Animation: Medium and Practice in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Animation has been a part of modern human life, and often become a media representation of a person, feelings, emotion, images, sound, lights, even political statements. Modern people like to see how this medium represents themselves, but they have limited access to understanding the complexity of animation production. The investigation begins with describing animation practice in the world in a glimpse through a historical perspective. The article describes how animation has been used as a versatile medium in representing humans on screen globally, how animation production takes place, and what makes it complicated and raises the budget. Data Literature is used to gather and incorporate data history about how animation was used to represent humans and ideas on screen from time to time. The article also tries to describe and analyze how the animation medium was introduced in Indonesia during the colonial era, and how animation practices in Indonesia during the Reformation era. Forum group discussion and interviews with animator practitioners, studio owners, animation artists, production houses, and government decision-makers were also conducted to gain more data about how disinformation about animation production's budget makes the ineffective realization of the project. The result is a description and explanation of Indonesia's animation medium and practices and its complexity in the production process.

Keywords: animation, medium, practice, Indonesia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Animation, or what Bancroft [1] refers to as 'moving images,' has been a part of modern human life. When screen technology was invented, people need to represent themselves to appear on the screen. Nowadays, animation often becomes a media representation of a person, feelings, emotion, images, sound, lights, even political statements. We can see these representations on-screen through gifs, gif stickers, animated visual effects, moving text, short animated, animated feature-length, and even animated concerts. Animation or moving image medium is often chosen as a medium of representation due to its effectivity in representing everything that the live-action medium cannot.

Nowadays, modern people see animation as an all-purpose medium representation. They would love to see their face-even their feelings are represented by animated gif or avatar in a game. People 'create' their representative through some applications that combine some provided assets to build up a surrogate representing them in the way they would like to be seen. The same thing happens when they watch animated films, animated commercials, or visual effects on screen, and people

think that it is 'normal' that a snowman can talk and move, a basket of fruits can burst into color, representing flavors or sound and feelings or impression can be visualized through a dash of color, images that move.

A developer who creates animation or moving images needs to prepare a set of images (it is called assets) and use tools, either CGI or mechanical, to make those images are seen moving on the screen [2]. Back in those days, those sets of images—assets—are produced one by one, so it means an animator will need to draw those images one by one until they are seen moving. When CGI was born, it automated some processes, but it never automates all the processes completely. With or without CGI, the animation is still required complicated skills in art, technology, and management to deliver the desired moving images, and when it comes to the production process, these lead to the budget needs [3]. Nowadays, animation represents many things on the screen, and people use this medium widely, but artistic production areas are still not completely understood by many people.

In Indonesia, where animation practice in this country is developing, things are even more complicated. The rise of the internet of things has made people accustomed to the animation medium. People are familiar with animations representing ideas, persons, and even it is used in presenting experiences on their gadgets' screens. As they are becoming a lot familiar with animation, the process's complexity is often kept unacquainted. Most people who are not aware of animation production complexity might be surprised, knowing the budget for an animated short of six minutes duration can consume up to hundreds of million IDR, and it will consume weeks to months of work in the production process.

2. METHOD

This article investigates how the animation medium and its practices in Indonesia. The investigation begins with describing animation practice in the world in a glimpse through a historical perspective. The article describes how animation has been used as a versatile medium in representing humans on screen globally, how animation production takes place, and what makes it complicated and raises the budget. Literature from Giannalberto Bendazzi is used to gather and incorporate data history about how animation was used to represent humans and ideas on screen from time to time. When talking about animation histories worldwide, two sources of animation literature are usually mentioned; from Giannalberto Bendazzi and the other is Maureen Furniss. Bendazzi emphasized his works based on descriptions of animation movies that were produced over the world.

In comparison, Furniss emphasized how some animated films worldwide construct social issues, using animated film samples mostly from America, Europe, and Japan, which are advanced in the animation industry's development. In this article, we used literature from Bendazzi since he includes animation development in the third world countries like Southeast Asia countries; Indonesia is one of them. The article also tries to analyze and add up Bendazzi's description of how the animation medium was introduced in Indonesia during the colonial era, and how animation practices in Indonesia during the Reformation era. The data is extracted from interviews and literature about animation practice; how animation studios grow and differ in various mediums and techniques, and how it may affect the production pipeline and budget. Forum group discussion and interviews with three animation practitioners, an animation studio owner, an animation artist, a production house, and several representatives from AINAKI (Indonesian Animation Association) were also conducted to gain more data about how disinformation about animation production's budget makes the ineffective realization of the project. The result is a description and explanation of Indonesia's animation medium and practices and its complexity in the production process.

