

To Shoot or Not to Shoot: Health protocols in Indonesian Film Industry Thriving Sustainable Business during Pandemic

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Abstract

Globally, the film industry decreased significantly due to COVID-19, starting in March 2020. Physical distancing, lockdown protocols, and other restricted regulations were applied. Vaccines were just founded and were not massively distributed. At that time, no official health protocols nor standard operating procedures regarding film production and movie theaters were applied in the "New Normal." The filmmaking businesses were threatened since film productions were restricted and movie theaters were closed down. The big dilemma occurred: which one was the priority: the safety of the crews and talents or the sustainability of national film industry? However, in 2021 there were some signs of progress. It started with *Makmum 2* (December 2021), which obtained more than one million viewers. It is followed by *Ku Kira Kau Rumah* (February 2022) and *KKN Desa Penari* (April 2022), which reached 2,2 million and 3 million viewers, respectively. In prestigious film festivals, the movies such as *Seperti Dendam*, *Rindu Harus Dibayar Tuntas*, and *Yuni* won as the best pictures at Locarno Film Festival (August 2021) and Toronto Film Festival (September 2021), respectively. Many films showed cases in Festival Film Indonesia (December 2021). These have shown that the Indonesian film industry is becoming better commercially and critically. The paper investigates how the Indonesian filmmakers tried to adjust to the New Normal era from both creative works and business strategy perspectives. In particular, the authors will do the mapping on the best practices of health protocols applied in film production.

Keywords

Film industry, business strategy, health protocols, COVID-19 pandemic, Indonesian movies

1. Introduction

The emergence of COVID-19, starting in early March 2020 until recently, has challenged and shaped the usual routine of every aspect of life. The pandemic forced most cities globally to do lockdown and entered the "New Normal" era. In Indonesia, the film industry back in 2020, where vaccines were just founded and not massively distributed, the movie theatres were closed down, and film productions were stopped due to strict physical distancing and limited mobility protocols (*PSBB – Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar*). There were no standard operating procedures for conducting film shooting in pandemic situations.

Based on a report from Filminonesia.or.id (2020), it can be seen that all films released after the lockdown did not reach above 300 thousand viewers, as shown in numbers 11 to 15 (Film Indonesia, 2020). However, there were interesting facts about some new films in the following year. *Makmum 2*, released in December 2021, reached 1,7 million viewers and became the first film with over one million viewers during the pandemic. It is followed by *Nussa*, a feature-length animated film released in October 2021, which reached almost 450 thousand spectators. Another film,

Yowis Ben 3 (released in November 2021), followed, with around 400 thousand audiences (Film Indonesia, 2021). In early 2022, the situation was better commercially. *Ku Kira Kau Rumah* (February 2022) and *KKN Desa Penari* (April 2022) have reached 2,2 million and 3 million, respectively (Film Indonesia, 2022).

Moreover, in 2021 some Indonesian films achieved international recognition, particularly *Seperti Dendam, Rindu Harus Dibayar Tuntas* (*Vengeance All Mine, Others Pay Cash*), won Golden Lion in Locarno Film Festival (August 2021), as well as *Yuni*, won Platform Awards at Toronto Film Festival (September 2021). *Penyalin Cahaya* (The Photocopier) was the winner of the 2021 Indonesian Film Festival, which was held offline in December 2021. All those movies were shot during the pandemic.

The above facts show that the Indonesian film industry has adapted to the New Normal situation. They have formulated particular ways of health protocols to produce the films. The paper will try to elaborate on how the filmmakers adapt to the pandemic condition and still produce films to turn the devastating state of the film industry and eventually reach sustainability in their business. It is expected that the analysis of the practices can enrich the knowledge and skills of practicing health protocols to be sustained in the business not only in the film industry but also can be adopted in other entertainment industries.

1.1 Objectives

The research aims to find answers to the best practices of film production during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research objectives are twofold: (1) to discuss how the filmmakers designed and enforced the health protocols during film production. (2) to analyze the business strategy that has been applied according to the practices during film production.

