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Comedy Films as Social Representation in the Society: An Analysis of Indonesian Comedy Films

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Abstract

This research sees comedy film being mostly produced in Indonesia and an important part in Indonesia's cinema history. From the viewpoint of cinema practitioners, comedy film is one of the main chosen film for producers due to potential profitable, and low budget costs in the movie production. The analysis will focus on narrative elements of each film's synopsis in order to see the categorization of main themes in all comedy films in Indonesia.

The research used content analysis and textual analysis methods to comprehend the genres of comedy film in Indonesia per era. The results showed that the type of verbal comedy is the most comedy film emerged and produced in Indonesia. There are 241 film titles or 46% in the period of 1950-2017. It can be concluded that the category of verbal comedy becomes social representation of a society in Indonesia where physical, sexual satire degrading others become potential joke in public daily life. And, the type of verbal comedy dominates in each era in Indonesian cinema development.

Keywords: film, comedy genre, narrative, social representation, Indonesia.

1. Introduction: Comedy film can become one of the most popular film genres (Georgakopoulou, 2000; Vandaele, 2002) Comedy film is able to reveal public values and taste. Within the film genre, it contains situations exaggerated through actions, language and characters. Through the film genre, we can see clearly anxiety and fear in society in each era (Colman, 2014). It is definitely possible that what we can be laughed at in certain era does not prevail in other eras.

The development direction of Indonesia's film genres is shown from the categorization conducted by the film portal (filmindonesia.or.id). There are 14 main genres in Indonesian cinema development. These genres include action, drama, horror, war, children, fantasy, legend, adventure, comedy, mystic, teenager, musical, thriller and animation. Moreover, total number of the three biggest recorded entries is under domination of drama film genre

with 1798 film entries, and comedy film of 601 film entries and 388 entries of action film (<http://filmindonesia.or.id/movie>).

As one of the film genres produced mostly in Indonesia, comedy film has become an important part in Indonesian cinema history. Furthermore, the journey of Indonesian cinema has ever born character or a group of comedic role that has ever graced Indonesia's wide screen. From each main character in Indonesian comedy film, these are attached to various themes and approaches of comedy stories. According to Allen & Smith (1997) the approaches of comedy story can be divided into 5 (five) main categories, i.e. (1) slapstick, (2) deadpan, (3) verbal comedy, (4) screwball dan (5) black or dark comedy.

When analyzing the cinema history in this country, Indonesia's cinema development and progress can not totally depend on cinema practitioners. Various elements should be able to contribute according to each capacity and skills. These include the support of the government, audience, public in general as well as academicians. For academicians, particularly from communication perspectives, film can be analyzed from various approaches and methods. However, as a basic study, it requires an organized mapping effort of films having been produced by Indonesia's moviemakers. From the mapping results, it can be used for other studies primarily intended for Indonesian cinema development.

The effort of mapping Indonesia's films can be carried out through textual analysis method and it bases on elements contained in the films. According to Bazin (2004), elements in film consist of two things, i.e. narrative elements and cinematography. Cinematography elements are all aspects of narrative or theme and storyline contained in each film. These are technical elements that can be seen in the film visualization.

This mapping is important to give a detailed overview on the development direction of film genres dominating since the early awakening of the cinema industry in Indonesia. The mapping results can be also valuable data and input for researchers and academicians intended to analyze Indonesian cinemay industry and its development deeply as well as for practitioners in producing and marketing their films in future.

Concerning the background, the researchers will analyze by mapping films in Indonesia particularly the comedy genre that has emerged in the period of 1950-2017. More specifically the mapping will be carried out through content and textual analysis methods towards narrative elements in each film.

2. Conceptual Framework of the Study:

The Genre of Comedy Film: Comedy films are films that are deliberately produced to make audience laugh (Colman, 2014). Comedy is a light drama produced to entertain and provoke joke enjoyment. In general, it exaggerates situation, language, acting and characters (Allen & Smith, 1997). It can decrease any weakness, our self-frustration and momentary escape from our daily life. Comedy films usually have happy endings despite humorous elements have a serious or pessimistic side (McIntosh, Murray, Murray, & Manian, 2003).

