



Fakulti Seni Gunaan dan Kreatif

**USING INDEPENDENT FILMMAKING PRODUCTION STYLE IN
PRODUCING A DOCUMENTARY FILM USING CANON EOS 550D DIGITAL
SINGLE LENS REFLEX (DSLR) PHOTOGRAPHIC CAMERA**

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Bachelor of Applied Arts with Honours
(Cinematography)
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This project is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the of Bachelor of Applied Arts with Honours
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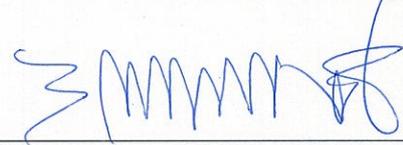
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ABSTRACT

USING INDEPENDENT FILMMAKING PRODUCTION STYLE IN PRODUCING A DOCUMENTARY FILM USING CANON EOS 550D DIGITAL SINGLE LENS REFLEX (DSLR) PHOTOGRAPHIC CAMERA

Nurqadia Bt Maslan

This study aims to review the effectiveness of producing a documentary video in accordance to the reduced budget shooting with a Digital Single Lens Reflex (DSLR) photographic camera. The researcher will compare the budget from student Final Year Project of 2006 in University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), which were shot using video camera (Panasonic DVX100), and the researcher will use Independent Film making production style that could reduce the budget. This study will provide tips that can be useful to documentary filmmakers in the future in producing a low budget documentary using High Definition (HD) quality camera. The findings will be applied in reducing the production budget shooting. A documentary video entitled *Bundle* will be produce by applying the independent filmmaking style using Canon EOS 550D DSLR photographic camera.

ABSTRAK

MENGGUNAKAN STAIL PEMBIKINAN FILEM BEBAS DALAM PENGELUARAN FILEM DOKUMENTAR DENGAN MENGGUNAKAN KAMERA FOTOGRAFI CANON EOS 550D DIGITAL SINGLE LENS REFLEX (DSLR)

Nurqadia Bt Maslan

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji keberkesanan penghasilan dokumentari mengikut stail 'independent' dengan mengurangkan bajet penggambaran menggunakan kamera 'Digital Single Lens Reflex' (DSLR). Pengkaji akan membandingkan bajet oleh projek tahun akhir oleh pelajar Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) tahun sebelum ini dan menggunakan stail pembikinan filem 'independent' untuk mengurangkan bajet bagi projek yang akan dijalankan. Kajian ini akan memberi tips yang boleh diamalkan oleh pembikin dokumentari pada masa akan datang untuk menghasilkan dakumentari bajet rendah namun berkualiti. Setiap aspek dalam proses pra-produksi sehingga post-produksi akan diambil kira dalam mengurangkan bajet penggambaran. Melalui kajian yang dibuat, sebuah dokumentari berjudul 'Bundle' akan dihasilkan dengan mengaplikasikan stail pembikinan filem independent menggunakan kamera Canon EOS 550D DSLR.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 PREFACE

The invention of digital camera gives the opportunity for filmmakers to explore their creativity, skills, and it gives room for new talents to get into the Film industry. This research focuses on producing independent Documentary Video using Independent Film making production style using Canon EOS 550D Digital Single Lens Reflex (DSLR) photography camera, that are usually used by professional photographers for taking digital still images. This study is based on the theoretical and practical aspects of video making. The researcher will also identify the methods used in producing low budget Documentary video. The budget from the past years student Final Year Project by University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) Cinematography program will be discussed as a comparison to the researcher Final Year Project.

David D. Busch (2006) explained that DSLR is a camera (film or digital) that uses a marvelous system of mirrors and/or prism to provide bright, clear optical viewing images through the same lens that used to take the pictures.

Gene Wright mentions in his website <http://www.vistaview360.com>, that DSLR camera is a digital camera that uses a mechanical mirror system and pentaprism to direct light from the lens to an optical viewfinder on the back of the camera. DSLR cameras are often preferred by professional still photographers because they allow an accurate preview of framing close to the moment of exposure. DSLR camera also allows the user to choose from a variety of interchangeable lenses. Most DSLR camera also has a function that allows accurate preview of Depth of Field.

