

Film as an emancipation project and alternative justice communicative action in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Background: Film has long been recognized as a medium with significant social and political impact. In Indonesia, film can be a means to voice issues of social injustice. **Purpose:** This article aims to explore how film can serve as a vehicle for emancipation and alternative forms of communicative action for justice. **Methods:** The Methodology used in this article is a literature review, which involves analyzing and synthesizing existing literature by identifying, challenging, and refining theories through the examination of one or more previous works. **Results:** Films in Indonesia have played a significant role in shaping public opinion and mobilizing support for issues of injustice. Film serves as a rational and dialogical medium that can facilitate emancipation through digital convergence and social media. **Conclusion:** Technological advancements in film have a significant impact on social, political, and cultural aspects, including facilitating broader audience participation and promoting the representation of underrepresented groups. **Implication:** Theoretically, this study suggests that film can be a powerful medium in social campaigns, enabling the establishment of dialogue and reflection on the problem of injustice in Indonesia. The practical implications of this study are that the Indonesian government and film industry should support the production of films that address social, political, and legal issues.

Keywords: Communicative action; emancipation; film; justice; technology

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INTRODUCTION

Films have had the potential for social and political impact since their inception. Since its invention, film has never been a neutral medium. It holds the power to reinforce the status quo or to challenge it, to entertain or to enlighten, and to inspire apathy or activism. This enduring potential for social and political impact is what makes cinema such a vital cultural and communicative force. Communicative force refers to the power or strength of a message in influencing understanding, emotions, or actions.

Films, both fiction and documentary, or films adapted from true stories can be instrumental tools for social movements to encourage social and political change. As visual narratives, they not only reflect societal issues but also can mobilize public opinion, generate empathy, and catalyze collective action. Through compelling storytelling and emotional engagement, films can serve as a powerful medium for advocacy, raising awareness about injustices, inequalities, and other critical issues affecting civil society. Although generally overlooked by social movement scholars, films can have a variety of significant impacts on the public, social movement organizations, and policymakers. Social movements continue to strive to create public spaces for debating issues they consider important, and films can play a significant role in this struggle by providing forums where the public can engage with these issues (Andits, 2022). In summary, films play a strategic role in advancing the aims of

social movements. By transforming cultural narratives into public discourse, films become essential tools in expanding democratic debate and mobilizing society toward change.

In Indonesia, the public's efforts to address justice issues continue to face numerous challenges (Eryanto et al., 2022; Setiawan & Tomsa, 2023). Factors complicating this struggle include Indonesia's complex and bureaucratic political structure, which often hinders direct public access to the decision-making process. Many important decisions are made in closed spaces that are difficult to access. Corruption and nepotism remain significant problems in the Indonesian political system, often obstructing public efforts to achieve justice, as decisions are frequently influenced by personal and group interests rather than the public interest. In Sum, corruption and nepotism are not merely ethical failings but structural impediments to justice, equality, and democratic governance in Indonesia. They entrench elite power, marginalize the public interest, and weaken institutional integrity, making it critical for any reform agenda to address these issues as core priorities.

Moreover, various legal cases, primarily criminal acts experienced by citizens, often do not receive the attention they deserve in terms of legal action and justice. This lack of attention is often related to certain parties labeled as authorities or those who have a relationship (connection) with the authorities. Over time, the public has begun to seek alternative routes

to obtain justice, particularly through the legal system. One of these alternative routes is through film cinematography (Amirah et al., 2023; Grossman, 2019). As a form of mass media, film plays an important role in the sociocultural, artistic, political, and scientific spheres. This is because film functions not only as entertainment but also as a powerful tool for communication, representation, and education. Its audiovisual nature allows it to reach a broad audience and convey complex messages in engaging, emotional, and symbolic ways.

