

# Seeing the Issue of the Climate Crisis from the Lens of an Indonesian Documentary Video

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**Abstract.** The documentary is one of the efforts of environmental activists in addressing the message of environmental conservation, especially about the climate crisis. As a medium of communication, film has the advantage of being complete audio, visually delivered verbally and non-verbally. The message of environmental conservation through documentary videos becomes important to be delivered sustainably. It becomes important because, environmental damage is increasingly widespread along with daily human activities. Data shows that the main factor causing the climate crisis is human behavior. Serious and massive action is needed to avoid the worst effects of the climate crisis. Environmental communication with documentary video media aims to try to awaken the audience to the importance of environmental sustainability by doing development in a sustainable manner. Theories about environmental communication, naturalizing culture and the concept of environmental literacy are references in this study. The research analysis unit is a video entitled "Deforestasi Tanpa Henti", "Mutualisme", "Sesak" and "Muara Gembong". This research aims to find out the message of environmental concern contained in selected documentary videos by looking at: choice of themes, selection of sources, characterization and other technical matters. It was found that the four documentaries had different themes, variations of the theme: "it's how the west was won", "boundaries between animals and humans are important and should be enforced" and "humans as both destroyers and saviors of nature". Documentary storylines are not docudrama. Only 1 documentary funded independently by the community, namely Muara Gembong: Sebatang Pohon Untuk Kehidupan. Only 1 documentary was found with a focus on NGO sources: "Deforestasi Tanpa Henti" while the other documentaries built a narrative with fairly complete sources.

**Keywords:** Video, Environment, Climate Crisis

## 1 Introduction

The central aspect of environmental themed documentaries is the environmental subject from various aspects. In the study of documentary films, the documentary is understood not only as a tool for disseminating knowledge but as a response to ideas, beliefs and emotions that arise in the process of audio-visual research into the environment. This process, like many themes of social documentaries, involves the filmmaker who understands that he is not only engaged but also involved [1].

Film is a medium that intersects with the modernity it critiques, and thus filmmakers must acknowledge involvement in the theme of environmental change on both a professional and personal level. Therefore, filmmakers should try to limit and justify the role of filmmaking in

environmental degradation through what the film has to offer about the global spread of environmental awareness. Documentary films with environmental themes can be distinguished according to the tone of response that the makers represent. In the discussion of genre and fashion, environmental themed documentaries are defined through aesthetic categories and engagement strategies with the subject. However, the documentary might be more defined as a communicative response in a dialogue with many debates taking place in the fields of environmental communication, environmental education and environmental psychology. In this case, the documentary can be understood as an ambivalent or contemplative, ironic or argumentative response in responding to awareness of the complexity of the issue [1]. Documentary films with environmental themes that are able to encourage social movements provide access to realistic changes and provide access to solutions in different contexts [2].

Documentary films are understood as one of the choices of communication media. Talking about the media does not escape talking about exposure as one of the expected goals in media. Media exposure (documentary films) has been shown to be a strong determinant of social behavior. This can effectively induce positive outcomes, such as prosocial behavior, but it can also lead to negative outcomes, such as aggression or risk-taking behavior [3]. In terms of environmental concerns, the available evidence suggests that the media are part of the problem, but may not easily be used to become part of the solution. Communicating through documentaries with environmental themes can arouse attention and desire to take action [4].

Environmental communication (campaign) with film medium and social media distribution platform is actually nothing new. Environmental campaigns have often been carried out by various parties with the same goal of trying to make the public aware of the importance of environmental sustainability by carrying out sustainable development. The different ways of communicating and interpreting messages about environmental conservation and sustainable development are always interesting to study. Film is a powerful medium for evoking emotions and transporting people across places and times. Information and education are also the communicative goals of film media. Environmental messages spread through videos and films can be reached by organizations, activists, and artists with only simple tools [5].

Environmental themes that often appears in art product is created as a response of the filmmaker to social, economic, political, and cultural situation [6]. According to Corbett [7], Films with the theme of environment and sustainable development consist of various themes as follows:

- a) Humans as both destroyers and saviors of nature.
- b) Science can solve and can save.
- c) Nature as a human test.
- d) Natural events as demonic other.
- e) Boundaries between Animals and humans are important and should be enforced.
- f) Nature battles as allegories of progress.
- g) It's how the west was won.
- h) The tribal is synonymous with the natural.
- i) Animals starring as humans.

