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(Malaysian Patriotism Films: Audience Reception on Patriotism Film in Malaysia)

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ABSTRACT

This study explores audience reception of Malaysian patriotism films by examining two significant works from different eras, *Sarjan Hassan* (1958) and *PASKAL: The Movie* (2018). While both films portray national loyalty, heroism, and sacrifice, they emerge from distinct historical and cultural contexts that reflect the evolving meanings of patriotism in Malaysia. The research addresses the growing challenge faced by patriotism films in appealing to younger audiences who are increasingly influenced by globalized digital media. Guided by the concept of "imagined communities" by Benedict Anderson, this study investigates how Malaysian audiences interpret, negotiate, and respond to patriotic values depicted in these films. Through qualitative interviews, the research aims to uncover generational differences in the understanding of patriotism and national identity, as well as the role of cinematic representation in shaping collective belonging. By comparing *Sarjan Hassan*'s post-independence ideals with *PASKAL: The Movie*'s contemporary military heroism, the study provides insights into the transformation of patriotic narratives in Malaysian cinema and their relevance to today's digital-age audience.

Keywords: *Patriotism Films, Audience Reception, National Identity, Imagined Communities, Benedict Anderson, Generational Differences, Digital Media Influence.*

INTRODUCTION

Patriotism films in Malaysia have long served as a medium for promoting national pride, unity, and loyalty among citizens. Since the early years of independence, cinema has been used not only as a form of entertainment but also as a tool for nation-building and the construction of Malaysian identity. Patriotism is commonly associated with the profound spirit of love, devotion, and unwavering loyalty toward one's motherland, encompassing a deep emotional attachment, sense of belonging, and willingness to contribute to the nation's progress and well-being. According to Abu Bakar (1996), Malaysia's historical journey reflects the nation's emergence from colonial rule to independence, driven by the strong spirit of patriotism. The dedication and sacrifices made by earlier generations in defending the country stand as enduring examples of patriotism that should continue to be upheld and practiced today. One of the earliest examples, *Sarjan Hassan* (1958), emerged during the

post-independence period and reflected the nation's aspiration to establish unity and courage among Malaysians in the face of colonial struggle and external threats. The film, starring P. Ramlee, portrayed patriotism through themes of sacrifice, bravery, and moral duty, aligning with the nation's early efforts to define what it meant to be Malaysian.

In comparison, PASKAL: The Movie (2018) reflects a new interpretation of patriotism within today's Malaysian technological context. Produced with support from the Royal Malaysian Navy, the film emphasizes military heroism and professional excellence, incorporating advanced cinematic techniques, digital effects, and action-driven narratives. It caters to a generation that consumes highly visual and globally influenced media content. Mainstream films play a significant role in shaping the cultural landscape, carrying deep educational value through the promotion of moral ideals, historical awareness, and social responsibility. These productions communicate universal virtues such as justice, honesty, and diligence by presenting compelling stories and complex characters. The courage of heroes who risk their lives for others, as well as the selflessness of ordinary individuals who work for the greater good, subtly imparts moral lessons to viewers. Moreover, by drawing inspiration from major historical events and revolutionary figures, these films recreate the struggles and resilience of the nation, helping audiences understand the challenges overcome and the achievements gained by their predecessors. Deraman and Abdul Razak (2018) analysed how the film *Ola Bola* portrays unity and patriotism through multicultural representation and sports narratives. That audience reception plays a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of patriotic films. Viewers interpret patriotic messages based on their personal experiences, historical knowledge, cultural background, and emotional responses to cinematic elements such as narrative structure, characters, visuals, and sound design. As a result, patriotic films can strengthen national pride and unity when audiences feel represented and emotionally connected to the stories presented. This not only fosters a stronger sense of national pride but also inspires respect for those who contributed to the nation's progress. At the same time, such films encourage viewers to reflect on their own duties and responsibilities in modern society. Through portrayals of characters who embody integrity and compassion, these works promote awareness of social issues and motivate audiences to take part in building a more just and caring community (Zhu, 2024). However, despite its commercial success, questions arise about how effectively such modern patriotism films resonate with younger audiences who are increasingly exposed to international narratives and diverse cultural perspectives through digital platforms.