Film is a powerful medium that has had a significant impact on humanity, playing a crucial role in shaping cultural narratives, influencing public opinion, and reflecting social realities. It serves as a tool for education, entertainment, and cultural expression, and can also influence our perception of the world around us. Film has a strong connection with humanitarian campaigns, and therefore, it can be a medium for voicing humanitarian issues. In this context, film can serve as a means to build public awareness, increase support, and initiate humanitarian actions, particularly in efforts to achieve justice (Aqababae & Rieck, 2023; Gruenewald & Witteborn, 2022). Film, as a powerful form of mass media, possesses a unique ability to narrate human experiences, visualize social injustice, and appeal to the emotions and conscience of its audience. In this context, film transcends entertainment; it becomes a powerful tool for advocacy, social education, and mobilization.

The development of film in Indonesia is also marked by emancipatory efforts aimed at realizing justice and effective law enforcement. The film *Sum Kuning* (1980) centers on the case of a young woman named Sum, who was the victim of a gang rape in Yogyakarta. The Film, for example, shows us how poorly the police perform in handling existing legal cases, including various efforts to obstruct the ongoing legal process. Despite being a victim, Sum faced significant obstacles in her quest for justice, including the indifference and incompetence of the police, who were either unwilling or unable to investigate the case thoroughly.

Another film, *Marsinah (Cry Justice)* (2001), tells the story of the murder of Marsinah, a female labor activist in Sidoarjo, showing how injustice befalls workers and the marginalization of women's roles in the labor movement in Indonesia. Her case remains one of Indonesia's most haunting symbols of state violence and labor repression. The film not only recounts her struggle for workers' rights, including demands for fair wages, humane working conditions, and unionization, but also reveals the broader systemic oppression faced by laborers under the New Order regime. The film underscores how her murder became a brutal warning to silence dissent, especially from women who dared to challenge both capitalist exploitation and patriarchal authority.

The film *Nama Dia 13* (2004), which tells the story of Munir Said Talib's struggle to uphold human rights and combat corruption, highlights

how corruption has become a significant issue in Indonesia, as well as the neglect of human rights. It will be a scripted drama adaptation of the book *Mencintai Munir* (2022), written by Suciwati, Munir's wife, exploring their partnership, activism, and the broader fight for democracy and anti-corruption in Indonesia.

The film *Di Balik 98* (2015), which tells the story of reform in Indonesia, illustrates the enduring influence of authoritarianism in the Indonesian democratic landscape. The story follows three intersecting narrative threads: Diana, the activist, insists on participating in street protests despite family tensions stemming from her brother-in-law's military role. Bagus is torn between his duty to maintain order and the concern over his missing pregnant wife, Salma, who disappears amid the chaos. Daniel, whose Chinese-Indonesian family fell victim to violent ethnic-targeted riots on 13–14 May 1998, leading to trauma and exile. As Soeharto remains in Cairo during the crisis, Habibie is thrust into leadership. The duo's internal political struggle mirrors the broader collapse of authoritarian control, a key moment in Indonesia's democratization movement. The film highlights the contrast between human stories and political upheaval: ideals versus loyalty, protest versus repression, and love versus fear. It examines how ordinary people, particularly students, soldiers, and marginalized citizens, are drawn into a systemic collapse.

The film *Istirahatlah Kata-Kata* (2016) explores the disappearance of Wiji Thukul, a

poet and human rights activist renowned for his critical poetry that challenged the government. *Istirahatlah Kata-Kata, Solo, Solitude* is a beautifully restrained and thoughtful film that humanizes Wiji Thukul, one of Indonesia's most enduring voices against tyranny. Through minimalist storytelling and rich visual poetry, it explores the silences, longings, and emotional costs of resistance. More than just a biography, it is a cinematic homage to a man whose words still resonate and whose disappearance remains unanswered.

Another film, *Surat dari Praha* (2016), explores the historical and political issues faced by political exiles who were unable to return to Indonesia after the 1965 incident. After the abortive coup on September 30, 1965, the Indonesian government under Suharto's New Order regime launched a massive purge against those affiliated or suspected of being affiliated with the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). Thousands of Indonesian students and intellectuals who were studying abroad, especially in Eastern Bloc countries like the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and China, were blocklisted and could no longer return home. Those who voiced criticism of the new regime or refused to sign loyalty pledges were permanently exiled. Jaya, in the film, represents one of these exiles, an idealist who was never allowed to return and spent decades longing for his homeland, which had moved on without him.

