A Study of Filmmakers Interaction through Social Exchange Theory

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Abstract—Film, as an art form playing a vital role and is a powerful tool in documenting, influencing and shaping the society. Films are the collective creation of a large number of separate individuals, each contributing with creative input, unique talents, and technical expertise to the project. Recently, the Malaysian Independent (or "Indie") filmmakers have made their presence felt by winning awards at various international film festivals. Working in the digital video (DV) format, a number of independent filmmakers really hit their stride with a range of remarkably strong titles and international recognition has been quick in coming and their works are now regularly in exhibition or in competition, winning many top prizes at prestigious festivals around the world. The interaction factors among crewmembers are emphasized as imperative for group success. An in-depth interview is conducted to analyze the social interactions and exchanges between filmmakers through Social Exchanges Theory (SET). Certainly the new millennium that was marked as the digital technology revolution has changed the face of filmmaking in Malaysia. There is a clear need to study the Malaysian independent cinema especially from the perspective of understanding what causes the independent filmmakers to work so well given all of the difficulties and constraints.

Keywords—Digital filmmaking; technology; interaction; crewmembers; cinema; independent filmmaker.

I. Introduction

MALAYSIAN independent cinema scene truly feels like a movement; a groups of people moving towards the same goal and vision, spawning a new breed of independent digital filmmakers and film content [8]. The main vision of these "Indie" filmmakers was not to make money, but to produce a good film that can compete in the international film festivals [39]. With the advent of and advancements in digital filmmaking, the "Indie" filmmakers have burgeoned in the latter half of this decade. Significantly, this 'movement' was a reaction towards the Malaysian film industry, a racially chauvinistic, anachronistic and shamelessly low-common-denominator entity, producing brightly lit, stereotype-heavy comedies purely for the fast-buck local multiplex crowd [42]. Most of the time these young independent filmmakers worked

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in a close-knit group, helping out each other's productions with a limited budget and mostly was self financed or by grants secured from overseas.

According to [31], mainstream commercial Malaysian cinema has over the past five years been challenged on the domestic front by the success of an increasingly large number of independent, often digital, short and feature films produced locally and seen by audiences both on the global festival circuit and by discerning cinema audiences at home. The success of independent filmmaking in recent years, is not just the cheap digital technology available to them but also the undeniable and tremendous amount of efforts of the crewmembers is the main reason which is acquired by good communication [2], [10], [39] cohesiveness [10], trust [6], [39], affective commitment, effort, friendly relationship [6], [39], sharing knowledge, idea and experience [39].

II. Digital Filmmaking Technology

A. Digital Filmmaking Technology

Utilising digital filmmaking technology, most of the independent film producers managed to reduce the production budget to a quarter of what it takes to shoot on film. Digital production also needed less personnel and equipment. Many of the independent films produced have skeletal crew that worked toward the completion of the films. These "Indie" filmmakers have done a great deal, with their limited resources, to help each other to produce internationally recognized films. The development of digital technology and the emergence of these "Indie" filmmakers have created a culturally vibrant industry. The availability of this relatively cheap digital technology has made it possible for young and aspiring filmmakers to venture into production. Most of the "Indie" films were shot using this technology [39], [8], [20], [2], [41]. Even though their budgets are much smaller than for most commercial films, independent productions face many obstacles. Filmmakers may have to finance the project themselves, with the help of relatives and friendly investors; they must also find a distributor specializing in independent and low-budget films. That being said, "Indie" filmmakers undergo alternative modes of marketing, exhibition and distribution.

The filmmakers represent the backbone of the production machine. The search for the right support group behind the camera is as important as finding the right actors to flesh out the story. In fact, the success or failure of a film project lies in their ability to collectively carry out the director and producer's vision of the script and the film. Budgets must be maintained, deadlines must be met, weather and locations are

unpredictable, and the coordination of any group of people involves unforeseeable twists and turns. We appreciate films more when we realize that in production, every film is a compromise made within constraints. The collective energy and creative input is responsible for the project being produced. The fact that these people often work together on each other's films contributes to the sense that this is a genuine community of filmmakers, not just a bunch of isolated talents. With so many talented people working so closely and sharing their knowledge among each other, it seems there's really treasure everywhere when we look at this independent group of filmmakers [8], [20], [42], [37].

III. SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY

One of the most important conceptual models for recognizing the workplace behaviour and dealing with interactions between people including behavior, affection, products, and communications from societal psychological view is Social exchange theory (SET) [7], [18]. This conceptual model has a long record of study and has been applied in a lot of disciplines, furthermore the roots of this conceptual model go back to at least the 1920s (e.g. [24], [28]). Consequently, components and processes of SET have been checked by scholars who have applied this model in many ways via a variety of constructs and labels [21], [35]. Among the different forms of exchange, there are two general forms that have attracted the most attention:

a) One form is described as more explicit, formal, carefully negotiated and contractual type of association.

b) The other form is described as a less formal, more tacit type of exchange based on significant relational connection and the norm of reciprocity [15].