Therefore, Michael Reichmann (2009) indicates in <http://www.luminous-landscape.com>, DSLR camera is a standard tool for serious photographers and is used commonly in the field of still photo.

Currently, filmmaking trends are moving towards using High Definition (HD) cameras. DSLR camera also expanding their technology into video, which offer movie mode capable. HD video became popular in the early 2000s by pioneering filmmakers like George Lucas and Robert Rodriguez, who used HD video cameras (Sony HDW-F900) to capture images for popular movies like *Star Wars Episode 2: Attack of the Clones* and *Spy Kids 2*, both released in 2002. HD digital video can be shot at a variety of frame rates, including 29.97 interlaced (NTSC) or progressive, or 25 interlaced (PAL) or progressive, or even 24-progressive (film). Furthermore one could shot an HD in 24-progressive, scans nearly perfectly to film without the need of a frame or field conversion process.

Michael Rabiger (2004) describe the documentary makers have an ardent respect for the integrity of the actual, for the primacy of the truth in

the lives of people. The mission is not to change or evade destiny but rather to embrace it, to show the presence in history, and to examine the choices available for making a more humane and generous society in the future. Thereby, a documentary film/video is produce to tempt document reality that gives facts and information about the subject in some way.

Sheila Curran Bernard (2004) states, "*The dawn of 21st century is proving to be both a challenging, and promising time for documentary filmmakers. The emergence of lower-cost production technology has created new opportunities for more diverse stories and storytellers.*" (2004: 4)

Jennifer Slegg (2010) indicates in an article of Independent Movies from <http://www.independentmovies.net/>, independent filmmaking received a major boost following World War II, as portable movie cameras now provided anyone with the opportunity to shoot their own features. In 1953, Ray Abrashkin's *Little Fugitive* became the first indie nominated for an Oscar (Best Original Screenplay). Currently, due to the large volume of inexpensive high-end digital film equipment available at the consumer level, independent filmmakers no longer depend on major studios to provide them with the tools they need to produce a film. The falling cost of technology helps those small production companies to obtain the resources they need to produce entertaining films at a fraction of the cost of the big Hollywood studios. Postproduction also has been simplified by non-linear editing software that is available for home computers. The advancement in video camera technology nowadays allows independent filmmakers to produce documentary video using DSLR camera with cheaper budget.

1.1 RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Bill Nichola (2001), states that documentary films bears a recognizable familiarity that offers us a likeness or depiction of the world. Through the capacity of film, and audio tape, to record situation and events with considerable fidelity, we see in documentaries people, places, and thing that we might see for ourselves, outside the cinema. He also mention that John Grierson, the father of British and Canadian documentary film indicates the term documentary as *“The ability of medium to document the particular event and it views as ”the creative treatment of actuality” undercuts the claim of truth and authenticity on which the documentary depends.”* (2001:4)

Josh Johnson (2010) mentions there were many non-professional digital cameras have possessed the ability to take video clips in high digital formats for quite a few years now. This impressive innovation of video technology present on Nikons, Canons, Pentax and many other models that allows us preview and take shots using the camera’s LCD screen rather than the viewfinder.

In this study, the researcher will analyze and examine the advantages and reliability of DSLR camera as a medium to convey the visual and the main motive to shooting low budget documentary production. This path will allow researcher to know more about digital filmmaking and how their achieving useful results in the video making worlds. The increasing popularity and feasibility of low-budget films has led to a vast increase in the number of aspiring filmmakers people with successful independent

documentary film/video like *911 Fahrenheit* (Michael Moore), *Music by Prudence and Food, Inc.*

Scott Kirsne (2008), mentioned that Director Francis Ford Coppola, long an advocate of new technologies like non-linear editing and digital cameras, said in 2007 that “*cinema is escaping being controlled by the financier, and that's a wonderful thing. You don't have to go hat-in-hand to some film distributor and say, 'Please will you let me make a movie?'*”