Most recently, the film *Vina: Before 7 Days*

(2024) addresses the murder of Vina, a 16-year-old girl from Cirebon, killed by members of a motorcycle gang in 2016. Vina and her boyfriend, Eky (also known as Rizky), are discovered dead on the Talun flyover. Initially, their deaths are misreported as a traffic accident. Yet the extent of injuries and signs of trauma prompt deeper investigation. On the sixth day after their deaths, Vina's friend, Linda, is said to become possessed, enabling Vina's spirit to recount the event: she and Eky were attacked by a motorcycle gang of 12 members, tortured, and Vina was raped, allegedly by Egi, who once had feelings for her. Their bodies were discarded beneath the bridge.

Of course, the film titles above are just a few examples of how film is a very safe medium for instilling human understanding of various things in a very subtle and targeted way (Manalu & Warsana, 2022). Films, with their powerful storytelling and cinematography, play a crucial role in shaping public opinion and exerting pressure on the government (Basu & Sen, 2024). When the media is controlled by specific political or business interests, civil society's ability to voice its issues becomes limited (Garz et al., 2024; Ricknell, 2024). This aligns with Adorno's skepticism about the potential for social emancipation in a capitalist society, as evident in films dominated by the cultural industry and market forces (Butzlaff, 2022). This idea reflects Adorno's critical view that films produced within capitalist systems, particularly those shaped by the

cultural industry, have limited potential to effect genuine social change. Adorno believed that in capitalist societies, cultural products like films are primarily created to generate revenue and entertain large audiences, rather than to challenge social injustices or encourage critical thinking.

He argued that the culture industry turns art into a commodity by using repetitive and familiar storylines that serve to maintain the existing social order. Films that promote social justice often do so in ways that are safe, predictable, and acceptable to the market. As a result, such films rarely challenge the deeper structures of power or offer meaningful alternatives.

The film industry remains influenced by market demands and institutional control. Therefore, while films might raise awareness about specific issues, their ability to support true social emancipation is limited under capitalism, an idea that closely aligns with Adorno's skepticism.

In this way, this article examines how film can serve as a project of emancipation and an alternative form of communicative action for justice in Indonesia. Of course, this involves not just film creativity and cinematography but also the influential role of social media, which changes the courage to speak out from digital aspects, namely digital society (Labidi, 2021; Pirry & Poernomo, 2023; Utami & Wahyuni, 2022). In other words, technological developments have social, political, and cultural implications (Marlowe et al., 2017; Salehan

et al., 2018). This certainly leads to what Walter Benjamin called a complex relationship between technological developments and the emancipation project.

Within the framework of Habermas' theory of communicative action, technology has great potential to support rational and dialogical communication. Technology holds great potential to enhance communicative action when it fosters inclusive, rational, and undistorted communication, supports public deliberation, and provides equitable access to information and discourse. However, this potential can only be realized if technological tools and platforms are governed by ethical principles and democratic norms, resisting tendencies toward commodification, surveillance, or strategic manipulation.

This strengthens the role of films that leverage digital convergence, such as social media, as an alternative means of communication for the emancipation of justice within civil society in Indonesia. Through platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, these films not only reach broader audiences but also stimulate public discourse, mobilize collective awareness, and foster civic engagement beyond traditional media boundaries, encouraging inclusive participation, diverse perspectives, and collaborative problem-solving within an increasingly interconnected global society.

RESEARCH METHOD

In communication studies, film refers to

the analysis and understanding of how films are used as a medium of communication and how their elements convey messages, ideas, and values to the audience. This includes examining narrative structures, visual and auditory symbols, audience reception, and the sociocultural contexts in which films are produced and consumed.

This method involves analyzing and also synthesizing existing literature by identifying, challenging, and refining theories through the examination of one or more previous works (Kraus et al., 2022).