2. Literature Review

The emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic that started in early March 2020 until recently has challenged and shaped the routine of every aspect of life. The pandemic has forced people globally to limit their mobility, enforce lockdown, and adapt to a "New Normal" situation.

2.1 Movie Production during Pandemic: How the Health Protocols Applied

In the film industry, back in 2020, when the vaccines and health protocols were not available, movie theaters were forced to close down. Besides, film productions were also on hold due to strict physical distancing and health protocols.

Looking at the movie production abroad, in Hollywood, Los Angeles (LA), United States, movie production has also faced a shutdown because of the pandemic waves. The pandemic has cleared the streets and LA's production industry. The city had to suspend many shoots from early March 2020 until June during the lockdowns. Since then, the LA production workers have been designated as the "essential workers" to resume production (Williams, 2020). The term essential workers refer to key workers or those who conduct a range of essential operations and services to continue critical infrastructure operations (NCSL, 2021). Usually, they are who work such as in the sector of energy, child care, critical retail (e.g., grocery stores, mechanics), critical traders (e.g., construction workers, electricians, plumbers), transportation, and more.

Moreover, it is reported by Williams (2020) that to avoid the spread of the disease, some protocols were in place, such as health screenings, social distancing, and providing personal protective equipment. These conditions of "New Normal" for conducting the health and safety protocols undoubtedly have caused more time needed and more cost spent on the production. It is reported that a producer, Justin Begnaud, needed to modify the script to increase social distancing and cut some production costs, which made an increment of 25% of the total costs.

Some extra precautions were conducted as well. It included an entire medical staff on set, temperature screenings for anyone on the set, personal protective tools for everyone, biweekly coronavirus tests for cast and crew, quarantining cast and crew if travel is needed, and a new logistics system (Williams, 2020).

Not only do the changes impact the costs, but also workplace culture. In a production of the fifth season of a TV series, "S.W.A.T.," there were only three groups of cast and crew allowed on the set. The group that interacts most with the actors is the most controlled, as the actors were often not wearing face masks or safety gear. According to an actress

in an interview (as stated by Williams, 2020), her cosmetologists are more resemble medical professionals as the makeup artists should wear masks, face shields, and scrubs. Even though it felt different, the actress admitted that the efficiency of the new protocols on the set was impressive. Some new guidelines did compromise some camaraderie onset; however, they also created a more controlled and comfortable environment on set. It is shown that the amount of time spent by the cast and crew is far less than before the pandemic, which was 10 hours instead of 15 (Williams, 2020).

The earlier section mentioned some phenomena that show the film industry has adapted to the New Normal situation. The industry formulated some particular ways of health protocols to produce the movies.

2.2 The Loss Experienced by Film Industry during Pandemic

Film, as one of the creative industries also hit by the pandemic. Globally, the film industry was hit very hard in the past two years of the pandemic. However, even though it bounces back, it still takes time until it is fully recovered. In the UK, because of the close-down of cinemas, the annual admission has been reported to be the lowest. The UK's biggest chain Cineworld reported a loss of \$3 billion in 2020 (Sweeney, 2021).

According to Wawan Rusiawan, Director of Strategic Studies at the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, since April 2020, the Indonesian film industry started to decrease and eventually was in big collapsed. PSBB was applied and, in consequence, film productions were stopped, and movie theaters were closed down indefinitely. *Produk Domestik Bruto* (PDB, Gross Domestic Product) of Film, Animation and Video film is estimated to grow negatively at 0.03 percent, which is a national threat for the industry involving about 42 thousand workers (Tim Film Indonesia, 2021).

Ten of ready-to-screen films were postponed starting the end of March 2020, including *KKN di Desa Penari*, *Tersanjung the Movie*, *Malik & Elsa*, *Tarung Sarung*, *Serigala Langit*, and *Generasi 90-an: Melankolia*. Most of the titles were decided to be screened on online platforms, and some of them waited until movie theaters were open (Tim FilmIndonesia, 2021).

