

Decision making in producing the ‘Jejak Rasul 5’ programme at Sistem Televisyen Malaysia Berhad (TV3)

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ABSTRACT

The Jejak Rasul Series was first aired on TV3 during Ramadan in 1995. Jejak Rasul is a 30-episode documentary that depicts the struggle of the 25 prophets as mentioned in the Quran. The documentary takes the style of a travelogue that covers various locations in the history and lives of the prophets and the Rasuls. The main aim of this documentary was to educate the public on the way of life of the prophets and their struggles to uphold the teachings of the holy Quran. The main focus of the research was to determine the decision-making process in the three stages of production – pre-production, production and post-production. Through the research, it can be concluded that there are three levels of decision-making in the making of Jejak Rasul 5 - decision-making at the group level, dyadic level and the individual level.

1. THE BACKGROUND OF JEJAK RASUL

Jejak Rasul is a 30-episode documentary that depicts the struggle of the 25 prophets as mentioned in the Quran. The documentary that takes the style of a travelogue covers various locations in the history and lives of the prophets.

The main aim of this documentary is to educate the public on the way of life of the prophets and their struggles to uphold the teachings of the holy Quran as quoted from Surah Yusuf, Verse 111:

“There is, in their stories,
Instruction for men ended
with understanding.
It is not a tale invented,
but a confirmation of what went before it.
A detailed exposition of all things,
and a guide and a mercy to any such as believe”.

(Al-Quran, Surah Yusof, Verse 111)
The Holy Quran, Text Translation & Commentary. A. Yusuf Ali
Sh Muhammad Ashraf, Kashmiri Bazar Lahore, page 590

The Jejak Rasul series takes a universal concept. The location shooting for Jejak Rasul 1 covered six West Asian countries namely Egypt, Turkey, Jordan, Yemen, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. The main theme is to encourage everyone, all over the world to do good deeds and live a good life.

The Jejak Rasul series are not re-enactments. The heritage and struggles of the prophets in upholding the teachings of the Quran were traced by 19 crewmembers in 104 days.

The Jejak Rasul series are not only for the Muslim community but also for other communities that want to understand the

religion and the people more closely. These programmes are also interesting because they touch on history, culture and the way of life of each country that was visited. The visuals captured were interesting to watch as it gave new insights to the countries.

2. JEJAK RASUL 5

Jejak Rasul 5 theme was ‘One Religion, One Border’. The theme was looking at the height of the Muslim achievement where they were free to go across political and geographic borders to have economic, culture and education ties with different countries. For them, Islam was equivalent to a passport to travel to these countries.

The Jejak Rasul 5 travelogue brought the viewers to Southeast Asia giving coverage to Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Singapore, Brunei, Philippines and Indonesia. Although Islam arrived quite late in Southeast Asia as compared to other countries, some of these countries have shown remarkable achievements recognized by Muslims around the world.

Although Islam is a minority religion in Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Singapore and Philippines, Islam has held strong until today. Similar to the other Jejak Rasul series, Jejak Rasul 5 showed a variety of aspects covering the history of Islam and how the people received it. It also encompassed the impact Islam had on politics, economy, education and the culture of the locals.

The audience was also entertained with the color and uniqueness of the lifestyle of the locals that was rich with traditional customs and culture. There were also a few discoveries, claims and customary beliefs.

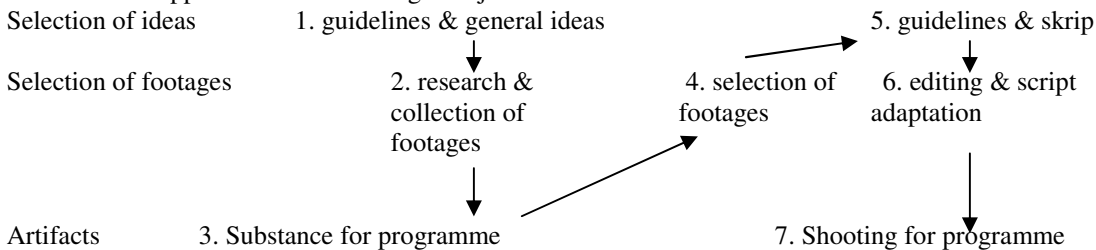
One claim was that Jose Rizal from the Philippines was Malay and a Muslim. There was proof that the name 'Manila' originated from an Arabic word 'Fi-Amanillah' which means 'In the Protection of Allah'. Another interesting fact was that the Mactan Island in Cebu saw the downfall of a Spanish General, Ferdinand Magellan, at the hands of a Malay warrior that sacrificed his life in order to uphold Islam; a small town called Marawi, which never fell to neither the Spanish nor the Americans in battle, is now a symbol and pride of Islam in the Philippines.