Film is one of the communication media to convey the message of environmental conservation and sustainable development. Environmental communication means pragmatic and constitutive modes of expression — naming, shaping, orienting, and negotiating — our ecological relationships in the world, including those that have nonhuman systems, elements, and species. Environmental communication has two distinct functions: First, environmental communication is pragmatic: It consists of verbal and nonverbal modes of interaction that convey instrumental goals. Pragmatic communication greets, informs, demands, promises,

asks, educates, reminds, persuades, refuses, and more. Second, environmental communication is constitutive: It requires verbal and nonverbal modes of interaction that shape, direct, and negotiate meanings, values, and relationships. Constitutive communication invites certain perspectives, evokes certain beliefs and feelings (and not others), fosters certain ways of relating to others, and thereby creates vivid feelings that may move us [8].

Film is one of the cultural artifacts, environmental communication is also inseparable from culture as its context. Donald Carbaugh put forward the Naturalizing Culture theory of how language shapes meaning about the universe. The starting point is that communication, as traditionally conceptualized, forms a binary. Carbaugh argues that natural and cultural systems help shape each other and radically influence each other. Environmental communication is not just one type of communication that is occasionally generated — rather, it is a dimension in all systems of communication practice [9].

Documentary, in the opinion of Bill Nichols in his book *Representing Reality* (1991), as quoted by Chandra et al. [10] is an attempt to retell an event or reality, using facts and data. Events or reality, in this case, are seen by filmmakers so that they form opinions that are packaged in the film medium by storytelling. Expository documentary, displays messages to the audience directly, through a presenter or narration in the form of text or sound. The narrator speaks in the third person to the audience, who explains what happened in the scene by giving context to the visual and sound texts that are displayed so that they don't get separated and remain intertwined in a complete storytelling stitch that is continuous with each other. Expository documentaries do not interweave images based on time continuity, but rather as supporting arguments conveyed through narration or presenters [10].

Expository documentary in Chandra et al. [10] view, documentary maker should position himself as a propagandist, who raises dramatic themes from the life around him as a social obligation or contribution to the environment and culture. In addition, the position of a documentary is not as a mirror but a tool to hit (warn to be aware) [10]. The expository form of composing didactic arguments, tends to present information directly to the audience, and often directs conclusions directly in a good or bad position based on a certain moral order, to avoid misinterpretation of the audience. The strength of constructing context building in expository lies in the narrative systematics that have been tightly constructed. Thus, the most basic drawback is of course if the sound element that embodies the narrative is turned off, then the visual structure becomes meaningless and loses its coherence [10]. Altman (2000) dan Langford (2005) as quoted Hutomo et al. [11] mentions that genres are defined by the film industry and then recognized by a broad audience. One of them said that documentary is one of the interesting genres to discuss.

According to Manzo [12], certain types of films, especially science documentaries involve environmental science. In doing so, documentaries must not hold to a higher standard than science itself, which is not expected to reveal the whole truth and be perfect. Debates about data interpretation, logos, and so on are inevitable. However, such films can, and should be held to photographic standards of honesty, openness and honesty. The indexical nature of documentaries is a matter of accuracy and trustworthiness, which is why disclosure about manipulated or falsified images is very detrimental to the viewer. It can undermine public understanding of science and public confidence in science.

Environmental campaigns (advocacy communications) have various objectives. Some aim to raise awareness of the new problem; others seek to actively involve their supporters in persuading public officials to act according to demands related to environmental sustainability and comfort. There are various uses of digital media to achieve these goals: First, alert: in the context of environmental communication a simple act of interpreting a phenomenon is "the

basic entry point for socially distinguishing and categorizing parts of nature". Second, amplify: the use of social media-based communication media can warn and strengthen. The purpose of amplification communication is to increase the number of people who are in touch with the message of environmental preservation and sustainable development. Third, engage: social media technology enables this type of community activism. Engagement, namely taking individual and collective actions that deal with public life. Reminding people and amplifying voices in public spaces (communicating) is an important role, engagement reflects how social change itself is shaped through communication [13]. This paper aims to find out the message of environmental concern contained in selected videos/documentary films by looking at: choice of theme, narrative style, selection of point of view and selection of sources.