Chairperson of *Asosiasi Produser Film Indonesia* (Aprofi, Association of Indonesian Film Producers), Edwin Nazir, stated that the Indonesian film industry in 2020 lost up to IDR 1,6 trillion just for the loss of potential income from movie theaters tickets, let alone the increase of film production costs and the failures of some well-planned film productions. To get the big picture, *The Doll 3* has lost around IDR 1 billion due to postponing its production (Tim FilmIndonesia, 2021).

Nazir states that filming activities started to get regular, with some adjustments due to the New Normal situation after the Joint Decree of the Ministers of Education and Culture and the Ministers of Tourism and Creative Economy was issued on July 2, 2020. The decree includes protocols and technical guidelines on audiovisual production. However, consequently, the production budget increases by up to 10 percent for the cost of health protocol (Tim FilmIndonesia, 2021).

2.3 Sustainable Business Strategy in the Era of New Normal

Ten sustainable business strategies can be applied to face the challenge in the new normal era. Each strategy offers its option to balance between gaining profitable business and high sustainable value. Followings are the ten sustainable business strategies that can be relevant to be applied in the Indonesian context (Arief et al., 2021).

Table 1. Options of Business Strategies in the Era of New Normal (Arief et al., 2021)

The Strategy Options	Description
Business continuity	It requires a new strategy to continue the economy and business activities, especially in the tourism and hospitality industries (Gyimothy et al., 2020)
Business to business (B2B)	As the impacts of the pandemic include difficulty in livelihoods and high unemployment, various trading strategies through B2B can be a promising option (Crick et al., 2020)
Opportunity	It is reported that the positive impact of the pandemic is on the increasing social cooperation and responsibility among business people, which can be a new opportunity for new business strategies (Fernandez, 2020; Buheji et al., 2020)
Rethink	Running a business in uncertain times because of a pandemic requires a distinctive strategy to enable the business to face difficulties. Rethinking and redesigning strategies can be relevant with a sustainable and adaptable approach during and post-pandemic era (Donthu et al., 2020)
Lesson learned	It is a learning strategy, whereas business people should not only see the negative sides of the pandemic. Entering the new normal requires strategic adjustments and adaptations to achieve a profitable business while accepting the natural change and settings (Craven et al., 2020)
Work from home	Companies and governments have employed this strategy since the beginning of the pandemic. It is considered a strategic policy as it adopts a healthy protocol of working to avoid the virus spreading (Bick et al., 2020)
Effective policy	Applying the right policies and strategies to lead businesses on a sustainable path into a new normal era (Caroll et al., 2020)
New Mindset	It is a mindset that can adapt to new normal and post-pandemic conditions. A new mindset is required to enable businesses running to survive and remain sustainable (Chan et al., 2018)
Strategic flexibility	It is a flexible approach that requires innovation in the business to enter the new normal and post-pandemic era. For example, by adopting technology and strengthening the human resources (Ahmad et al., 2020)
Understanding new business	The understanding of business strategy that focuses on objectives, availability of sufficient venture capital, and specialization in a particular business that has less competition (Agyapong et al., 2013)

3. Methods

The qualitative method was carried out as the research method to answer the research questions. The data were extracted from the interviews with some informants, then analyzed using a qualitative technique developed by Miles and Huberman (1994). The analysis consisted of open coding that developed into categories, and subsequent conclusions were drawn (Miles et al., 1994).

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), a qualitative analysis consists of three processes: data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions and getting verification. The following table describes all the activities carried out and the source of documentation used in the research.