Researcher will refer to some of low budget documentary video works that have been done by the independent filmmakers which using digital camera or DSLR and applied independent film making style to shoot the short documentary video.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Although DSLR camera has had a massive influence on documentary, it did not mean all photographers or filmmakers can handle it. As an independent filmmaker, one problem is coming out with the money. The works they produced usually involves low budget cost.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Objectives of the study in this thesis are:

1. To understand the development of video technology in Digital Single Lens Reflex (DSLR) to be used to produce documentary video.
2. To identify appropriate methods in producing independent documentary video using DSLR camera using low production budget.

1.4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The researcher will focus on the low budget documentary video that is produced using DSLR camera based on the advancement in filmmaking. At the beginning of the research, the researcher will collect information from reading materials or any kind of references that states about documentary, independent filmmaking and DSLR camera in depth. Then, the researcher will analyze some independent documentary videos as research materials, which is The Blair Witch Project (1999), and A Bundle of Joy (2011).

Cinematography student's Final Year Project of University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) in year 2006 a short documentary budget by Esther Bala will be discuss as comparison to the researcher project. After the analysis, the researcher will continue the study using content analysis methodology to collect the data for literature review. Based on the information and the process that have been done before, the researcher will produce an documentary video using Canon EOS 550D DSLR camera. The researcher must use cheaper cost that is less than Esther Bala Final Year Project and spend just around RM400 to produce this project to prove that using DSLR camera can reduces the cost and to compare it with UNIMAS Cinematography students past years Final Year Project which usually spend more than RM 1500 in average.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

The literature review is done by identifying the common findings of research related to documentary video making modes. This chapter describes the previous literature review related to the problem or question to be investigated. This literature review will be discussed in more detail and clear on a number of previous findings related to the topic being studied.

2.1 What is Documentary Film?

Rabiger (2004) defined the word ‘documentary’, which surfaced during the mid-1920s in the conversation between Flaherty and John Grierson, a Scots social scientist who was interested in the psychology of propaganda. Critiquing a cut of Flaherty’s *Moana* (1962, United States), Grierson said he thought it was ‘documentary’ in intention, and so retrospectively, was *Nanook of the North* (1922) today acknowledged as the genre’s seminal work.

He added, the history of documentary film making were started by two French brothers Louis and Auguste Lumiere that recorded the workers going out of the factory in 1895 entitled *Workers Leaving the Factory*. That was the first film that recorded real people as its subject. *The Arrival of the Train* not only made history as the first film in the world but also the history and traditions of documentary film making. Then, at 1922, Robert Flaherty's come out with *Nanook of the North* which is an actuality story with a deliberately imposed, overarching meaning. Robert Flaherty was an American mining engineer and began an ethnographic record of an Eskimo family in 1915 using 16mm camera.

Rabiger (2004) mentions John Grierson in his book indicates the documentary film should be a tool to transmit information, education and propaganda. He added, Grierson stressed the documentary is representation of actuality, but at the meantime a filmmaker can act with creative approaches to record reality. He also considers documentary as unfolding evidence. He explained that the modern documentary differs from its earlier. The modern documentary is more scripted forms because mobile technology allows us to record events and authorial consciousness as they unfold.

Florence Yaps (2006) in the research of the real meaning of documentary, she mentioned The American Heritage Dictionary describes documentary as "presenting facts objectively without editorializing," and it acknowledges that the word comes from the Latin word, "documentum" a lesson, example, and warning; from docere, which was to teach. She added, besides the academic point of view, Australian Film Commission definition of

documentary is “a program that is a creative treatment of actuality other than news, current affairs, sport coverage, magazines, infotainment, or light entertainment program.”

Following these findings, documentary film/video is a medium to present information and reality about the world outside the film. The information will leads us to assume that the persons, places, time, and events exist and the factuality revealed is trustworthy and true. Knowing the meaning of documentary is a part of preparing the researcher to understand and apply some of the findings in documentary video that will be produced.