## **2 Method**

The unit of research analysis is 4 videos/documentary films, namely: (1) Deforestasi Tanpa Henti, (2) Mutualisme, (3) Sesak and (3) Muara Gembong: Sebatang Pohon Untuk Kehidupan. The four environmental themed videos/documentaries were analyzed using content analysis techniques. This study aims to determine the message of environmental concern contained in selected videos/documentary films by looking at: choice of themes, narrative style, and selection of sources. Themes will be determinate by looking on documentary's storyline. This research will study narrative style of the documentaries by comparing whose story did the documentary follow, who narrates the story throughout the film, whether the narrator appears on camera and the filmmakers involvement on the issue [14].

## **3 Finding and Discussion**

This section will begin by presenting a synopsis of each video/documentary film with an environmental theme with an Indonesian background. First, a video/film, a documentary entitled "Deforestasi Tanpa Henti" (2018). This video/film tells the data that Indonesia's natural forests continue to decrease every year. The government's efforts to tackle deforestation also seem to be invisible because from year to year the lost natural forests are increasing. Currently, Indonesia requires sustainable and fair forest management for all people. Produced by a non-governmental organization called Forest Watch Indonesia (FWI) it was built to make changes to the system in accessing data and information regarding forest management in Indonesia, where existing conditions indicate that data and information are difficult or inaccessible to the public.

Second, a video/documentary film entitled "Mutualisme" (2018). This video/documentary tells about the Petungkriyono Forest in Pekalongan Regency, Central Java, which is the only remaining tropical rainforest on the island of Java. The forest in the Dieng mountainous landscape is outside a conservation area--such as in a national park--so the level of threat is quite high. The existence of the forest provides physical and non-physical benefits to the people who live inside and outside the Petungkriyono forest. Its usefulness has succeeded in growing a sense of concern and awareness of the importance of protecting the forest. This reciprocity is a mutualism that cannot be separated in life. The production of this film was supported by the Pulitzer Center through the Rainforest Journalism Fund program.

Third, a video/documentary film entitled “Sesak” (2021). This video/documentary talked about "The Story of Those Who Grow Up With Dirty Energy" is a documentary collaboration between Watchdoc with Greenpeace Indonesia and Enter Nusantara. This documentary tells about the fate of children who live close to dirty energy sources. Where they lose their ecological rights, the air that is inhaled is no longer clean until the threat of disease it causes, even though these children will later become part of the demographic bonus that has been predicted by the government. Muara Gembong: Sebatang Pohon Untuk Kehidupan (2017): This video/documentary tells about the clearing of mangroves in the early 1980s to create shrimp and fish ponds without considering the importance of current barrier for the Muara Gembong area. After the abrasion flooded the ponds and settlements of Muara Gembong, the community began to carry out a mangrove planting movement.

### **3.1 Featured Theme**

Based on theme sorting written by Corbett [7], the four videos/documentaries have different themes. “Deforestasi Tanpa Henti” (2018) dan “Sesak” (2021), same theme i.e “It’s how the west was won”. “Deforestasi Tanpa Henti” (2018) said that the deforestation that occurred was the result of the conversion of natural forest functions into industrial plantation forests. By prioritizing the economic sector, the government ignores the interests of the environment and the surrounding community. “Sesak” (2021) said that energy dependence is a pain for some people who are directly affected. However, instead of being concerned with public health, the government's policy is in favor of the interests of capital. “Mutualisme” (2018), themed “Boundaries between Animals and humans are important and should be enforced”: This documentary talked about the shift in the use of forests by local communities. Former wildlife hunters and loggers have switched to growing coffee and sap, which have been around for a long time but are not cultivated. “Muara Gembong: Sebatang Pohon Untuk Kehidupan (2017)” themed “Humans as both destroyers and saviors of nature”: The resource persons talked about the clearing of mangroves in the early 1980s to create shrimp and fish ponds without regard to the importance of retaining currents for the Muara Gembong area. After the abrasion caused the ponds and settlements of Muara Gembong to be flooded, the community began to carry out mangrove planting movements. Various animals such as langurs and wild boars that were previously hunted are now guarded and escorted by the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis).