Referring to Table 1 below, the basic steps and important choices involved in conducting a literature review are suggested and discussed through four phases: designing the review, conducting the review, analyzing the review, and writing the review. This process is developed from practical experience and is a synthesis influenced by various standards and guidelines suggested for literature reviews (Snyder, 2019).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As a communication medium that combines audio and visuals, films serve multiple roles, including entertainment, disseminating messages, facilitating learning, and promoting social causes. Film is one of the communication media that is considered effective as a campaign tool, including for social campaigns (Utari, 2022). Film, which combines audio and visual elements, plays a variety of important roles

Table 1 Phases and Methods in Conducting a Literature Review (Adapted from Snyder, 2019)

No	Phase	Key Activities	Methods and Decisions
1	Designing the Review	Define purpose: Explore film as a medium of communication, technology, and social critique.	Focus on how film operates as a medium of communication, education, propaganda, and technology.
		Formulate research questions	How does film function in socio-political critique? - What is the technological and communicative role of film? - How do Benjamin, Adorno, and Habermas explain the impact of film in modern society?
		Select review type	Integrative review combining theoretical analysis and case-based examples (e.g., Vina: Before 7 Days, Sum Kuning)
		Determine scope and boundaries	Film as a medium, art, and technology within political, cultural, and communicative frames
		Identify key sources	Scholarly writings by Benjamin, Adorno, Habermas, and contemporary media studies
2	Conducting the Review	Literature search: Collect works on film and critical theory	Combine keywords: "film and communication", "film and technology", "Walter Benjamin", "Adorno cultural industry", "Habermas communicative action"
		Screen and select studies	Prioritize theoretical contributions and empirical illustrations from Indonesian cinema.
		Document search and logic	Use database (Scopus, JSTOR, Google Scholar), national film references, and critical essays
3	Analyzing the Literature	Extract theoretical and empirical insights	Examine Benjamin's theories of mechanical reproduction, aura, and the democratization of art, as well as Adorno's critique of the cultural industry and Habermas's distinction between communicative and instrumental action in film production and narratives.
		Identify themes	Theme 1: Film as democratized art (Benjamin) - Theme 2: Commodification and mass deception (Adorno) - Theme 3: Rational dialogue and public space in film (Habermas)
		Synthesize patterns and contradictions.	Benjamin sees emancipatory potential; Adorno sees ideological manipulation; Habermas bridges both by advocating rational consensus via communicative action
4	Writing and Reporting	Present a critical discussion	Contrast and complement theories in film case studies (Sum Kuning, Vina: Before 7 Days)
		Reflect on implications	Films as democratizing tools vs. instruments of control; the double-edged nature of technology
		Discuss limitations and future research.	Need for empirical validation of how audiences engage critically with films - Need for exploration of film's participatory role in public discourse.
		Ensure transparency	Cite theoretical texts (Benjamin, Habermas, Adorno), methodological transparency in case selection, and thematic interpretation

Source: Snyder, 2019

in society. Beyond providing entertainment, it functions as a means to convey messages, facilitate learning, and promote social causes. In this context, film is considered an effective medium for campaigning, particularly for advancing social campaigns.

Films typically feature interesting scenes and serve as a medium of entertainment. Films usually present visually and narratively engaging scenes that capture the audience's attention through compelling storytelling, striking cinematography, and memorable

characters. These elements not only stimulate curiosity and evoke emotions but also sustain viewers' interest throughout. While serving as a source of enjoyment, relaxation, and emotional experience, films also act as a medium of entertainment that can subtly convey values, ideas, and cultural messages, making them both an artistic creation and a powerful tool of communication. Beyond entertainment, films serve as the medium for education, criticism, advice, and the dissemination of political, social, cultural, economic, and religious issues (Kasmawati et al., 2024).

Films can also be considered a form of technology, as they result from technological developments that enable the recording, editing, and playback of moving images. Object films are a social practice for both their makers and their audiences: in their narratives and meanings, we can find evidence of the way our culture understands itself.