Comedy films have two common formats: (1) comedy directed by comedians through jokes and sketches; and (2) situation comedy presented through the narrative concept. Both comedy elements can appear together or overlap. A comedy hybrid is usually played together with other main genres, such as music-comedy, horror-comedy, and comedy-thriller. Comedy has also been classified into a variety of subgenres, including; crime comedy, romantic comedy, comedy, sports comedy, adult comedy, social class comedy and dirty comedy (Ulea, 2002).

According to some viewpoints (Krutnik & Neale, 2006; Ulea, 2002; Vandaele, 2002), there are some types or forms of comedy films, among others:

1. **Slapstick:** Slapstick is a type of comedy film that does not need sound. It is a term taken from the analogy of clowns slapping each other to make audience applauding and laughing. Slapstick is primitive and universal comedy packed with the style of aggressive and physical acts including violent scenes, crude play and joke with vulgar vision (for example, throwing a cake to face, crumbling house, falling into the sea, missing pants, slapping each other). In packaging slapstick, it needs a long time to get good results. Slapstick began to flourish in comedy around 1930s, and it was dominant in the early era of the silent film.
 2. **Deadpan:** Deadpan is a type of comedy presented through immovable facial expression. This is shown in facial expression like a hero in a comic story. Therefore, the facial expression makes audience entertained.
 3. **Verbal Comedy:** Verbal comedy is a type of classic comedy. Some characteristics of this comedy include verbal intelligence, physical and sexual innuendo or verbal absurdity in the film dialogue. The actors will humble themselves to provoke the audience to laugh.
 4. **Screwball:** Screwball comedy film is one of the most popular and long lasting film genre. Screwball is a type of comedy showing madness, eccentricity, silliness, and erratic behavior. The comedy film tends to be generally light and romantic story. It usually focuses on conflict between two protagonists who try to outwit or outrank one another. It also has the visual joke elements (with some slapstick), strange characters, identity reversal (or cross-dressing), wise dialogue and one sentence which reflects the sexual tension and conflicts of continuously attractive relationships between two persons falling in love.
 5. **Black or Dark Comedy:** The type of dark comedy contains humorous stories with sarcastic and cynicism elements that lifting forgotten or less popular stories. The comedy is the combination of a comedy that accentuates dark side packaged with the comedy concept.
- 3. Social Reality in Media:** In relation to the representation of social reality in media, at first it comes from McQuail (1992). According to McQuail (1992), media is believed as mirror to reflect social reality so that what we see in media is a factual description of reality. However, in present it is believed that media do not only reflect reality but also it is believed that media represent reality. Social reality is presented again in media through the representation process by processing again the

reality so that it presents in new packaging, and so it becomes media reality. Therefore, mass media have made construction to reality (Gauntlett, 2008).

According to Widyaningrum (2014), media has important role in influencing a society's mindset. Media frequently only admit the dominant ideology so that what is displayed is usually a mainstream thing. Bryant and Miron (2004) state that the concept of truth held by mass media is not a real truth but something considered in a society as a truth. Media also give priority to those from middle and high class and excluding minority group. Moreover, minority group is frequently presented "incorrect" in media. It also means that identity that media represent is still only the dominant identity (Mulyana, 2017). So, it is not surprising if it emerges second reality as the results of media construction and processing to social reality. Second reality is meant as result of constructing reality models made in media. In this matter, after reconstructing the complicated reality, media process and select the reality. Moreover, it becomes a series of second reality inside the media. The second reality in media presents in the form of symbolic language presented in signs and symbols. In this matter, media uses certain signs to construct reality (Morissan, 2016). Empirical reality is constructed to be symbolic reality and this matter it means that it becomes a media reality.

4. Methodology: This research uses quantitative and qualitative approach. Content analysis is used in the quantitative approach to explain, summarize various conditions, situations or variables emerged in society. Moreover, it raises to surface of characters and description on condition, situation or variables Bungin (2005).

According to Prior (2001), content analysis studies message content systematically. The study identifies and calculates keywords, terms, and message themes to interpret what is stated, how say it, changes in appeal and motives underlying the message. On the other hand, Krippendorff (2012) states that content analysis is a research method to describe manifest communication content in objective and systematic way.