Table 2. The process of data analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994)

Process	Activities	Source of documents
Data reduction	Giving codes to the initial data set Adding comments and reflecting Identifying similar patterns, themes, phrases, and differences between sub-groups and/or groups	Interview transcripts Data coding Memo
Data display	Developing data matrix and data display Identifying sets of generalizations	Spreadsheet analysis of responses
Conclusion and verification	Linking the generalizations to theories or constructs Summary development	Expert panel Theoretical links

4. Data Collection

The data collection was undertaken using webinar interviews (*Diskusi Publik*). Film Committee ran the webinar at Jakarta Art Council (where the first author currently serves as the committee's chairperson). The informants were Shanty Harmayn (CEO of Base, producer of *Akherat: A Love Story*) and Fajar Nugross (CEO of IDN Pictures, director of *Yowis Ben 3* and *Balada Si Roy*). Both filmmakers shared their experiences at the webinar regarding the health protocols applied during the film production. Despite the standard of health protocol (such as physical distancing, limited crew, wearing masks, hand sanitizers, swab/antigen test, etcetera), the authors will try to find out other systems, particularly for film production, such as *Zonasi/Ring* system and *Bubble* system.

5. Results and Discussion

In the early days of the pandemic, in 2020, Indonesian filmmakers tried to adjust their modes of production. At that time, vaccines started to be campaigned for and were not evenly distributed. The strict lockdown was applied, and there was no official SOP or health protocols for the creative industry production, let alone film production. Local filmmakers needed to find out, by trial and error, how to produce their films. Movie theaters were closed, and they got a dilemma between crews and talents' safety and healthiness and the sustainability of their respective production houses.

Nonetheless, film productions were going on. Among others, *Ashiap* and *Cinta Pertama Kedua Ketiga* were among the first. Other films include *Yowis Ben 3* and *Akherat: A Love Story*. The paper will focus on the latter titles. *Akherat* was in the final stage of pre-production, and *Yowis Ben 3* was on its third day of shooting when the government officially announced the first *Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar* (PSBB, lockdown)¹.

Based on the public discussion held by Dewan Kesenian Jakarta (2021), we can conclude that there are some similarities in acts regarding the design and application of health protocols during pandemic (2020-2021). Both the production team had *Satuan Tugas* (Task Force) COVID-19 and the medical team. The job was to make sure that health protocols were enforced, particularly during the shooting days. The activities included a reminder for washing hands, temperature checkings, and random sampling of swab tests (which were very expensive). The following subchapters will discuss particular health protocols applied in their respective productions.

5.1. The Case of *Akherat: A Love Story*

Akherat: A Love Story took 20 days to shoot. Shanty Harmayn, one of the film producers, stated that there are at least two keywords for the pandemic situation: Preparation (pre-production) and good production design. One of the aims was to make sure that the shooting location could accommodate the crews and production needs. As Harmayn states:

¹ Starting with the closing of entertainment and public spaces on March 14, Jakarta Provincial Government officially applied total lockdown on April 17, 2020. <https://metro.tempo.co/read/1417826/kaleidoskop-2020-jalan-panjang-wabah-covid-19-di-jakarta/full&view=ok>

“In the time of crisis, health and safety are the top priority. So we need to adjust/change some scenes/locations without losing the elements of creativity and still based on the script” (Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 2021).

Many factors need to be considered due to the New Normal Situation. Since crews and talent's health and safety are the priority, they need to design everything--including the shooting location, risk assessment, insurance, and inviting the doctors to the set for a medical checkup--to ensure that everybody was secured and comfortable. Moreover, the crisis mode should be turned on.

On March 16, the day the first PSBB was announced, they were preparing for shooting at the final prep level on April 9. However, they had to postpone the shooting and reconsider everything since they needed to redesign everything to adjust to the New Normal. This included the new shooting dates, budget implications, and rescheduling of crews and talents. It is important to note that Antigen Test was not familiar among film workers at that time. Harmayn states that:

"We need to design health protocol based on the production's needs and review the previous plan to be suitable with the pandemic situation" (Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 2021).

One of the critical decisions was to redesign the production and move everything from Jakarta to Bogor to avoid crews and talents commuting.

One of the most critical decisions is the cluster system. They designed five rings of the shooting area. Ring 1 is the set or shooting area; Ring 2 is the waiting room for talents and crews and video villages, and so on (see Figure 1 below).

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Pembagian Ring

Diberlakukan untuk mengurangi kontak langsung dengan orang banyak dan penumpukan kru di suatu area tertentu. Pergantian keluar masuk set akan dilakukan secara bergilir sesuai urutan prioritas kerja.