As Malaysia's media landscape becomes more globalized, traditional patriotic narratives risk losing their relevance and emotional impact. The challenge lies in how patriotism films can continue to inspire a sense of national belonging in an era defined by digital connectivity and global culture. Understanding audience reception becomes crucial in this context, as it reveals how viewers interpret, negotiate, or even resist patriotic messages presented on screen. Wahab and Abu Bakar (2024) highlight that films are effective storytelling mediums capable of conveying patriotism, history, and national identity through emotional engagement. In Malaysia, patriotic films are especially important because they help unify diverse ethnic groups while reinforcing shared values and loyalty to the nation. Hence, it is especially commendable when patriotic films are created by local filmmakers in the country. By comparing *Sarjan Hassan* and *PASKAL: The Movie*, this study seeks to explore the evolution of patriotic representation in Malaysian cinema and to analyze how different generations of audiences perceive and engage with these narratives. The research situated itself within cultural studies and reception theory, aiming to provide insights into how film continues to function as a reflection of national identity while adapting to the changing values and expectations of Malaysia's modern audience.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study explores how people from different generations in Malaysia view patriotic films, and it shows that these views are often shaped by personal experiences, historical background, and the type of media they grew up with. Rather than sharing a single understanding of patriotism, audiences interpret patriotic films in different ways depending on their age, memories, and emotional connections to the nation. These differences help explain why certain patriotic films resonate more strongly with some groups than others.

For older generations, early patriotic films such as *Sarjan Hassan* (1958) often hold strong emotional meaning. These films are remembered not only as entertainment but also as reflections of lived experience and collective struggle. Patriotism in these films is closely linked to themes of sacrifice, humility, and unity, where ordinary people are shown defending their country under difficult circumstances. Because the stories feel close to real life, they encourage viewers to emotionally connect with the characters and to see patriotism as something personal and meaningful.

Younger audiences, however, tend to encounter patriotic films through a different cinematic style. Contemporary films like *PASKAL: The Movie* (2018) present patriotism through fast-paced action, military strength, and advanced technology. For many younger viewers, these elements make the film exciting and visually impressive. At the same time, the study finds that such representations may feel emotionally distant, as patriotism is often expressed through elite forces and national power rather than through everyday struggles. As a result, patriotic messages may be admired, but not always deeply felt.

By comparing older and newer patriotic films, this study highlights how storytelling in Malaysian cinema has changed over time. Earlier films focus more on character development, moral choices, and emotional tension, which allow audiences to reflect on the meaning of patriotism. In contrast, contemporary films often aim to project national pride on a global level, using spectacle and action to communicate strength and modernity. Both approaches have value, but they appeal to audiences in different ways.

These findings are especially useful for those working in the creative industry. Understanding how different generations respond to patriotic films can help filmmakers create stories that feel both relevant and emotionally engaging. Instead of choosing between tradition and modernity, patriotic films can combine meaningful narratives with modern filmmaking techniques. This balance can allow patriotic stories to speak to younger audiences while still preserving the emotional depth that earlier films achieved.

More broadly, the study suggests that patriotic films play an important role in shaping how Malaysians understand their national identity. Films that focus only on symbols of power may create short-term excitement, but films that explore human experiences, sacrifice, and shared history are more likely to leave a lasting impact. Patriotism becomes stronger when audiences see themselves and their everyday realities reflected on screen.

In conclusion, examining patriotic films through a generational lens offers a deeper understanding of how patriotism is experienced and interpreted in Malaysia. The study shows that patriotism is not fixed but evolves as society changes. By learning from both past and

present filmmaking approaches, Malaysian patriotic cinema can continue to grow and remain meaningful to audiences across generations, even in an increasingly globalized media landscape.

CONCLUSION

This research allows us to infer that the concept of patriotism in Malaysia is largely derived from the people's emotional experiences, the shared historical values, and the daily life stories that are intertwined with the communal realities. The narrative of the movie *Sarjan Hassan (1958)* is an excellent illustration of patriotism that is mainly based on personal sacrifice, love for the country, and the common fight against the colonial oppressors. Through characters of the common people who save the honor of the nation and the state without the use of technological power or modern military assets, this story is delivered. This method gives the viewers an opportunity to emotionally engage with the presented patriotic values and hence, enables them to feel a natural love for their country.

On the other hand, *PASKAL: The Movie (2018)* is an example of how patriotism has been transformed visually and spectacularly with the main focus being on the advanced defense assets, the agility of the elite forces, and the futuristic military technology. Even though these factors are indicative of a country's capability and sovereignty at the global stage, this research study reveals that the approach adopted by PASKAL leaves very little room for the viewers to be able to identify with the patriotic values at a profound level. The film PASKAL uses limited examples of the people's struggles for the nation and instead focuses on institutions that build the country and its physical power as sources of pride.

This comparison reveals that the power of patriotism to raise people's awareness and get them involved cannot merely be achieved through the demonstration of a nation's power but rather by the way in which the film builds its narrative around the characters' sacrifice, solidarity, and historical context. Hence, the results of the study corroborate the idea that first patriotic movies such as Sarjan Hassan are more adept at fostering a genuine understanding of patriotism among Malaysian viewers than the present-day patriotic movies which mostly show patriotism as a symbolic and visual concept.

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