Meanwhile, in this research the textual analysis with the qualitative approach is used to analyze the synopsis of Indonesian comedy film stories. According to Wodak & Fairclough (2013), the textual analysis sees utterance and writing as the form of social practices. Social practices showing the ideological effect, means that it can produce relationship between social classes represented in the social position presented.

Analysis Unit: Analysis unit in this research is the synopsis of Indonesian comedy film in the period of 1951-2017, and total number reaches 601 films coming from the Indonesian film website, i.e. <http://filmindonesia.or.id>, accessed until period December 2017.

Definition of Concepts and Operationalization of Categorization:

Definition of Concepts:

- a. **Comedy Film:** Comedy films are films that are deliberately produced to make viewers laughing. Comedy is a light drama made to entertain and provoke joke enjoyment. The type of comedy film generally exaggerates situation, language, acting

and characters. The comedy film bases on its narrative elements directed to five main types, i.e. slapstick, deadpan, verbal comedy, screwball and black or dark comedy.

- b. Narrative Elements in Film:** Narrative elements in film include, i.e.: (1) story and plot, i.e. all series of events presented in visual and audio form, (2) narrative relationship to space, i.e. place where film story goes on; (3) the limitation of story information, i.e. limiting story information based on number of characters emerging, (4) main narrative elements consisting of story actors, problems and conflicts as well as aims, (5) the pattern of narrative structure, i.e. beginning, middle and end, (6) the three-plot structure, i.e. preparation, confrontation, resolution, and (7) the three-plot alternative structure, i.e. multi-plot, realistic narrative and non-linear pattern.

Operationalization of Categorization

Concepts	Variables	Indicators	Categories
Narrative Elements in Film	1. Story and Plot	The stories of narrative	1. Slapstick 2. Deadpan 3. Verbal comedy 4. Screwball 5. Black or dark comedy.
	2. Narrative relationship in film	Setting	
	3. Limitation of story information	Number of main characters that appear	
	4. Narrative elements	1. Character 2. Problems and conflicts 3. Aims	

Reliability Test: Before used in this research, the categories should be tested at first. The category testing is intended to know whether the categories that will be used are reliable or not. If results of the categorical testing indicate reliable, the categories are reliable to be used in this research (Bungin, 2005).

To avoid coding bias and keep having credibility and objectivity, the researcher gets help from 2 staff doing the coding and they are called the coder I and II. The coding results from the coder I and II will pass the reliability test of the coding that the researcher has made. The statistical reliability test is used to know error in measurement, and the purpose to get assistance from the two coders is to get agreement or the joint aims so that it is expected to have input with high reliability. Reliability means that it can be trustworthiness. A tool of measurement is stated to have reliability when similar researcher or others use it many times and the results will be same (Rakhmat, 2007).

The method applied in this research is to use the method (Holsti, 1969) with his formula as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{CR} &= \frac{2M}{N1+N2} \times 100\% \\ &= \frac{2(51)60+60}{528+528} \times 100\% \\ &= \frac{102}{110} \times 100\% \\ &= 0,85 \times 100\% \\ &= 85\% \end{aligned}$$

Note :

CR : Coefficient Reliability

M : Total statements approved by the coders.

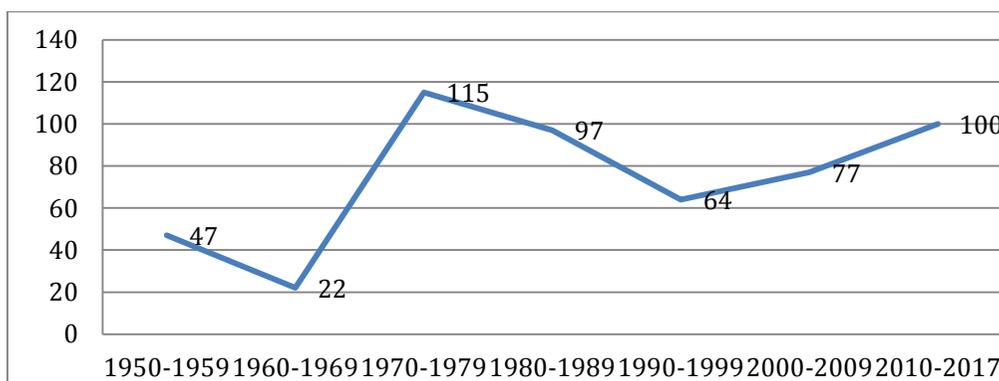
N1, N2 : Total statements having been codes by the coders