- **Full Access**
Produser, LP, Sutradara, Astrada, Petugas khusus yang ditunjuk
- **Ring 1**
Set: Chief Department, Talents, Kru pendukung yang ditunjuk oleh Chief
- **Ring 2**
Video Village, stand by crew
- **Ring 3**
Talent Room, Wardrobe & Hair Make Up Room, Production & Unit Basecamp, Catering
- **Ring 4**
Extras Waiting Room
- **Ring 5**
Parking Site, Driver, Genset, Pengawal

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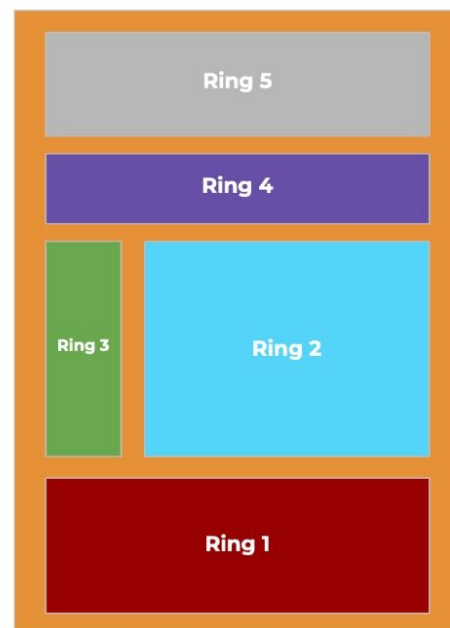


Figure 1. Cluster System in *Akherat: A Love Story* (Iskandar, 2022)

As shown in the webinar video (Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 2021), they also had a disinfectant chamber beside the standard health protocols. Furthermore, random sampling of the Swab Test was taken twice a week for 5-10 crews and talents in each cluster to track down and monitor whether the set was secure and conducive. The expensive PCR test was part of the production budget.

The other important thing was to communicate to the location owner or manager—besides the crews and talents—that the production team already designed health protocols properly, so they do not need to worry about the spreading of COVID19 due to the crowd or lack of physical distancing.

In addition, the producers need to be "expect the unexpected" awareness and get ready to do improvisation for the worst scenario, and be problem solvers. In *Akherat's* case, an actor tested positive only two days before the shooting days. So, it was a hectic situation to find a new actor in two days.

Harmayn also underlines that since vaccines are available in many locations, it should be one of the requirements to complement the PCR test. Furthermore, health insurance, which is expensive but essential, is obligatory for film production.

5.2. The Case of *Yowis Ben 3* and *Balada Si Roy*.

Fajar Nugross, the director of *Yowis Ben 3* and *Balada Si Roy*, also thinks health protocols are essential during the pandemic. In addition, for *Balada Si Roy*, all crews and talents needed to have at least the first vaccine certificate, and the production team would help them find the vaccine's location, if necessary. According to Nugross, health and safety regulations are needed to create a safe and comfortable atmosphere among actors and crews to maintain their good mood.

“We need to make sure that all crews and talents focus on the story and production, instead of the COVID19 situation” (Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 2021)

Yowis Ben 3 was already shot in Malang for three days before the Mayor of Malang decided to apply lockdown as non-Malang people had to return home. So, the production was stopped to rethink and redesign the situation before they decided to continue shooting a year later, with a bigger budget adjusting to the pandemic, particularly for health protocols.

Nugross had to lead 195 people and 341 persons for *Yowis Ben 3* and *Balada Si Roy*, respectively. And the shooting locations were in outside Jakarta (Solo, Banyuwangi, Surabaya, Malang, and Kediri for *Yowis Ben 3*; and Bandar Lampung, Serang, Rangkas Bitung, for *Balada Si Roy*). That means crews and casts did not return home and stayed in one place. With this situation, Nugross could apply a Bubble quarantine system, where everybody stayed in particular hotels, and the producer could limit their mobility strictly to the hotels they stayed in.