According to Bernajean's Porters (2010) in her articles on <http://www.digitales.us>, documentary film is considered as nonfiction organizing the complexity or multi-facet of a topic or person into presentation that can reach the audiences. Documentaries create complex topics into ideas and understanding that either narrated or told in the actual words of the participants themselves (perhaps re-enacted dialogue) based on diaries, letters, journals, recordings and other artifacts.

Porters added, five requirements to incorporate that were adapted from Michael Weinberger's definition of a documentary.

1. It must attempt to tell the truth – the information must include providing multiple perspectives on the topic or event.
2. It must appear to do so by presenting only factual evidence – a good documentary starts with rigorous, in-depth research. The author is building

the understanding and perspective by the art of arranging the facts into a pattern of understanding.

3. It must not attempt to re-create or distort the truth – taking poetic license (imaginative interpretation), constructing intentional bias or developing a singular perspective threatens the credibility of a good documentary moving into more fiction or slanted truth than fact.

4. It must be objective –in fact, a personal reflection of how the topic matters and connects either to individuals, communities or humanity is essential in order to push the body of information beyond summary reporting, but these embedded perspectives must be ethically grounded in accuracy, doesn't mean must a strong and overt point-of-view.

5. It must present all factual evidence in its original context and form – an abundant amount of primary sources needs to be incorporated, documented and credited as part of the product, this builds credibility for the documentary.

Following these findings, documentary is nowhere from actuality, facts and presents evidence. Documentary makers must assemble factual and doing in deep research on the subject, the he or she will produce.

2.2 Independent Filmmaking

Independent filmmaking is usually identified as low budget film or the film that produced outside the mainstream professional circuit. A film critic, Richard Coliss, in an article Time Asia from 2001, stressed that desperate

circumstances creates principled outlaws. The censors did not intent this, but by their intransigence they help spawn a truly independent culture. Independent documentary is just the same as independent film making with the same characteristic of the making.

In this research, the researcher will discuss about low budget documentary video making. describe that this stream always have opposite opinion or application from the mainstream especially in idealism, cinematography, issue that cross boundaries, film making style and other aspect that make it as independent films. It is usually being produced by independent production that is own by a personal company, shot without permits or membership to professional film organizations using digital video camera, amateur or volunteer actors and minimal crew. They work closely together, helping and inspiring each other.

2.2.1 Past Years Student Final Year Project in UNIMAS

The researcher concludes that almost all final year projects of Cinematography students is independent film because the budget is by their own. Every final year student must produce their own project either short video or documentary. They will assembly their own crew in production and prepare the Pre-Production until Post-Production stages independently.

Referring to Esther Bala (2006) study in *Realism in Ethnographic Film*, produced an ethnographic documentary video about a Penan family who has left the nomadic life in 2003 in the jungle and settle down at Pa'Tik, a two days walk from Bario, Sarawak, a village where they send their

children to school. They have built their temporary huts in Bario, and learn how to survive in the developing world. Bala's spent RM 3240 in this project and that was a big sum. Bala's did not bring a lot crew because she was the producer, director, and director of photography in this project. Big expenses possibly in transportation because the place it quite far in rural area, pay for the guide, accommodation and food. Her study showed the Production schedule that take a long time, which was 10 days of shooting from 2 March 2006 until 11 March 2006.

For the reasons mentioned above, the researcher will try to find way to produce a documentary video with little money about RM 400. The researcher created a restriction that will narrow and deepen what to shoot with convenient subject, the location, the days of shooting and all that can be estimated in the budget.

2.3 Digital Camera

Rabiger (2009) states that video technology arrived in the 1970s to supply a cheaper and immediate process in film making. However, the weakness is was the poor quality and hard to edit. After the cassettes and small-format video introduced, it was a relief for filmmakers and they had easy shooting. The digital camera and computer software handed independent filmmaking the freedoms and allows filmmakers share their idea and creativity.

Johnson (2002) indicates early digital cameras generated low resolution images, like 320 x 240 pixels – not even enough to fill a computer