### **3.2 Storyline**

The storyline of each of these videos/films is a pure documentary, not a docudrama that adds an element of drama to strengthen the message that will be sent to the audience. “Deforestasi Tanpa Henti” (2018): This film contains information about the condition of natural forests in Indonesia and the current state of deforestation. The initial sequence explains the acceleration of forest clearing from year to year with a focus on 3 regions, namely Sumatra, Kalimantan and North Maluku. While the next sequence shows that deforestation occurs in forest clearing concessions, meaning that this forest clearing occurs illegally but is carried out with the design and approval of the government. This sequence shows that the government approved the permit to plant industrial forest plantations in natural forests which resulted in flash floods, landslides and droughts. This film questions the very rapid rate of deforestation, how is the government's commitment to reducing carbon emissions. “Mutualisme” (2018) told with a plot: This film tells the story of the relationship between the Petungkriyono forest and the surrounding community. It opens with interviews with Javan gibbon primate researchers and interviews with former hunters and loggers. The next

sequence tells about the shift in forest use by the surrounding community. What used to be hunting and logging turned to coffee and sap farming. In the past, wild forest bee nests were destroyed for honey, now people have turned to beekeeping. The next sequence shows the use of river water in the forest to produce clean energy that is channeled to support village life so that it can meet the needs of cottage industries. The film closes with an interview with a local KPH who states that the status of Petungkriyono's forest use has changed from being exploitative to being conservative.

“Sesak” (2021) told with the plot: The Documentary *Sesak* opens by showing the dependence of mothers who live in urban areas on energy and then asks them to see the condition of their children and residents who live around dirty energy plants. The next sequence contains the health impacts experienced by children in Pangkalan Susu, Jeneponto, and Cilacap. Sequence three contains scientific information about the impacts experienced by children living around dirty energy plants delivered by interviews with pediatricians and academics of public health sciences. The fourth sequence shows the impact of dirty energy generation on the community's economic sector, this part is delivered by interviews with environmental activists and residents whose livelihoods are disrupted. Sequence five contains government regulations that actually remove coal waste from the toxic waste category and information on flue gas desulfurization. The documentary closes with a narrative about children's rights to a good environment for growth and development and shows the concerns of mothers in urban areas who depend on dirty energy.

“Muara Gembong: Sebatang Pohon Untuk Kehidupan” (2017) told with a plot: The film opens with various footage of the condition of the kingpin estuary. The film follows the flow of an interview with the Chair of the Alibata Muara Gembong Tourism Awareness Group, Qurtubi. Qurtubi told of the condition of the Gembong estuary before the abrasion began to displace the shoreline of the Gembong estuary in 1980-until now. Several interviews with fishermen and residents of Muara Gembong are embedded throughout the film. The first sequence of the film tells about the drastic decline in shrimp and fish catches, causing some residents to choose to move because their livelihoods are no longer productive. The second sequence contains public awareness of planting mangroves to fight abrasion. The third sequence contains the diversity of animals and plants, efforts to protect animals in Muara Gembong from hunting and community efforts to build Muara Gembong tourism.

### 3.3 Narrative Styles

The following chart summarizes and compares the narrative styles of the four unit analysis.

**Table 1.** Comparison of Narrative Styles

<b>Film</b>	<b>Follows</b>	<b>Narrated by</b>	<b>Narrator on camera?</b>	<b>Filmmaker involved with subject?</b>
Deforestasi Tanpa Henti	Does not follow a particular person	Voice Over Artist and Mutfi Fathul Barri, Forest Watch Indonesia Program Manager	Yes	No
Mutualisme	Different subjects on the film	Different subjects on the film	Yes	No
Sesak	Different	Voice Over Artist and	Yes	No

<b>Film</b>	<b>Follows</b>	<b>Narrated by</b>	<b>Narrator on camera?</b>	<b>Filmmaker involved with subject?</b>
	subjects on the film	sources		
Muara Gembong: Sebatang Pohon Untuk Kehidupan	Does not follow a particular person	Is not narrated by/through a particular person.	No	Yes

None of the filmmakers of these films appears on camera. “Muara Gembong: Sebatang Pohon Untuk Kehidupan (2017) is the most prominent film that shows the directors involvements with their subjects. Without any God-Like voice over place this film on participatory mode. “Mutualisme” (2018) and “Sesak” (2021) has almost same narrative styles. They follow different subjects that appears on camera as sources and narrating throughout the film. An authoritarian commenter also appears on this two films and also “Deforestasi Tanpa Henti” 2018 place this three films on expository mode.