Like Harmayn, the production of both films also applied rings or cluster systems as can be seen in Figure 2 and Figure 3 below.

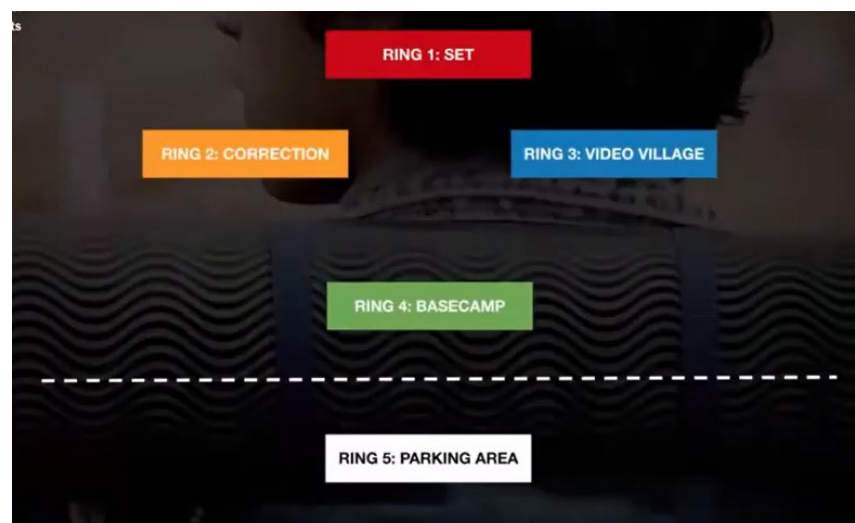


Figure 2. Rings or Cluster Systems (Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 2021)

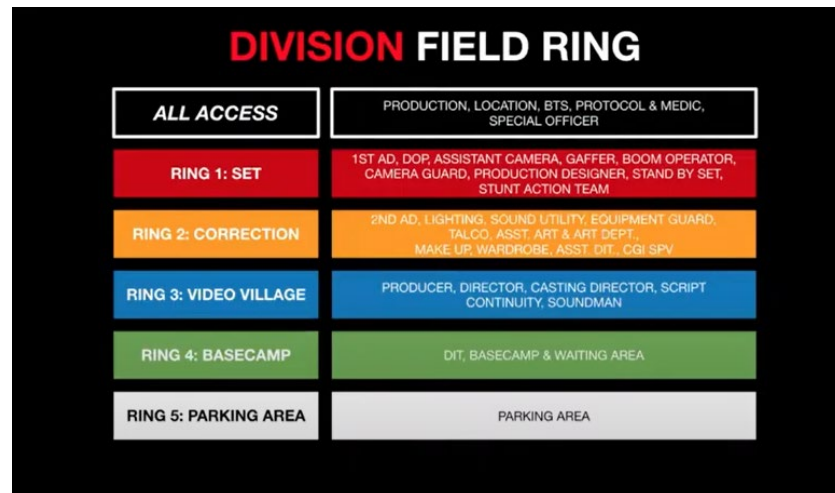


Figure 3. Division of Field Rings Systems (Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 2021)

As a result, the production of the films being analyzed applied two systems to prevent the COVID19 from spreading. In addition, a random sampling swap test was taken every week. There were seven members of the Task Force and medical teams in the production. Interestingly, based on *Yowis Ben's* production experience, in *Balada Si Roy*, the Task Force members were not allowed to become friends with talents and crews to maintain strictness and law enforcement, particularly the use of masks. The job of the Task Force was to make sure that all health protocols—wearing masks, physical distancing, washing hands—were applied, as well as to make sure that ring regulations were not broken. If someone was tested reactive for antigen test, they needed a PCR test to ensure the results (Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 2021).

The results of random samples of the Swab test for both film productions are as follows:

For *Yowis Ben 3*, the second test revealed that three persons tested positive, while for the third and fourth test two crews, there were two cases and one case, respectively. The fifth, or the last test, was zero cases. Hence, the production team needed to improvise and be problem solvers, considering that the more they stayed in the hotel, the more expensive the budget would be. So, they always need to improvise to ensure the production is still running according to the plan, while the positive ones should be quarantined in separate places (Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 2021).