Film projectors, as a form of projection technology, enable films to be shown on the big screen, bringing the cinematic experience to theaters and other venues. Sound recording, as an innovation in sound technology, encompasses microphones, sound mixers, and sound-image synchronization techniques, enhancing the film-watching experience with high-quality audio. Films are structurally composed of many shots, scenes, and sequences. Each shot requires careful camera placement to best capture the setting and action at a specific moment in the course of the story, which is why a film is

often described as a combination of images assembled into a cohesive unit that tells a story to the audience (Akbar et al., 2017).

Walter Bendix Schoenflies Benjamin was born on July 15, 1892. Benjamin's approach to the symptomatic significance of the 'crisis of art' for the 'crisis of experience' through the concept of Technik shows the fundamentally Marxist character of his view of historical development. For Benjamin, the development of the forces of production is the driving force of history. Benjamin also distinguished between potentially liberating 'first' and 'second' technologies, the latter enabling "highly productive uses of human self-alienation". It is undeniable that works of art, including film production, are always tied to interests in profit, ratings, and Box Office success, which are measured by the number of viewers and the monetary profits obtained. In this dimension, Benjamin shifts his analysis from the economic superstructure to the superstructure of consciousness in the form of art. Benjamin argues that technology enables works of art, including films, to have mass accessibility, allowing them to be reproduced and accessed by the masses (Hardiman, 2021).

Before the era of mechanical reproduction, art was tied to tradition and ritual, having a sacred function. However, in the era of mechanical reproduction, as Benjamin conceived it, there has been a form of liberation of works of art from their parasitic dependence on ritual (Benjamin, 2008). With technology, art (and film) experiences the autonomy of works of art,

namely liberation from these bonds, allowing for new, broader, and more diverse interpretations and meanings. Film, as a modern art medium, is often free from traditional contexts and can convey various narratives and messages that are relevant to contemporary issues. Technology and innovation in the production of works of art in film align with Benjamin's view. Technological developments in film, such as CGI, special effects, and online streaming, have transformed the way films are produced, distributed, and consumed. This technology enables films to reach a global audience, thereby democratizing access to them.

Benjamin views art as a political tool. Film, as a powerful art form, can be used to educate, manipulate, or raise critical awareness among its audience. Films have a political function, which can be a means of propaganda or, conversely, a tool to reveal the truth and challenge the status quo. Films are often used as a medium to convey political and social messages. Documentary films, films with social themes, and films with political content demonstrate how cinema can serve as a tool for social and political change, marking a shift from "magic to politics." Benjamin notices the fading aura. He argues that mechanical reproduction removes the aura of the work of art, specifically the uniqueness and authenticity inherent in the original work. This understanding of aura differs from the natural meaning of aura, which refers to something that "emanates" from natural objects. This natural aura, as explained by Benjamin, is a

form of "phenomenon typical of a distance no matter how close it is" (Benjamin, 2008). In the world of cinema, this can be translated as a loss of authenticity when films are reproduced in large quantities or across multiple platforms. However, this also allows a broader audience to enjoy the work. The impact of changing the function of works of art in Benjamin's dimensions of thinking is that art must be open to transformation and not tied to ritual. In cinema, this is reflected in the diversity of genres and themes that reflect current social, political, and cultural issues.

Film can serve as an effective medium for conveying important issues to the public, mobilizing society, and educating activists about history and issues relevant to their struggle. Films have been used to organize and inspire people in social movements. Additionally, films can influence policymakers and contribute to shaping the direction of public policy. At its core, film is recognized as a valuable tool in social and political struggles, both in creating space for public debate and in strengthening activist communities. Benjamin's statements (insights) are particularly relevant in explaining several ways in which films function as a reflection of reality, including exposure to social and political issues, terrorism and security, environmental crises, mental health and psychological instability, trauma and depression, public health, economic inequality and social injustice, poverty and inequality, oppression and discrimination, technology

and social isolation, technology addiction, dystopia and surveillance, identity crisis and existentialism, the search for meaning, and alienation and loneliness.