3. GLOBAL ANIMATION MEDIUM AND PRACTICE IN A GLIMPSE

Giżycki [4] stated that television channels' growth impacted on animation growth since more channels meant more content was needed. Many animated film series was made to fulfill the television channels' need for content. As more screen platforms were developed nowadays, computer websites, smartphones, smartwatches, tablets, LED Screens, and many more have made animations, an irreplaceable part of modern life. It might be in the form of animated films and commercials on TV, websites design we see through our computers and laptops, even in the form of gifs people share on chatting platforms on smartphones. Through screens, animation has been used to represent people's responses, reactions, emotions, feelings, and ideas. In the form of visual effects in a line text of a website or commercials, animation has been used to highlight some impressions, to enhance visuals, or represent product concepts.

The animation has become more accessible these days, and its accessibility also brings more exposure to animation practitioners. According to Giżycki, nowadays, animation software is replacing expensive cameras and frame by frame drawing process. Frame by frame drawing process—is known as traditional animation—cost more and was too labor-oriented. He also mentioned how the growth of animation platforms democratized the animation production budget, which was very high in the old times. However, even though the animation production budget has become more affordable these days, generating and animating a series of images using technology is still complex, yet the cost is considered exorbitant for those who are unclear about animation production.

Another issue regarding the complexity of animation production is of artistic value. For many products, technology helps to make the production process more effective and efficient in terms of quantity and quality. The software helps automate cleaning, duplicating, and rendering images in the artistic context, but not in creation. The process of creation requires an artistic vision, which cannot be replaced by technology. Also, in animation, the process of creation does not stop when the objects are created. The objects are assets which have to be animated, or to 'bring it to life'; the phase of bringing life to a 'dead object' [5]. The animation artists need to bring the objects to life by creating the movements and let the objects interacting with the surrounding situations. This process makes animation still considered a complexity. Even though software technology has made the process more straightforward, it cannot replace the human artistic value in the whole process.

Since artistic languages are changing from time to time, the form, style, and purpose of the animation change from time to time. Bendazzi [6] wrote about how

animation films were produced in many countries. What constructed the animated film can be based on the situation, story, and visual preferences. However, Bendazzi also wrote how other factors such as technology and other situations in the intern studio, such as budget, team composition, time frame project, political and economic situation, can also affect the animation film's form and style decision. For example, during wartime, some animated shorts were produced to serve as war propaganda films, such as Education for Death (1942), Tokio Jokio (1943), Donald Duck's Der Fuehrer's Face (1943), and Donald's Decision (1942), Daffy Duck's Scrap Happy Duffy (1943). Evil Mickey Attacks Japan (1936), when Mickey Mouse, a lovable Disney character, was turned into evil in the Japanese anime propaganda film. Some other animated shorts were made to protest the cold-war, like an anti-war film, Neighbours by Norman McLaren (1952).

When the wartime was over, animated films were produced to meet various needs of the era in the shape of television channels, cinemas, festivals, even commercials. Animation that served for content for television channels, cinemas, and festivals might bring different issues and contents, depend on the targeted audiences. In 1960-1970, the end of the war period has made America experienced economic growth, contributing to the increasing demand for consumer goods and commercialisms. This leads animation to serve capitalism in the form of product commercials. In product commercials, the animation was utilized to enhance the commercialized product's concept to persuade audiences to buy. For example, in a detergent commercial, animation enhances the detergent's clean effect by visualizing white radiance light all over the hanging laundries.

Computer and screen technology was more advanced in the 1980s. It revolutionized the animation technique to be more automated and computerized. As the animation medium became more popular, the needs of representing lives on-screen using animation were increasing. The success of the computer-animated feature film Toy Story in 1995 became a new reference on how a CGI created an alternate universe of life representation. At the end of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st century, display technology took over how the information is conveyed. Computer animation has created life representation and a whole new reality.)

4. ANIMATION MEDIUM AND PRACTICE IN INDONESIA

In his book, Bendazzi [7] explained how animation was developed in Japan and India as part of the Asian animation discussion. He also wrote briefly about the development of animation in Indonesia in the period of 1945-2003. To add up Bendazzi's description, in the

Dutch East Indies (Indonesia's name during colonialization), people started to acknowledge the animation medium in the 1930s. At that time, animated film commercials were printed in the newspaper. When the films were to be screened at the cinema in the next few days, the newspapers will post a commercial about the film. Animation medium was also introduced during Japan occupation, but if we talk about the production of animated films in Indonesia, it started long afterward after independence.