For *Balada Si Roy*, with a more significant number of crew and talents, they shot the film for 33 days. They found that 13 tested positives for the second test, most of them were drivers from the previous production. So, the positive ones needed to be quarantined, and their expenses were covered in the film budgeting. Therefore, the producer needs to spare unforeseen expenses, particularly for health protocol matters. However, they did not pass the virus to another cluster since the regulations were enforced (Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 2021).

For the third test, six-person tested positive were the same person from the last test. Furthermore, no positive result was found in the last three tests since they were at the same respective clusters during the production.

Again, in the pandemic situation, the filmmakers need to do improvisation and expect unforeseen situations. There was a case when an actress in one production tested positive just three days before the shooting began. Therefore, they need to find a substitute actor in a limited time (Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 2021).

5.3 Analysis of Business Strategies Applied

Referring to the options provided in the earlier section and looking at the analyses of health protocols adopted in the movies production above, it can be seen that the producers have applied some business strategies to ensure the sustainable business is in place. In both films production, the health protocols applied show the strategies of rethink, effective policy and strategic flexibility.

Rethink strategy should always be in place during the production of both films in order to create a safety and health condition for everyone on set. Creating the system for health protocols, such as cluster or ring system in *Akherat: A love story*, *Yowis Ben 3* and *Balada Si Roy*, was an example of rethink and redesign process to create and ensure a comfortable atmosphere for all casts and crews. In particular, for the production of *Yowis Ben 3* and *Balada Si Roy*, as the shooting of these films have been taken in different cities. The complexities of the problems require complexities of the protocols as well.

The existence of COVID-19 task force on set, has been very crucial to ensure effective strategy can be maintained. The policies and strategies of setting up the health protocols should always be controlled by the task force. Clusters or Rings regulations were also part of the effective strategies to ensure that health protocols were in place and everyone complied and adopted the protocols.

In the production of *Akherat: A love story*, the producer emphasized that preparation (pre-production) and good design of production should be in place. As making the health and safety to be the top priority, that they need to adjust and change some scenes or locations of the film, show the flexibility that should be maintained. It shows the ability of the leaders in those productions to achieve success without jeopardize the crews and casts of the movie. When someone got infected by the virus, the producers should come up with alternatives to improvise the best scenario for the production (which happened in all films production above).

6. Conclusion

Many industries experience setbacks due to the pandemic, and the film industry is no exception. There are many forms of adaptations and changes made by business people in this industry. It ranges from the following changes in patterns in film consumption (from the big screen/theatrical to virtual screening), changes in movie sales and distribution (OTT) patterns, to how to keep producing films amidst the challenges of the spread of the Covid-19.

The paper focuses on the discussion of the latter, which is on how the Indonesian filmmakers were trying to find the right patterns or protocols in producing the film and practicing business strategy. The best practices are needed so that production efficiency can be achieved (not over budget), minimize the spreading of the virus, and finish the movie promptly.

During the pandemic situation, particularly in 2020, filmmakers were in a dilemma: to shoot or not to shoot. On the one hand, the situation was challenging during a lockdown: physical distancing was firmly applied, movie theaters were closed down, no SOP/health protocols were formulated, PCR tests were costly, and vaccines were not nationally circulated. On the other hand, the sustainability of the film industry should happen as production houses need to make films they already planned. Hence filmmakers need to formulate a film production atmosphere where all crews and talents feel safe and comfortable and focus on film production based on their respective roles.

Both Harmayn and Nugross highlight the importance of designing and applying health protocols regarding film production during the pandemic. The health and safety of all crews and talents are the most important; therefore, filmmakers need to design good preparation and ensure the application. Moreover, maintaining the excellent mood of everybody is also crucial. The protocols have reflected the business strategies adopted which are rethink, effective policy and strategic flexibility to ensure the sustainable business in this industry.

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