The development of film technology and its implications on social, political, and cultural aspects demonstrate that film is not merely a form of entertainment but also a powerful tool for communication, education, and social change. This aligns with Walter Benjamin's concept of the complex relationship between technological developments and the emancipation project. Benjamin explores how media technologies, such as photography and film, alter the way art is produced, distributed, and consumed, significantly impacting human aesthetics. He argues that mechanical reproduction technologies, such as photography and film, transform art from something unique and auratic into something that could be reproduced and accessed on a mass scale (Benjamin, 2008).

Walter Benjamin argues that technology, including film and cinematography, has the potential to make art more revolutionary. Contrary to Theodor Adorno's views, Benjamin, despite being a member of the Frankfurt School, expresses admiration for techniques that other figures, such as Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse, criticized. Adorno was surprised by Benjamin's appreciation of these techniques, believing that Benjamin overlooked the autonomy of art and overemphasized the role of reproductive techniques (Adorno et al., 2007).

In the early era of national film development,

latent characteristics surfaced, as exemplified in the film *Sum Kuning*. This film emerged from public interest in the incident, which occurred ten years prior, as a dramatized reenactment of the 1970 *Sum Kuning* rape case. Produced in 1980 under the title "Perawan Desa (Village Virgin)" and directed by Frank Rorimpandey, the film was banned in Yogyakarta. However, Yati Surachman's portrayal of *Sum Kuning* and the dramatization of the dialogue and storyline effectively evoked strong emotional responses from the audience. The film won the Citra Award for Best Indonesian Film, along with three other accolades: Best Director, Best Editing, and Best Screenplay. Despite its dramatic impact, the film failed to deliver the anticipated justice, with claims that National Police Chief Hoengeng was dismissed for his honest attempts to reveal the truth about the case. Nonetheless, the film succeeded in raising awareness about justice among the public and authorities.

This aligns with Benjamin's thinking, which posits that although mechanical reproductions (such as prints, photographs, or recordings) can create copies that are similar to original works of art, these reproductions cannot substitute for the intrinsic value and meaning of the original. The concept of "here and now" highlights the uniqueness and originality (authenticity) inherent in a work of art within its original context. In other words, mechanical reproduction can reproduce and distribute works of art. However, it cannot reproduce the unique experience and aura that accompany the

original work when encountered in its original environment.

Benjamin argues that the situations in which a mechanical reproduction product is produced may not change the other properties of the work. However, they certainly reduce the value of the “here” and “now” existence of the work of art (Benjamin, 2008). While he recognized the potential for liberation and democratization through technological developments, he also emphasized the critical importance of its use and impact, as well as the necessity of considering the social and political context in which technology operates.

Jürgen Habermas was born in June 1929 and grew up in rural North Rhine-Westphalia, to middle-class parents who were conservatively educated. Habermas defines communicative action in various ways but consistently relates it to reaching consensus based on validity claims. In one place, he describes communicative action as “linguistically mediated interactions in which all participants pursue illocutionary goals and only illocutionary goals.” He argues that instrumental and strategic actions are dependent on communicative action (Finlayson & Rees, 2023).

Habermas’s pragmatic theoretical framework of meaning underpins his social theory. He developed several models of human action, including teleological, normative, dramaturgical, and communicative action. In this typology, Habermas distinguishes actions based on their orientation towards success or

consensus, as well as whether they are social or non-social (Finlayson & Rees, 2023).

Central to Habermas’s typology is the distinction between communicative action and instrumental and strategic action. Habermas emphasizes that while all actions are considered rational, they differ in the type of rationality used, where communicative actions are driven by consensus. In contrast, instrumental and strategic actions are driven by success (Finlayson & Rees, 2023).

In filmmaking, teleological action is evident in the way producers, directors, and screenwriters strive to achieve specific goals, such as completing a film on schedule, within budget, or meeting the criteria for a particular film festival. For example, decisions about location selection, actors, and technology used are instrumental actions that focus on the efficiency and success of film production.