During Japan occupation (1942-1945) in Indonesia, some propaganda films were made to broadcast about Japan's pseudo-victory over Asia Pacific War. Some propaganda films were also made for inlanders as Japanization doctrine. Even though most films were made live-action, a film archived by Pusbangfilm (Indonesian Center of Film Development) with a simple animation as an opening. The film informed us how to cultivate tilapia fish to raise food sustainability "Moedjaer Teman Kita." The animation was so simple, a cartoon hand-drawn tilapia that was animated using a very simple motion graphic technique with very simple key-frames and gestures to create motion. Other characters, humans, and animals, then appeared surrounding the tilapia as if they celebrate the tilapia as their friend. The rest of the film was then being shot as live-action.

Archiving historical materials are still a big problem in Indonesia, regarding human resources and the methods itself. There is not enough data about the production process of the films made in the colonial era. Data interpretation becomes an important method to try to comprehend the works of the past. The animation has appeared in the film's first duration due to the film's subject was meant to inform those with lower education levels. The simplicity of the animation medium makes the message is much easier to comprehend, that the tilapia fish is a friendly source of food, so people need to cultivate it to sustain the food storage. The use of animation in the film was to retain lower level attention. The animation medium was not used completely in the whole film duration.

After Indonesian independence was declared, in the early 1950's the effort to create an Indonesian animation ecosystem was conducted by sending an Indonesian artist to be an internship in Disney's studio. Soekarno, the former president, realized the power of animation to convey a message. After the artist returned, the first animated film project was aimed as an educational and guidelines message for Indonesians' first public election in 1955. During the ups and downs of the political turmoil in 1960-1970 and the transition of the government from Old Order to New Order, Indonesian animation developed its style and skills through some local artists. Those local artists were sent for an internship at some animation studios overseas. When they were back from overseas, they then established some animation studios in

Indonesia and worked on some local content animation series or shorts.

Most animation studios in Indonesia served commercials to survive during the New Order era. In the Reformation era at the beginning of the 21st century, some animation studios started to create some Intellectual Properties, while most of their income was still from commercials or subcontractors for other overseas animation studios. In this era, the animation industry had more opportunity to grow. In 2011, the government established a creative economy board as part of the Ministry of Tourism. The government also opened more opportunities for the creative industry—which animation industry was included. The opportunity that was offered, was to obtain support from the government in financial support, project support, industry channels support, and others. About twenty years after the Reformation was initiated, Intellectual Properties and the support from the government is still a complicated problem in Indonesia.

Through many limitations, Indonesia's animation industry is developing and serves many needs. Old Order government treated the animation medium as a propaganda medium, just like Japan introduced it during its occupancy. The medium was used for propaganda of national election, as the Indonesian Old Order government might see animation as a suitable medium for government propaganda since the visual can be shaped to be understood by most people regardless of their level of education.

The changing of the political climate had brought the animation industry in Indonesia to a different path, and again it proved its versatility and resilience. In the New Order era, most of the animation studios served commercials works for survival. Most commercial works are short and combined with other mediums such as live-action, so animation works were not that complex and not that expensive. On the other side, commercials need an exaggeration aspect, which is familiar in animation to retain the viewer's attention and create an impression at the same time.

When the New Order collapsed, Reformation democratized all opportunities, including the animation industry. The Reformation created more possibilities for any ideas and opportunities, and it happened concurrently with the internet revolution at the beginning of the 21st century. With more open government and open-access information, and more democratizing technology, many animation studios attempted to create more possibilities using animation as a versatile medium. Commercials, animation shorts, animated stickers, and animated feature-length represent many ideas, even the ideas that have been considered banned or taboo in the New Order era.

One of the biggest challenges the animation studios are trying to create is their Intellectual Properties animated feature lengths and or animated series. Animation, once again, has a promising future in this era since the industry climate became more democratic as the government opened more opportunities to the creative-based industry's funding. With the bigger opportunity offered, it is expected that the animation industry in Indonesia can bring the challenge they are trying to actualize. Up to now, the IP creation in some animation studios is still ongoing)

5. THE CHALLENGE OF ANIMATION MEDIUM AND PRACTICE IN INDONESIA – A PROPOSED POINT OF VIEW

Bendazzi [7] wrote lengthy paragraphs about animation development in some countries like European countries, America, and Japan in Asia. He extensively described how the animation artists in those countries built and developed their animation style due to the needs of the issue taken, the context of the era, and the development of the industry in terms of production capability. For example, he noted how the story and characters of Toy Story I were made, and why was the human characters were only shot up to chest level.