These two forms are labeled as "negotiated" and "reciprocal" exchange by [35] and [11]. The main focus of this study is on the reciprocal exchange. The interaction factors of this study such as relationship and friendship, cohesiveness, sharing idea, communication and collaboration, commitment and trust are categorized as informal and implicit form of exchange among team members and cannot be totally described as formal and contractual kind of association. Therefore, the research model of this study is examined based on reciprocal exchange rather than formal exchange. The interaction factors of this research are reciprocal exchange in nature due to their informal and implicit form of exchange rather than negotiated exchange. Development and recognition of influencing significant interaction factors between crewmembers will help in achieving better outcomes in filmmaking process. According to reciprocal exchange the importance of the interaction factors among crewmembers can be indicated by justification of these factors through social exchange theory. Figure 1 shows the most significant interaction factors derived through social exchange theory.
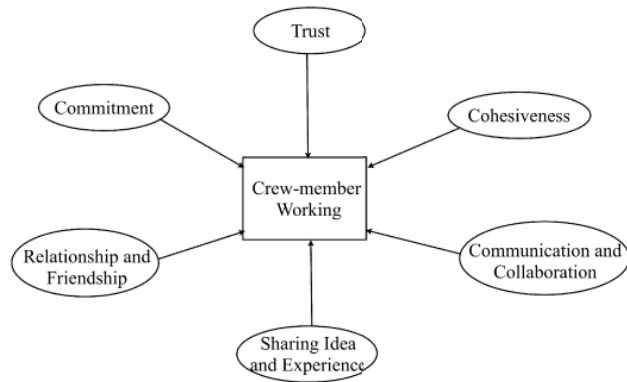

Fig. 1 Crewmembers interaction factors

IV. ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

Based on reciprocal exchange, justification of interaction factors through social exchange theory indicates the importance of interaction factors on the success of digital filmmaking in the Malaysian independent cinema. Identification and improvement of these factors lead to better results in the filmmaking process. The crewmembers provide a series of recorded interviews. The anecdotal responses have been studied and the comments organised according to:

a) Trust
b) Cohesiveness
c) Communication and Collaboration
d) Relationship and Friendship
e) Sharing Idea and Experience
f) Commitment

B. Trust

Trust plays an important role for having a better association between production team members during the project. According to [39], "Indie" films are really a test of friendship and trust. In the film industry where crew-members move between jobs very quickly, trust and relying on the coworkers has a great deal of importance [6].

According to SET, growth of relationships over time turns them into trusting obligation. Furthermore, one of the helpful relational constructs is trust [9] and it has been recognized as an identifying result of constructive social exchange [7], [17]. By having the reciprocal obligation, trust and interchange challenges spread out in organization, so members are motivated to help each other [7]. Trust echoes an enthusiasm to be accessible [29] and become apparent through the repeated useful communications among individuals. If there is a lack of mutual trust, the cooperative relations and mutual obligations are unable to succeed [46]. Additionally, [1] has stated trust as a significant influencing factor on duty. Reference [16] have found that trust enables crew-member to achieve high performance in projects, which is pursued by commitment in the relationship [46].

One of the interviewees described the role of trust between crewmembers as:

"Some of the filmmaking equipments are really expensive, and some of them may even be rented for a particular job. Therefore one should be extra cautious while working with the facilities. If some of the crewmembers are not reliable, careful enough or by any means not trustworthy, leaving the job to them or working with them may be next to impossible. Imagine if only one of the recorded tapes gets lost, it would be a disaster. Lack of trust automatically induces a great amount of stress and pressure on the key members".

On the other hand, the crewmembers should also have trust on their higher levels, as they will consider their rights, respect them and support them unconditionally, no matter what the result turned up to be. In a higher level of trust among the team members, they can perform better.

C. Cohesiveness

Filmmaking is considered as a collaborative offer and cohesiveness between crewmembers lead them to success. There should be a single coordinating sensibility that dominates the work of art, when a film is a coherent work rather than a scramble of individual gestures [10].

Reciprocal exchange involves less "enforceable" resources like recommendation and information [30] and more symbolic and particularistic resources [13]. According to [30], better and greater social exchange and developed reciprocal exchange among the team members, create a cohesiveness that enhances group performance rather than individual work. Hence, reciprocal exchange improves the cohesiveness between the members of the team and eventually increases the efficiency and performance as a whole.

