

TRANSCRIPT

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

AUDIENCE RECEPTION ON ANIMATION IN MALAYSIA

GROUP 4: FOREIGN AUDIENCE

ASSISTANT: N/A

- Moderator: Hi. So, good afternoon everyone. My name is Mohd Amir. I'm currently conducting my PhD on Characteristics, Audience Reception and Future Direction of Malaysian Animation. So the focus group discussion today will be regarding Malaysian animation that you have viewed, your opinions on it. Let's begin an introduction of yourselves. Can you tell me your names and tell me which Malaysian animations that you have viewed before.
- Aziz: Hi Mr. Amir. My name is Aziz. I'm from Uzbekistan. Recently I've watch Malaysian animation named *Bola Kampung*.
- Moderator: Any other Malaysian animation that you have seen before besides Bola Kampung.
- Aziz: Malaysian? No.
- Moderator: How about you?
- Irfan: My name is Irfan. I'm from Indonesia. Malaysian animation that I've been watching is Bola Kampung and Upin Ipin.
- Moderator: And you?
- Kevin: My name is Kevin. I'm from Vietnam. I have watched recently Bola Kampung and Upin & Ipin.
- Moderator: And you?
- Agil: My name is Agil. I'm from Maldives. I watched this Bola Kampung, Upin Ipin and little bit of 1st Met. It's a 3D animation.
- Moderator: What's the title again?
- Agil: 1st Met. M..E..T..
- Moderator: M.E.T.?

Agil: Yeah, Met. I searched it on Youtube. I just write in ‘Malaysian Animation’ and that thing came straight away.

Moderator: Ok.

Toghzan: My name is Toghzan. I’m from Khazakstan. And I also have also watched the animation, Malaysian animation called Bola Kampung.

Moderator: And you?

Matilda: My name is Matilda. I’m from Tanzania. I recently have been watching Bola Kampung, Malaysian animation.

Nadeel: Good afternoon. My name is Nadeel. I’m from Pakistan. I have watched Upin & Ipin and Bola Kampung from the Malaysian animations.

Moderator: So now we have gone through the introduction. For my next questions, any one of you can actually volunteer to answer. You are encouraged to answer if you want. There is no time limit whatsoever. So how did you learn about the animation titles that you have mentioned just now?

Agil: I just typed ‘Malaysian animations’ and then those things came aside. I just clicked on those things.

Nadeel: Well, I’ve seen Upin & Ipin adverts, posters in Carrefour and these hypermarkets. So that’s how I got to know. And then on TV, it’s very famous. And I have a four-year old niece. So she likes cartoons and she really enjoys Upin & Ipin. Even my 20-year old sister, she enjoys it. So that’s how I got to know.

Moderator: Where to they actually watch it?

Nadeel: On Astro.

Moderator: Oh, so they are staying here?

Nadeel: They were staying here.

Moderator: Do they still watch it? On the internet? Back home?

Nadeel: Not anymore.

Kevin: Back in my country, I knew about Upin & Ipin through Disney Channel.

Moderator: In Vietnam?

Kevin: Yeah, in Vietnam. Through Disney Channel. Yeah, and Bola Kampung, I just knew about it just now.

Moderator: Okay.

Irfan: I watch Upin Ipin through Disney Channel in Indonesia. The Upin Ipin is quite famous in Indonesia.

Moderator: How famous?

Irfan: Not as famous as in Malaysia but quite a lot of young aged children watch Upin Ipin consistantly.

Aziz: I had a lecture titled 'Media, Culture & Society'. During that lecture, our lecturer put on the animation to teach us how culture affects other societies. Due to that lecture, I've known about Bola Kampung animation and watched them.

Moderator: So what were your first impression when you first saw the animation, regardless of whichever title.

Nadeel: The characters are really different. The faces of them are obviously really different from the ones we see from Disney, Nickelodeon, from USA. They're obviously trying to make them look like the locals, the Malays, Chinese, or Indians. They want to add all those characters. So, a bit different for us. The accent is slightly different. Not really different. The language is obviously different. They speak how the locals speak. It's very casual, not formal. The places they show is not the city. It's more on the countryside. They tried to show that. So yeah, it's a bit different.