Bendazzi also wrote about the development of animation in other countries where the animation industry was still emerging. For Indonesia, he wrote a brief explanation about how the animation industry was developed in the post-independence era to the Reformation era. Those brief explanations gave the assumption that the Indonesian animation industry played a trivial role in the whole picture of the world's animation. If we look further, MDec's animation report described that many animation studios in Indonesia grow as subcontractors to other big projects. That means the industry of animation in Indonesia is growing.

The urge to develop the animation industry in Indonesia is significantly relevant to the animation world industry. With the expansion of the animation industry in the 21st century, Southeast Asia becomes a promising region for subcontract from bigger studios (MDec, in Southeast Asia Animation Report: The Regional Digital Content Landscape 2018) [8]. Some Indonesian animation studios serve as a subcontract for foreign animation studios. For example, Infinite Studios and Brown Bag Film Bali. Subcontracting enables the local studio to maintain the cash flow while learning to be more professional in managing the project and delivering the result on time with promised quality. While many studios become subcontractors for bigger animation studios worldwide, they also struggle to create Intellectual Properties based on their animation products.

The project of building an IP is different from the subcontract project. In subcontract, the studio works for bigger studios as a part of a larger project. Working on IP

means a studio works for its project. A studio will take a bigger risk once they work on their IP since it requires self-support funding with no guarantee of benefit. IP is very useful for the studio to create a distinctive product stand out from another, but the development usually takes long and needs special skills in market research, concept, and storytelling. Creating and having a successful IP is a dream for many animation studios, but the development is risky to their cash flow if they do not have enough resources.

The government's policy plays an important role in determining how the animation industry is developing. In the Reformation era, the Indonesian government opened up funding opportunities in the animation industries. Unfortunately, this has not been applied completely, considering that the animation industry's funding system can be complex and unique. It happens first because most people are not well-informed about the budget in animation production can be very expensive. Second, there is no exact formula and pipeline for every animation project.

The animation is an interesting medium people would love to use for their projects or promotions, but the budget in producing animation has never been that simple. The frame per second durations, the whole durations, the mediums, and the weeks and months working, make animation medium-cost varies. Most people are never being informed well about the animation process's complexity, so the price for an animation project might surprise them.

People might be questioning why is an animation project can be that expensive. One of the fifth-semester animation students' tasks in preparing their final project is calculating their future final project. What was included in the component they were trying to calculate were: hardware and software, electricity and internet, and working hours. The result is that students were surprised when they see the numbers. Animated short films with 3-5 minutes duration can cost a hundred million IDR with the largest cost proportion in the working hour. It shows that animation is the work of artists where technology can only help to automate the process.

Many people are still not aware of the high cost of an animation project, and when it comes to government support, it becomes more complicated. Even though the government has provided some channels to support the Indonesian animation industry, the government's allocated fund is often too small for a prompt result. The unawareness of the production cost has caused the funding allocation to go ineffective.

As the animation medium became one factor determining the rest of the project, animation studios in Indonesia started to focus on a certain medium: motion graphic, 2D animation, 3D animation, or stop motion. Big animation studios like Infinite Studios, Brown Bag

Film Bali, grow its specialty in 3D Animation. Meanwhile, Kumata in Bandung is focused on 2D Animation, and Lanting Studios is an example of animation studio that works on stop motion medium. Most animation studios formerly specialized in commercials now still work on motion graphics, like Shark Animation and Manimonki Animation. Even though not all studios try to be specialized in a certain medium, the medium's differences define the looks and the pipeline of the project. For every project, an animation studio should spend lots of time designing the pipeline, timeline, working composition and artists, budget, and looks, making the pre-production process take time and effort to plan. Somehow the pre-production process in the animation process might take years to prepare, especially feature-length films)

6. CONCLUSION

As animation often becomes a media representation of modern human life in many countries, things are different in Indonesia, and it is still ongoing. So far, what we know about animation medium and practice in Indonesia, it might not be about a medium representation of life yet. Animation practice in Indonesia is about a continuous effort from its practitioners to stay relevant in the complexity of the medium that only plenty of people would give attention to. Somehow it is developing another form of history, as the growth of the animation medium and practice in Indonesia is expanding recently, mostly in the industrial sector.

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