Departing from the statistical test, it can be known the agreement of juries, the agreement value considered reliable. According to Riff, Lacy, & Fico (2014) they states that 70%-80% of the approved agreement between juries is reliable enough. Meanwhile, according to Wimmer & Dominick (2013) the agreement between the coders of 75% has been reliable.

5. Results and Discussion: Comedy films are films that are deliberately produced to make viewers laugh. The films differ from joke because if those who play in the joke are usually comedian, actors of the comedy films do not need to be comedian but common movie actors can do the acting (Georgakopoulou, 2000). In essence, the comedy themes always offer something that the viewers can be smile and laugh out loud (Devlin, Chambers, & Callison, 2011).

Based on the data from filmindonesia.or.id, it is known that comedy films in Indonesia started from 1951 and the research did the study until 2017. There are totally 601 comedy films having been produced in Indonesia. Indonesia's cinema world undergoes up and down following the existing political development and the government's condition in each era.

Figure 1
Development of Indonesian Comedy Film, 1950-2017



In the development of comedy films in Indonesia from 1950 to 2017, it can be divided into seven eras (1950-1959, 1960-1969, 1970-1979, 1980-1989, 1990-1999, 2000-2009 and 2010-2017). In the seventh era the development of comedy films in Indonesia indicates relatively fluctuative number, and it can be seen particularly from total production of comedy films per era. The highest number is shown in the era of 1970-1979 and it amounts to 115 titles of the comedy films in Indonesia. However, if we see average film titles per year, it can be predicted that the era of 2010-2019 will be the golden era for comedy films in Indonesia. From the three consecutive years, it is known that average film number in the period 2010-2017 has reached 25 film titles per year.

Figure 2
Development of Indonesian Comedy Film, 1950-2017

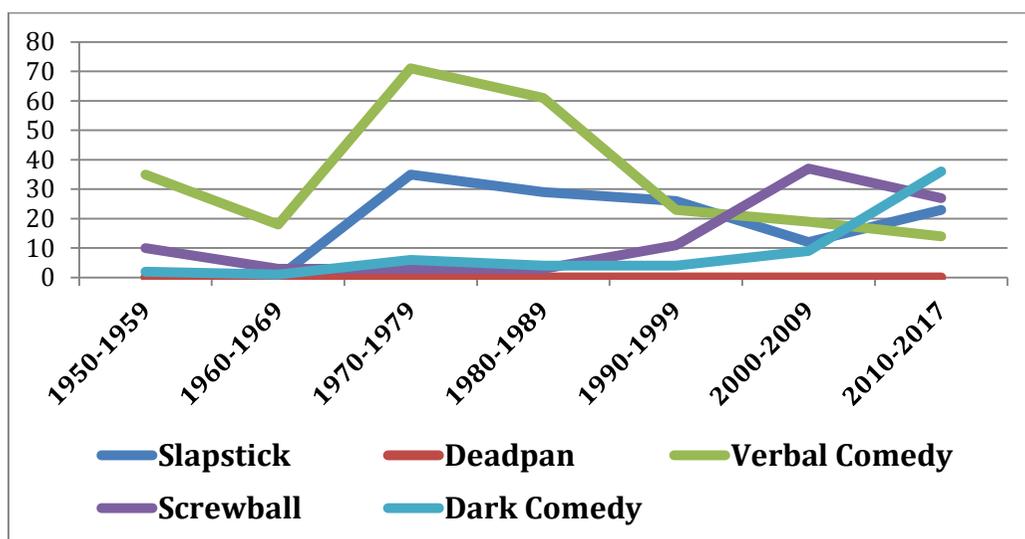


Figure 2, it is shown that each comedy film category in Indonesia indicates the growth in each era. For the slapstick category, it just emerges in the era of 1970-1979, and the era becomes the peak growth if considered from total movie production. In the era there are 35 titles of comedy films included in the category of slapstick. Moreover, the slapstick category undergoes the reduction until the era of 2000-2009 and it starts to rise again in the era of 2010-2017 with total number of 23 film titles in the period of the last three years.