In script development and film production, communicative actions are crucial for creating understanding and agreement among creative team members, including writers, directors, actors, and crew. Discussions regarding script interpretation, scene adjustments, and conveying the film’s message are examples of communicative actions where participants strive to reach a consensus on the film’s vision.

Film is a medium of communication between the audience (viewers) and the creator. When the audience watches a film, they interpret the messages conveyed through the film. Films are often used as a medium to criticize various

social and cultural issues that are currently developing. In this context, communicative actions are seen in the form of critical messages in films (such as morality and politics) that are conveyed to the audience (viewers), which can then provoke discussion and deep contemplation (reflection).

From the explanation above, Habermas' Communicative Action Theory can be used to understand various aspects behind the filmmaking process, including how interactions occur between producers and audiences. Habermas himself has been criticized for characterizing instrumental and strategic action as overly individualistic. The criticisms suggest that the actions taken involve cooperation and are based on shared interests. These criticisms suggest that Habermas's approach may need further justification, and that each individual's actions are more complexly different. Nevertheless, Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action still makes an important contribution to understanding human interaction (communication), including how social action is coordinated. In the context of technology, Habermas' theory provides a framework for understanding how technology can either support or hinder communicative processes in society.

According to Habermas, communicative rationality refers to the type of rationality involved in the communicative use of language,

where actors engage in argumentation aimed at achieving shared understanding and consensus (Habermas, 1984). Communicative rationality is a way of using reason within genuine conversation. It happens when people speak to share meaning, listening to one another, and exchanging reasons openly. In this process, participants present their ideas, explain their reasoning, and allow others to question or challenge them. The aim is not to manipulate or win an argument, but to reach a shared understanding of the issue at hand. When successful, this kind of communication can lead to consensus, where everyone agrees on the truth or validity of certain statements. In short, communicative rationality is reasoning together through honest dialogue to understand and agree, rather than to dominate or outsmart the other person.

In many films, the story that is built often centers on conflict and conflict resolution. In the film *Vina: Before 7 Days* (2024), for example, it shows how the police are moved to reopen an unsolved murder case. The communicative rationality in the film is evident in the deliberations attended by the judges, which feature debate, dialogue, and an effort to reach a mutual agreement (consensus) regarding the final decision. This incident highlights the importance of open and honest dialogue in fostering mutual understanding between individuals.



Source: imdb.com, 2025

Figure 1 Uploaded by IMDbPro

The film, as depicted in the poster in Figure 1 above, which is based on a true story, tells the story of a young woman named Vina (16 years old), from Cirebon, who was murdered by a motorcycle gang in 2016. The case has again garnered public attention following the film's release and subsequent viral spread. With the release of this film, netizens are looking for information about three fugitives who are members of a motorcycle gang and the masterminds behind the heinous crime. The police are hunting for the three fugitives who have been on the run for eight years. This tragic story has not only reignited public concern but has also spurred the authorities to take renewed action on a case that had been forgotten. On its 41st day of release, *Vina: Before 7 Days* had attracted 5,815,403 viewers, according to an Instagram post by Dee Company, as quoted by *Kompas.TV* on Tuesday, June 18, 2024. The

film currently ranks second among the best-selling Indonesian films of 2024, behind the film *Agak Laen*. The release of the film *Vina: Before 7 Days* generated both support and criticism among the Indonesian public. The film, based on the true story of a murder and rape case in Cirebon, has sparked widespread discussion on social media. Not a few of them even criticized the film *Vina: Before 7 Days* because they considered it exploiting the victim's grief. As a result of the film's impact, the Vina Cirebon case has resurfaced, leading the police to renew their search for several suspects who are still at large. The case has gained renewed attention with the emergence of new facts, and Dee Company producers Dheeraj Kalwani and Anggy Umbara have been summoned by the police for questioning in connection with the case.