3. REASONS FOR RESEARCH

This research was conducted to find out the process of decision-making in producing Jejak Rasul season 5. In general there are a few decision-making processes before the final decisions are made. This process will also take place at the location shoot and at the post-production stage.

5. MODEL USED FOR RESEARCH

This model is applicable in the making of Jejak Rasul 5:



The model that was coined by Elliott, P., Media Sociology, A Reader (1970:223) only covers the first stage of the making of the Jejak Rasul 5 programme.

In general the programme has different stages of production. They are:

a. Pre-production

- i. Ideas for the programme
- ii. Selection of the director
- iii. Selection of host
- iv. Selection of the editorial crew (scriptwriter/researcher, assistant producer and production assistant)
- v. Selection of two production crews (director, technical producer, 2 cameramen, technician and lighting man)
- vi. Selection of shooting locations
- vii. Research
- viii. Coordination of visas, leave and immigration

b. Production

- i. To scout the location upon arrival at the selected countries
- ii. To overcome logistic problems
- iii. Shooting
- iv. To decide how many episodes will be produced on each country

c. Post-Production

- i. Preview of tapes
- ii. Selection of shots
- iii. Editing process

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In conducting this research paper, a few questions on the topic will be answered. They are:

- 1 What are the important processes in the making of Jejak Rasul 5?
- 2 How are these decisions formulated in different stages of production – pre-production, production and post-production?
- 3 What are the factors that constitute changes in the original decisions made (logistics, safety, visa)?

Who makes decisions at different levels of production - pre-production, production and post-production in the making of Jejak Rasul 5?

iv. Script

v. Post-production – audio dubbing and music

The next stage will be the assessment of Lembaga Penapisan Filem to ensure that the programme fulfills the criteria of television viewing.

6. METHODOLOGY USED

For this research paper, data collection was done through in-depth interviews.

Conceptual areas of inquiry

In conducting this research, this researcher will give a few definitions for important concepts used in this research to give a clearer picture on the focus of study. Concepts are ideas that are generalized or explained in detail to give a clear explanation of the terms used in research (Littlejohn, 1978: 8).

According to Syed Arabi Idid (1999: 25) concepts have a close relation to theories. Theories on the other hand are a statement that relates to two or more concepts. When one concept is related to another concept in a systematic way, it helps to explain a phenomenon.

Jejak Rasul 5

RESEARCH REPORTS

Jejak Rasul is a 30-episode documentary, which is the continuation of the Jejak Rasul series that tells the stories of the 25 prophets as told in the Quran. This documentary is no longer a travelogue, but is more focused on facts related to locations visited. Coverage includes history, facts and the life of the prophets that are told in a chronological order in the Asian archipelago context.

In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews are focused on the questions that will be forwarded to the subjects to get information on the topic of research. The main reason is to identify the stages of decision-making in the production of the Jejak Rasul 5 programme. From the main questions formed, supplementary questions will be asked in order to get more information to complete this study.

Subject of research

An in-depth interview was conducted with Ustaz Wan Alias Hj Abdullah, the producer of Jejak Rasul 5. Wan Alias was responsible for the research on the historical aspects of the countries visited. Wan Alias was also given the task of selecting certain countries for shooting based on historical facts pertaining to Islam.

Another in-depth interview was conducted with Hj Zainal Ariffin Hj Ismail, the director for the 30-episode documentary for that season. In addition to directing, Zainal Ariffin was also responsible for the entire shooting process, doubled-up as host and conducted research. He also took on a main role in the selection of shots for the editing process, overall production, the final script and selection for music for the final piece that goes on air.

Zainal Ariffin's experience in journalism and production was an added advantage in the production of the 30-episode Jejak Rasul 5 series from pre-production up to post-production. His experiences in hosting also helped the transition of the story from one location to the other in terms of facts and visual. This gives a clearer picture of the history and expansion of Islam in Jejak Rasul 5.