Figure 3
Percentage of Indonesian Comedy Film, 1950-2017

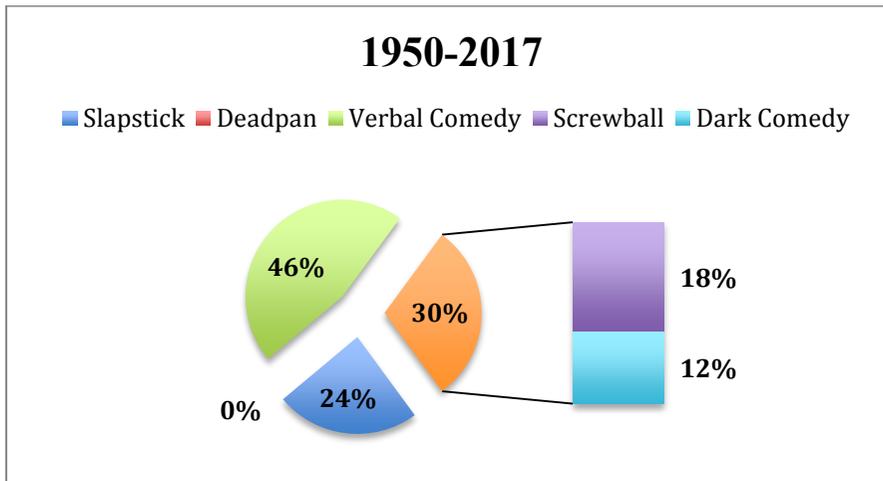


Figure 3, it is known that the category of verbal comedy has dominated the comedy films in Indonesia since 1950 until 2017. The category of verbal comedy occupies total 46%, and it exceedingly leads other categories. The category of slapstick follows the number with total percentage of 24%. The category of screwball amounts to 18%, the dark comedy 12% and deadpan comedy it is totally not found (0%).

Based on the research results, it is shown that each comedy film category in Indonesia indicates some growth in each era. However, the number of Indonesia's movie production is rather fluctuative particularly in the era of 1995-2000s. It results in political condition in Indonesia, and it causes movie production temporarily stop. Due to in the previous era, films become propaganda for anyone to meet their interests.

The emergence of various comedy films tends appropriate to social condition in certain eras, and it can be seen from the fifth types of comedy films with their diversity in each era. One comedy film category that never rises in comedy films in Indonesia is Deadpan. The category is never produced in the period of 1950-2017.

Verbal comedy is a comedy film category that mostly rises and are produced in Indonesia. Total number reaches 260 film titles in the period of 1950-2017. The peak emergence occurs in the era of 1970-1979 with total number of 71 film titles in the period of 10 years. Despite the trend starts declining since the era of 1970-1979, the category of verbal comedy still becomes one comedy film category that dominates in each era of movie development in Indonesia.

The category of screwball comedy films starts emerging since the early of the comedy film development era in Indonesia despite the number does not dominate significantly. However, the category always emerges in each era. Total number of the comedy films in Indonesia with the category of screwball reaches 94 film titles in the period of 1950-2016. Peak production occurs in the era of 2000-2009 with total number of 37 film titles.

Dark comedy is a comedy film category which starts popular since 2010. In the era of 2010-2017, total number of the movie production reaches 36 titles and it becomes the highest along the era of Indonesia's movie growth. With the number, it can be predicted that total number will rise until 2020, and it will replace popularity from verbal comedy category that always dominates the movie production in the previous eras. Based on the data it is known that the category always appears in each era, and the number is relatively small. Total comedy films with the dark comedy category in Indonesia only reach 62 titles in the period of 1950-2017.