Cohesiveness of one group is directly related to the performance of its crewmembers. The universal findings of cohesiveness declared that this factor is increased with success. Cohesiveness is measured by characteristics of the groups, such as openness among members of a group, the time taken to be together, tendency to be with each other, how group members influence on one another, and precise remarks in the group. Cohesion is defined as "a group property with individual manifestation of feelings of belonginess or attraction to the group" [22] p.337. Production teams with high cohesive members are more cooperative, friendly and generally behave in ways designed to promote integration. In addition, members make more attempts to reach the agreement in high cohesive groups and the sense of cohesion has positively affect on members performance in projects. Recognitions, acknowledgements and understandings are determined as the most significant factors to create a high level cohesiveness among team members.

One interviewee emphasized that:

"Members should feel the team as their second family and work location as their second home. They should understand that their work is not an individually performed task, but it is a teamwork that requires their cohesiveness in all matters and situations. The success and failure is for the entire group, not only for certain people. When there is a sense of tendency to be together and working with each other during the projects, they consider each other as members of one family that need

each other support to solve the problems; and that the solution does not come from individuals but by being together cohesively they will be successful."

D. Communication and Collaboration

Film industry is considered as an approach of communication and cultural expression determined by the structured relations of the economic and the social [2]. Having an open and free communication along with personal relationships are vital to group members [3] p. 22. In a production project, it is necessary for the group members such as; editor, cinematographer, production designer and composer to fully understand the intentions of the director, which will only takes place under a good communication schema, to avoid misunderstanding [10].

One composer as a crewmember explained that:

"I always try to compose the music in a way that the director would do so, if he wanted to be the composer. I feel that collaboration with the director is indispensable; working with the director, discussions regarding the style of the music and the development of ideas proceed step by step with the shooting of the film".

All of these processes need the healthy communication to understand each other's intentions [25] p. 199–200. Communication is a critical and important component of the production projects. Having a frequent communication among crewmembers, tend them to share more knowledge than those who communicate less [40]. Communication and collaboration between individuals can settle some of the problems and issues; in addition, they can make their deals, express their feelings and resolve the existing conflicts. Shared information, collaboration and communication of implicit knowledge are identified as critical parts of socialisation procedure, which have high impact on crewmembers performance [26].

According to SET, through repeated communications, collaborative interactions will grow, construct, debase, and fade as a result of an open social exchange and arrangement process and action, which may be accepted as an exchanging of material or intellectual awards between the parties [7], [17]. In the relationships, which are built based on reciprocation, individuals will benefit each other as long as the exchange and association are fair between them. Having good relationship and collaboration among team members will result in high performance. Also, the units of exchange are significant to respective parties, which enhance the communication between individuals.

One interviewee quoted:

Collaboration and communication are crucial for crewmembers and it is the backbone for every filming crew. It is the good communication in the team that avoids misunderstandings and therefore apprehending the wrong ideas. Good communication and collaboration is a level in which, everyone in the group understands his/her duties, according to the schedule. They are not afraid to express their creative new ideas and solutions. There should be a "question and answer" process that provides a suitable situation for discussion. The talking should not be like a one-way road that

only certain main people speak and others obey unconditionally. Two-way discussion can lead to making better decisions. The result of good communication and collaboration is that nothing will be missed, in addition to a lot of time and budget that is saved, and finally everyone in the team knows precisely what the director wants. From the good communication and collaboration, so many other factors will be exploited such as; trust, friendship, commitment and so on and so forth."

E. Relationship and Friendship

Crewmembers stated that having a good working relationship is the most important factor for them to work with each other repeatedly [6]. Previous researches show that good relationship is one of the influencing factors to achieve better results [21]. Knowledge cannot be managed by technology itself in the company. Creative tasks, relationship between crewmembers are more valuable and will grow by using that technology. The importance of cultivation and recognition of creativity, expertise and knowledge of young independent filmmakers has been emphasized by the chairman of Perbadanan Kemajuan Filem National Malaysia (FINAS) [4].

As stated in SET, reciprocal exchange includes informal and tacit type of association based on significant relational connection and the norm of reciprocity, also it is more based on particularistic resources like friendship and emotional support [12], [35]. The most attention of social exchange theory studies has been the notion of workplace relationships [43], [44]. In fact, relationship is an affiliation between two interaction parties. Individuals are potential to match goodwill and kindness toward the person whom they have social exchange relationship with, as they usually return the benefits they receive throughout the friendly relationship [27]. According to social exchange theory, individuals make their social decisions on perceived benefits and costs. It also declares that individuals determine the advantages they gain from the social communications through evaluation of all relationships. Moreover, if people feel that the cost, or effort, of a relationship outbalances any achieved benefits, they usually leave it. Hence, better results will be achieved, if crewmembers have friendly relationship with each other during projects. They could gain better results by creating a suitable environment from their kindness and hospitable relationships.