7. LITERATURE REVIEW

A few articles discuss the stages of decision-making in production of a programme. In the article entitled Television Sponsorship Forms and Program Subject Matter by Joseph Turow (1980), he discusses group decision-making in the production of a children's programme. Generally, the discussion at a group level will be between the producer, researchers that are involved in programme research and sponsorship.

The article written by Robert Pekurny, "Coping With Television Production", also discusses stages of decision-making in producing sitcoms. The big difference is that the decisions that are made are based on a producer's track record. The producer, Gary Marshall, played a big role in determining the programme that was going to be produced and how would the network's reaction and budget be. Due to his good track record, he often produced programmes that were bankable. This obviously gave him the edge to determine the selling process of his programmes.

Another article written by Joseph Turow was titled "Unconventional Programs On Commercial Television: An Organizational Perspective". The article discussed the decision-making process in making 'unconventional' programmes. It was a comparative research comparing a few programmes. The author concluded that 'unconventional' programmes were well received by the organizations that were undergoing drastic changes and pressure from competitors. It was found that 'unconventional' programmes have a slow process from idea transition to the production process.

For Jejak Rasul 5, the editorial and the decision-making stages are more complex and are done in a uniform manner. The decision-making process in Jejak Rasul 5 is staggered into the stages of pre-production, production and post-production. The group decision-making involves a small number of people, while decision-making at the dyadic and individual level involves only one or two key personnel.

Research findings

From the in-depth interview conducted on both subjects, these are the findings: There are three stages of decision-making in the production of Jejak Rasul 5 that took place at group, dyadic and individual levels.

Group level decision-making

The main decisions made at this stage are the selection of the director, host, editorial team and technical team. Before decisions are made, the main decision will be the selection of the director. A discussion for the selection was done between Yunos Said, the Director of Operations, the Magazine Department Manager and Ustaz Wan Alias Abdullah, the producer.

Based on past experiences in Jejak Rasul 1, Zainal Ariffin was chosen as Director and host. If the director selected to shoulder the responsibility was not a host, then another discussion will be done to choose a host. For Jejak Rasul 5, since Zainal Ariffin is capable of doing both tasks, there was no need for a host.

After decisions on the director and host are concluded, the next process will be to select the editorial team, which consists of an assistant producer, a researcher/scriptwriter and a production assistant. The group decision making process will determine who will be selected to join the Jejak Rasul 5 team. The selection will normally be based on the ability and style of writing (for researcher/scriptwriter) and an eye for directing (for assistant producer). Past experiences from the production of Jejak Rasul 1 - 4 were used as yardsticks to determine the selection.

Producer Ustaz Wan Alias and Zainal Ariffin will give suggestions on candidates based on the criteria set. But there have been instances where new staff is chosen to give them exposure in their respective fields. The Magazine Manager, Ustaz Wan Alias and Zainal Ariffin will choose the editorial team.

In the selection of the technical team (which consists of a technical producer, two cameramen, a technician and a lighting man) the same personnel are involved with the addition of the Manager and Senior Cameraman from the Engineering Department. The producer and director will once again give

suggestions on candidates. The main criteria will be based on experience and the capability of enduring harsh conditions. Teamwork is a must. The understanding among crewmembers is important in determining a harmonious working environment and the success of the production process for the duration of the shooting, which takes a few months.

The final decision for the technical team will be in the hands of the Manager and Senior Cameraman from the Engineering Department based on the criteria determined by the producer and director of *Jejak Rasul 5*. Only the best will be selected based on the slogan that they have carried throughout the *Jejak Rasul* series - 'Only the best will produce the best'. But as mentioned earlier, the team will sometimes consist of new staff to give exposure to the editorial team and new experiences to the technical team, hoping that the combination of old and new will give a fresh breathe to the production process.

Dyadic level decision-making

The Dyadic level decision-making between the producer and the director is made at two stages of *Jejak Rasul 5*, which is at the pre-production and post-production stage. Decisions made are on the duration of shooting at each location/country to ensure that all aspects on the history of Islam are covered in terms of research and production.

Based on the location shoot, the producer and director will determine on location how many episodes will be needed to tell the history of a country. As an example, the shooting that was done in the Philippines concluded with a lot of footages. According to the director, the footages were enough to cover three episodes but after a preview session with the producer, a discussion ensued and the final decision was to produce only two episodes that would tell the story without compromising the end product. In the preview session, they realized that many shots were similar.