### 3.4 Documentary Funding

The funders for the production (producers) of three of the four documentaries which are the unit of analysis are non-governmental organizations (NGOs). “Deforestasi Tanpa Henti” (2018) produced by Forest Watch Indonesia. Forest Watch Indonesia (FWI) was built to make changes to the system in accessing data and information on forest management in Indonesia, where existing conditions indicate that data and information are difficult or inaccessible to the public [15]. “Mutualisme” (2018) produced by IDN Times & Pulitzer Center. This film is a production of the IDN Times funded by the Rainforest Journalism Fund by the Pulitzer Center. IDN Times is a leading media office that claims to focus on millennials and Z generation in Indonesia. The Rainforest Journalism Fund (RJF), established in September 2018, is an international funding program focused on environmental and climate reporting. RJF has funded nearly 200 projects and conferences designed to raise the level of reporting on global tropical rainforest issues such as deforestation and climate change. Meanwhile, the Pulitzer Center, which is the parent organization of RJF, is a news agency organization in the United States that has funded various independent reporting projects since 2006 with a focus on issues deemed "less important" by other media [16].

“Sesak” (2021) produced by Watchdoc & Greenpeace Indonesia. Watchdoc This production house was established in 2009, which was founded by two journalists, namely Andhy Panca Kurniawan and Dandhy Laksono. On his YouTube account, Watchdoc has produced 165 documentary episodes and 715 television features. Among them are The Mahuzes (2015), Asymmetric (2018), Sexy Killers (2019), The EndGame (2021), and Kinipan (2021). Watchdoc documentaries are considered to be part of investigative journalism that uses new and creative platforms to highlight social, environmental and human rights issues [17]. Meanwhile, Greenpeace Indonesia is an international environmental campaign organization that acts to save the Earth through peaceful and non-violent actions. A global environmental activist organization in which Indonesia has a representative office.

A documentary entitled “Muara Gembong: Sebatang Pohon Untuk Kehidupan” (2017) is one of the documentaries produced by the local community independently. Producer: Sandi

Barita, Director: Sandi Barita & Fiqi Septiansyah. This film is a documentary film produced independently by a local filmmaker.

### **3.5 Selected Resource Person to Strengthen the Narrative**

In build the narrative, the documentary uses quotes from various sources to strengthen it. Types of resource persons include: NGOs, media, government, private sector/business, community leaders or communities who are directly or indirectly affected. Keynote speaker in the documentary “Deforestasi Tanpa Henti” (2018) is an NGO: Program Manager Forest Watch Indonesia Campaigner Forest Watch Indonesia. “Mutualisme” (2018) which was produced by IDN Times & Pulitzer Center selected resource persons from NGOs: Wildlife Reserves Singapore, government: ADM KPH Pekalongan Timur, community leaders/academics: Primate expert Swara Owa and insect experts and directly affected communities: former animal hunters, former illegal forest loggers.

“Sesak” (2021) choose community leaders/academics: Pediatrician RSPP, Academics of Public Health Sciences, General Practitioners of Pangkalan Brandan Health Center and Environmental Activists. Affected Communities: Some mothers whose children suffer from diseases due to living around dirty energy plants. Residents whose livelihoods have been disrupted after the establishment of a steam power plant in their area of residence as well as several mothers who live in urban areas that are not directly affected to strengthen the narrative. Last documentary “Muara Gembong: Sebatang Pohon Untuk Kehidupan” (2017) chose community leaders: Qurtubi (Chairman of Alipbata: Tourism Awareness Group) and Sanusi, Sahan, Rahmat, and 2 fishermen as people who were directly affected.

## **4 Conclusion**

Based on the theme, the four documentaries that become the unit of analysis are themed: humans as both destroyers and saviors of nature, boundaries between animals and humans are important and should be enforced, dan it’s how the west was won. The storyline of each of these videos/films is a pure documentary, not a docudrama that adds an element of drama to strengthen the message that will be sent to the audience. There is only one self-produced documentary (Muara Gembong: Sebatang Pohon Untuk Kehidupan), the others were produced with strong NGO funding. NGOs with strong funding tend to finance more macro environmental themes. This film also presented in participatory mode. The documentary “Muara Gembong: Sebatang Pohon Untuk Kehidupan” is actually a description of the micro condition of environmental damage which is a reflection of a more macro situation. To strengthen the narrative about the environmental message, selected resource persons who are considered competent. The varied sources show that the documentary makers present the environmental reality from various points of view and interests, not from a mono point of view.

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