One interviewee explained about the relationship among team members as:

"Crewmembers should rely on each other, as in a warm relationship condition, they can work better together. Writing a contract does not guarantee a great teamwork or to achieve good results but warm relationship and friendship between crewmembers can lead to a great team relationship and collaboration. By good relationship, they can understand each other better; and also help each other in special situations. Producers and directors should try to break the ice in the team by joking with members or chit-chat during intervals in order to provide a friendly situation and maintain a nice relationship among them. It is because of these relationship

and friendship that usually most of the crewmembers would prefer to continiously work together in a fixed group."

F. Sharing Idea and Experience

Film industry plays a key role in scattering 'ideas' in society as a part of the larger capitalist economic and cultural enterprise, despite of whose ideas they are and how they can effect people. The Malaysian independent filmmaking industry is part of the superstructure of society, by perceiving the structure of this industry it will be possible to develop a link between society system and this industry [2]. Firstly, these ideas are born and created between the production team members and after exchanging and sharing the ideas, they are transferred to societies through films. During the film production, working with and meeting a large scope of individuals of all types of background are inevitable, this cannot be done without interaction with others. Sharing idea and experience are needed because they become exhausted after a while, they should interact with people and exchange opinions in order to keep them on the feet. The experienced crewmembers found that their continuous sharing ideas and experiences are much needed in the filmmaking industry [39]. Some of the people are using their expertise, talent and passion, which they have gained over the years in their fields of works on the production projects and they have no academic background. On the other hand, there are academic and well educated people who have a good academic reputation such as authors, directors, creative people and technical people. Combination of these two groups of people make a very challenging and interesting environment, there are arguments over different issues, agreements and disagreements and people interact with each other actively and share their knowledge and they also barter opinions and views in effective ways [39].

Based on SET, due to mutual commitment, team members show their integrity constantly while they are in an exchange and interaction relationship [7], [46]. When exchange relationship is constructed, there will be more helping hands and mutual goals, in addition, knowledge and information are shared by different individuals in the team and better interchanges will be built continuously. In the collaborative relationship, exchanging ideas lead to better knowledge sharing between team members and improvement of their performance [46].

One interviewee stated that:

"The best way to solve the problems during shootings is sharing ideas and experiences. The idea can come from absolutely anyone; plus all ideas are welcome, even the "stupid ideas", may come useful as they might trigger a new idea or thought in someone else. I always tell to my crewmembers not to be afraid of sharing and expressing your thoughts with me even when you think that it might sound like a stupid idea, as the stupidity in that may trigger something new in my mind. If you do not encourage sharing ideas and experiences among crewmembers, for instance in an emergency conditions or when a difficult problem is raised, they may not be eager to share their experience with you to

solve that problem, therefore you will be forced to put off the take which obviously puts you behind by messing up the schedule and of course it may cost tremendous amount of financial loss".

G. Commitment

The concept of commitment can be mentioned as one of the most important factors in examining the relationship among members and organizations [34]. According to [33], commitment is defined as a social exchange of behavior to gain benefits that will be admired and appreciated by others. Findings show that projects with committed members achieve exclusive results [5], [23]. Organizational commitments play an important role in those jobs, which are more complex in nature and require adaptability [14]. Also, because of having very important details in filmmaking, the level of complexity will automatically increase; so the team members should have a high level of commitment and obligation.

Relationships evolve over time into faithful and reciprocal commitments and this feature is stated as one of the basic principles of social exchange theory. The results from previous studies indicate that team members who have a strong willingness toward building relationships with others, have more propensities to return a good endeavor than those who have a low willingness toward association with others. According to [46] and [7], group members would repeatedly represent their trustworthiness due to mutual commitment during the exchange relationships. Findings show that projects with committed members achieve better results in contrast with those projects with less committed members.

One interviewee mentioned:

"There will be times that the timing or schedule becomes so tight that you should be going to have to ask the crew to make sacrifices to be present at the location for shooting. These are the times that without commitment and devotion, the whole project may become compromised. Commitment does not only come from the contract, but it usually comes from the member's passion towards the work. When you love your job, you will be committed to it unknowingly".

V. CONCLUSION

This study presented and validated a multi-facet model for Malaysian independent filmmaking industry to help in understanding the interaction factors among crewmembers that contributes to the success of a film project. Factors discovered from previous studies are analyzed through Social Exchange Theory (SET) and finally a model is put together based on the research.

The result of this study can help film production to achieve better results by considering the interactions factors based on SET. Findings from interviews show that interaction factors such as; trust, communication and collaboration, relationship and friendship, commitment, sharing idea and experience and cohesiveness among crewmembers have significant influence on the success of a film project.

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