by James on the WEBE website. WEBE is a Malaysian crowd backing platform for people to showcase their ideas if the project gets sufficient people support, WEBE will fully fund the particular project. James Lee knows that Malaysian cinema lack of creative story. Most of the filmmakers in Malaysia are playing it too safe, which is why Malaysian cinema cannot compete with the international scene as it lacks a universal storyline. Based on his personal experience and also from looking at the data from Finas website, the director knows that it will be close to impossible to make a profit in the traditional distribution way. Besides, it will be too expensive to release such a low budget film into Malaysia cinema as well. It is not worth the time going through all the hassle like the censorship board, marketing on the cinema chain and so on just to putting a film into Malaysian cinema. The director tried to use the minimum budget to gain back the confidence of Malaysian audience. KL24: Zombie was only given RM200, 000 by WEBE community.

6.1. Promotion on Social Media

The first milestone for the KL24: Zombie was when it successfully caught 5000 supporter's attention to support the idea on WEBE website. The director focused on what the audience wanted instead of playing it safe in the local Malaysian market. It is not easy to persuade people to support you when you only have a trailer, to begin with. Social media plays a very important role in the beginning of a project. With close to no budget for KL24: Zombie, other than family and friends, the only way to get people to support was through social media. The director only spent around RM500 on buying Facebook ads. The job did not stop after the project successfully got the support it needed. The director consistently updated the project status

through several videos. The director uses the trending Reddit “ask me anything” on YouTube to answer from the backers. Sometimes he uses Video blog (Vlog) to update the audience such as how the casting is going, what kind of makeup material, artist and etc. something worth mentioning was that the whole team were passionate about the project as well. In the YouTube channel, you can see the assistance director, actor as well as the writer promoting the project on social media. These process really helps to build up more audience. When it came closer to the premiere date, they started releasing several trailers teasing different characters on YouTube as well. It give the audiences a better understanding.

6.2. Benefit of Social Media for KL24: Zombie

Surprisingly based on the analytics on YouTube, the majority of the viewer for KL24: Zombie are from the United State. James Lee believes because of the name “Zombie” and English spoken language help attract the American audiences. Malaysian audiences being the second most and the third biggest audiences were from the Philippines. YouTube is really a great place for local filmmakers to test their strength. You might be well known in Malaysian cinema scene, but once you put your video on YouTube everything became transparent. YouTube allows you to keep track how long you manage to keep your audience attention. Which parts of the film was skipped and more. Sometime bad review is better than no review. All these information data will be very helpful for the next film. Filmmakers can get to understand more on the comment section as well bringing filmmakers and the audiences closer. The film can be on YouTube forever which mean it can be screen forever. The traditional way of releasing movie did not enjoy these privileges.

6.3. Successful examples

In late 2013, a short horror story “Lights Out” was uploaded to YouTube. Light out is a relatively short horror film. It uses classic horror techniques that will scare you afraid to turn off light. Using only dark background, a very simple storyline, and one main character (played by Lotta Losten) the director of the short story, David F. Sandber managed to capture almost more than 12 million viewers across the globe. With this huge success, the video gained more than it should by winning several awards such as the Winner of 'Best Short' at FANT Bilbao 2014 and the Winner of 'Best Director' in the 'Who's There Film Challenge'. Sandber, in his YouTube channel, said that he appreciates it so much for all the good comments and he would try his best to create more quality short story videos in the future. This magnificent news has interests the director of several box office movies “The Conjuring”, “Insidious” and “Saw”, James Wan. He contacted Sandber to collaborate with him into turning his 120 seconds video into a whole 2-hour horror movie. Three years later, a new movie trailer also titled “Lights Out” was uploaded in YouTube, but this time under the famous company Warner Bros. Pictures. The movie expanded his idea and creates an imaginary friend but the twist is that, it’s not for a child, but an adult. "I always thought it would be scarier if the parent had an invisible friend," Sandberg said on his premiere WonderCon panel. Behind the stage, Wan mentioned how he came across with the short horror story. His fellow acquaintance producer Lawrence Grey recommended him to turn the short short into a feature film. Wan was not convinced by this but later changed his mind when he met with Sandberg.

7. Conclusion

Base on the interview with James Lee and the observation about KL24: Zombie movie. It can be deduced that the internet can be the best alternative way to releasing Malaysian films. Viral marketing is a strategy based on social networks to increase awareness about a brand, product, or an event before the item is launched- basically word-of-mouth marketing, but through social media. Malaysian filmmakers should start thinking about imitating the similar process of marketing and start promoting their movies earlier. Although they might not have enough budget to produce a movie at that moment, making the public aware of their upcoming movie would grab the attention of not only the potential audiences but also potential investors that would want to invest their money in the movie. Once they have these potential audiences and investors' attention, they could resort to crowdfunding, which is an alternative way to get a movie funded.

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