This film has opened a new realm of

dialogue, engaging millions of viewers and fostering a deeper understanding of communication dynamics, social interaction, and the pursuit of shared understanding in film narratives. This aligns with Habermas's distinction between strategic action, where actors pursue individual goals through calculated means, and communicative action, which is oriented toward achieving understanding and agreement through dialogue (Habermas, 1984).

The power of the authorities or concealed parties obstructing the legal process in Vina's case appears to be "diminishing (weakening)" due to the widespread public interest generated by the film, a product of modern technology. The influence of certain authorities or hidden groups that have been obstructing the legal process is weakening. This shift is primarily driven by the strong public attention sparked by a film about the case, a creation made possible by modern technology. As the film gains widespread attention and sparks public interest, it becomes increasingly complex for those in power to continue obstructing the pursuit of justice. Its integration into a social context can either facilitate or hinder communicative action (Habermas, 1984).

Analyzing the impact of the film *Vina: Before 7 Days*, film technology emerges as an alternative medium for restoring communication as the foundation of democracy. This could make the Indonesian film community a civil society force, akin to Aristotle's concept of *koinonia* politics, a civil society intrinsically

linked to the polis. In this city-state, political society or community resides. In that order, the film community becomes what Aristotle mentioned, where the politics of *koinonia* reflect ideal political and ethical conditions, with standards ensuring equal standing before the law. The foundation of democracy must, of course, be understood as a healthy democracy requiring a public space where citizens can engage in free and open discussions to reach rational consensus and collective decisions (Habermas, 1987). The essence of a healthy democracy lies in the existence of a public space where citizens can freely and openly engage in dialogue. In this space, individuals exchange ideas, express opinions without fear, and participate in discussions aimed at achieving rational consensus. Through such communicative interaction, collective decisions can be made that reflect the shared understanding and reasoned agreement of the community, rather than the dominance of particular groups or interests.

CONCLUSION

Films have the potential to encourage social and political change, with a focus on legal cases where the authorities often silence civil society. By referring to the thoughts of Walter Benjamin and Jürgen Habermas, film serves as a rational and dialogical medium that can facilitate emancipation through digital convergence and social media.

The Indonesian government and film

industry should support the production of films that address pertinent social, political, and legal issues. Such films can raise public awareness and stimulate discussions on justice and emancipation. With the development of technology, filmmakers can use social media and streaming platforms to expand (broaden) the reach of their films. This will make it easier for audiences to access and discuss the various messages conveyed in the film, while also providing space for voices from marginalized or minority groups.

Meanwhile, for films to have a significant social impact, filmmakers can establish collaborations with both social activists and social organizations. This collaboration aims to ensure that the films produced are relevant to the struggle being pursued, as well as convey a clear and strong message to the audience.

The audience and public also need to continue being educated and advocating for the important role of films in achieving social change. This includes fostering critical media literacy, enabling viewers to interpret and engage with film content beyond mere entertainment, and understand the social, political, and cultural messages embedded in cinematic narratives. By cultivating an informed and conscious audience, films can serve as more effective catalysts for awareness, dialogue, and collective action. Ultimately, this process contributes to the formation of a society that is not only responsive to social issues but also actively participates in transformative change. The audience and

public also need to continue being educated and advocating for the important role of films in achieving social change. Empowering the public with the knowledge and tools to analyze films critically enables them to become active participants in societal transformation. When audiences are aware of the communicative power of cinema, they are more likely to support, share, and create content that amplifies social justice, human rights, and democratic values. The audience and public also need to continue being educated and advocating for the important role of films in achieving social change. This is essential not only to broaden their understanding of film as a medium of social discourse but also to encourage a sense of responsibility in consuming and responding to media. Educated viewers are better equipped to engage in meaningful dialogue, challenge dominant narratives, and demand more inclusive and socially responsible storytelling.

This effort can be done, for example, through open discussions, seminars, or special programs related to the impact of films on the social and cultural life of the community. The government and the film industry can facilitate public access to films that convey social messages, for example, by hosting film screenings in public spaces, film festivals, or other events where the audience can easily view these films.

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