Basically almost each comedy film contains more than one element of the comedy film categories. The humorous categories can rise either as the supporting element or become the unseparated part of total core stories in the films. It is also found in the comedy films in Indonesia since its emergence, each movie tries to combine some humorous categories as their selling value. Despite it is designed from various elements of humorous categories, and in general there are only one category of humorous/comedy that are mostly seen in each film. Based on the data analysis results, it is found that verbal comedy elements becomes the most category that rises in the comedy films in Indonesia in the period of 1950-2017.

Verbal comedy is basically a form of comedy that emphasizes humorous in all forms of conversation. As stated by Phelps (2011), jokes are mostly conducted with language uses. Such form of comedy is the most usual comedy that we find or we use in our daily life. It is possible that it can become reason why the forms of verbal comedy are mostly emerged through the films (McIntosh et al., 2003). The closeness to daily life makes the film material becomes more easily acceptable and understood by audience. It is also in line with a purpose why people watch the comedy films, i.e. entertaining their self without any involvement in complicated thinking process (Bishop, 2013).

The text analysis results indicate that basically we frequently use verbal comedy in our daily interaction with others. It is way to make people relaxed and does not make personal exchange seriously. It indicates that you are friendly, and it is way to share emotion to others. Joke is only word play. Moreover, when a joke is on absurdity on some aspects of our life, it indicates that the joke is natural.

There are also found that verbal comedy strategies make people entertained or laughing as follows:

1. **Timing:** Time for joke is the important part of verbal comedy. It gives emphasis on when it starts, stops and interrupts. These will influence the moment.
2. **Prosody:** Prosody is ritme, stress, and intonation of speech. The utterance of simple sentence and moreover, it relates to expression that indicate anger or frustration.
3. **Mimicry:** Mimicry is when imitating the characteristic of others' utterance. It can be carried out in naughty way where a comedian directly sends those they ask to talk. It can be used to emphasize strange accent of speech. A comedian can make such a caricaturization of some public figures by exaggerating their way of speech.

4. **Funny Voices:** Funny voices occurs when a comedian extract joke sounds to entertain viewers. It can be applied with high sound, low sound, fast talk, slow talk, wrong guess and others. The comedian can also do it without any words to be uttered.

The findings also indicate that Indonesia's comedy films are dominated with verbal comedy elements and there are various stereotypes towards the categories found in social groups in Indonesia. The verbal comedy in Indonesia mostly discusses themes or main figures that describe social groups from the low-and-middle socioeconomic status. Home workers like maids, drivers, cleaning service workers, gardener, public transportation driver and security personnel. The social groups are mostly subordinate group considered underclass in Indonesia's social life.

Nominating figures and themes around low-and-middle socioeconomic strata in Indonesia's society is carried out by putting their position as object or subject of action and joke language and these make the viewers laughing. In general, it emerges other stereotypes related to the view that people coming from the low-and-middle socioeconomic strata are those who are close to any silliness.

Moreover, Indonesia's comedy films also mostly rise themes on any cultural ethnic stereotypes. For example, those frequently emerged are characters from Batak, Java, Sunda ethnics as well as those from East of Indonesia such as Sulawesi, Ambon and Papua. Moreover, it is frequently found in foreign ethnic characters found mostly in Indonesia's social life, such Arab and Chinese Indonesians.

The appearance of characters attached to several ethnic groups always comes with the focus of using dialect and distinctive vocabulary of each culture. Moreover, the nature and character that become the stereotype of each tribe is frequently emerged as humorous elements in the films. For example, how main characters from Batak ethnic are frequently described with expressive, outburst and very open characteristics. On the other hand, other characters from Javanese ethnic become figures with the complicated, closed and slow-moving characteristics.

6. Conclusion: It can be concluded that verbal comedy is the most typical type in Indonesia's comedy films. A variety of tribes and languages following the films becomes the power in various comedy films in almost each era. Indonesia's diverse social life with various differences in fact have jocularity risen successfully to become humorous elements in the films.

Indonesian comedy film represents the diversity of Indonesian society. This representation is seen through issues related to class distinctions and ethnic stereotypes. The dynamics of life of Indonesian people who have a diversity of ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds provide a source for the emergence of interesting things in the interaction among fellow members of the community. Although the story, character and setting in the film are always made to follow the times, but the issues related to socio-economic class

differences, and ethnic stereotyping always make the funny element for the audience in every era.

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