Normally the number of episodes for each country is determined in Malaysia before going on location overseas. But challenges on location will always determine the final decision. Different decisions that are made on the dyadic level are decisions regarding logistics. It is normal that the producer and director discuss the best route to the shooting location, the number and kind of vehicles that are comfortable for the long journeys and cancellation of shoot if they feel that the safety of the crew will be compromised.

For example, in Mindanao, Philippines there was much unrest due to the elections that were going on. The producer and director quickly decided to shorten the duration of the shooting to ensure the safety of the crew. According to Ustaz Wan Alias, "We wouldn't be good planners if we went on with the shoot. If we know that we're going to be in trouble if we proceeded, then why do it ...".

Another decision that was made at the dyadic level was at the post-production stage, specifically regarding the script. The discussion is to determine the final script that is accurate in terms of facts and continuity of visuals before it goes for next process, which is the audio-dubbing stage (music and voice over).

Individual level decision-making

The individual level decision-making process happens at different levels of the production stage. This level of decision-making involves only the director or producer.

Producer

The producer will make decisions at an individual level starting at the pre-production stage. This involves the selection of locations based on historical facts of the expansion of Islam. In addition, the producer will coordinate the visas, leave submission for crew and settle immigration issues for each crewmember as the producer also sets the shooting schedules.

If, for example, the country visited is having unrest like Aceh (at the time), then it will be up to the discretion of the producer whether to cancel the shoot in that particular country or not. Such decisions are not subject to debate for discussion because according to Ustaz Wan Alias, the most important concept is the safety of the crew.

Director

For the director, the decision-making process that is done on the individual level is made during the production and post-production stages. The director is given the responsibility to determine the best shots in terms of creativity and co-ordination of historical facts and visualization to tell the story of a certain location. Sometimes the director and the producer may have disagreements on location but decisions on visuals will always be made by the director to get the best for the *Jejak Rasul 5* series.

One example that can be cited is the incident in Sibolga, Indonesia. It was raining very heavily with strong winds but the director decided to go ahead with the shoot. He directs one of the cameramen to prepare for the shooting but the cameraman questions his decision. Zainal Ariffin then directs the other cameraman to conduct the shooting. His rationale to shoot is to show that Sibolga is situated close to the sea and is open to the dangers of the sea. But in wanting to capture the situation, the director did not have time to explain his intentions. When on location, time is of the essence and the main motivation is to complete the shooting process. Although the producer and the cameraman did not agree with the director's decision at that time, when the 'shot' was used in the Sibolga episode the producer and cameraman saw the importance of the 'shot' and it was eventually incorporated into the story.

Another example was during a night shooting in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The shooting was about religious classes conducted at night. Due to economic and political factors, these classes were conducted in the back alleys. Due to safety reasons, the producer did not want production to proceed, but the director reasoned that the shooting was important to show the efforts of minorities to enhance Islamic teachings to the people.

The director also made decisions on 'standuppers'. A 'standupper' is a short piece that is voiced during the shooting process. This shows the presence of the host on location and also helps in the transition of storytelling. All scripts and direction of shots are done based on the director's creativity. The script plays

an important role in story transition and a continuation from one location to another.

At the post-production stage, decision-making at the individual level undertaken by the director include the selection of shots, the editing process (Zainal Ariffin edited 13 episodes for the Jejak Rasul 5 series, the rest were edited by the assistant producer with Zainal Ariffin's supervision), post-production and the 'voice-over' process. If the assistant producer's editing is not according to the director's planning, the director will then re-edit the episode again.

To edit and re-edit is important, as each episode is a continuation of the previous episode in terms of storytelling and Islamic history. If this is not done right, the transition and the flow in terms of visualization and storytelling may be compromised or fragmented.

Likewise during the 'voice-over', a process where the host's voice is recorded, the script will be rewritten to synchronize the script with the visuals. The script will be changed based on visuals, facts and storyline.

8. CONCLUSION

From the discussion, this researcher was able to conclude that there are three levels of decision-making in the making of Jejak Rasul 5. They are decision-making at the group level, dyadic level and the individual level. All decision-making levels in producing the Jejak Rasul series, from Jejak Rasul 1 till Jejak Rasul 6 were the same. Any difference that arose often came

about due to different personnel holding different responsibilities in production. For Jejak Rasul 1, 5 and 6, the decision-making process at the individual level remains the same as Zainal Ariffin was the director and Ustaz Wan Alias was the producer.

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