Moderator: Anyone else? Matilda, you've been quiet. What do you think?

Matilda: I think it's different because the way the appearance of the characters of the animation is different. Even the characters. Mostly they use storylines. The storylines is different from the ones I've seen before.

Moderator: How is it different?

Matilda: Malaysians like football that much compared to other countries. They're based on *kampung* football.

Moderator: Anyone else?

Kevin: Actually my nephew, he didn't like Upin & Ipin that much. It was kind of boring. Even though the design of the characters is

cute. But to be honest, most of the characters look the same. There is nothing different. It is just like a slight change of the hair style or the skin color. And for the storyline, it's kind of simple. I know the storyline is different compared to the American stuff. But my nephew still finds it boring. I don't know. Most of the time he just prefers Oggy and the Cockroaches or Tom and Jerry because it's much more funny.

Moderator: First impressions?

Irfan: Even though they try to capture the local situation like Malaysia most of the storyline sometimes follow like the western storyline. For example like the Bola Kampung, they name the character like Ivan, Kevin. Not really like Malaysian names or Asian names become more western names. Also the storyline also following like characters from western stories like Pirates of the Caribbean and the storyline is not to original, I think. They try to imitate the other western countries and not try to develop more about the Malaysian culture, maybe.

Moderator: So what did you particularly like about Malaysian animation? What do you find interesting?

Agil: It was quite fun, yeah.

Aziz: The thing is they try to imitate the Indian accent, the Chinese accent of English, in Bola Kampung, I mean. That was fun. That was good. Really.

Toghzan: After watching the animation Bola Kampung, I like it. It was fun, like a comedy.

Moderator: I see.

Nadeel: They have a variety of characters. Unique kind of kids. One is angry, one is very emotional, is always stressed out, one is always joke of the class.

Moderator: Anything else that you feel that was particularly interesting with Malaysian animation.

Kevin: The first thing I know about Upin & Ipin, I was kind of happy because suddenly like this Southeast Asian country have this great cartoon was published in Disney Channel. So that's the only thing I'm proud of Southeast Asian animation in general.

Agil: In both opening in Bola Kampung they used kids as main characters. So mostly they concentrate on youngsters, kids.

Moderator: Any more additions?

Irfan: Like from Upin Ipin especially, they have a catch phrase that makes children or maybe adults also interested in the catch phrase such as 'Betul, betul, betul!'. Now, every people are doing the same thing. Like if someone's asking, they will answer 'Yeah, betul, betul, betul!'

Moderator: Yes, interesting. A catch phrase.

Irfan: Catch phrases are very interesting. So children like it and also the adults like it.

Moderator: Alright, on the other hand, what did you find frustrating, or what did you not like, or what did you hate about Malaysian animation? Anything that you saw that you didn't like?

Agil: Yeah, in Upin Ipin they stretch out like, I don't know how to say it. Stretch like 'ma', 'la'. Those words. It's kind of annoying.

Moderator: You mean they stretch the words that they say?

Agil: Yes. Like 'boleh la'.

Aziz: But that is accent. But some people like it, right.

Agil: Yes, but for some people, it's kind of annoying.

Kevin: I just don't like about the design of the characters.

Moderator: The design of the characters? In particular?

Kevin: Upin Ipin, Bola Kampung. Like you see the characters have the same small eyes. Looks kind of ugly. Just a different hairstyle, all the small details. I know that, it represents Malaysians. But actually they look ugly.

Moderator: (Jokingly) So you're saying Malaysians are ugly?

Kevin: No, sir. Just the design.

Aziz: Counting today, with technology they could have made the more better design.

Irfan: The animation are quite stiff compared to the western animation. For instance like Bola Kampung, maybe Southeast Asians know Captain Tsubasa?

Moderator: I guess so.

Irfan: Captain Tsubasa from a few past years. The animation is quite similar with Bola Kampung. That's why I said the animation is not quite well done. It's still stiff.

Moderator: Why do you think that happens? Why is the animation stiff?

Irfan: I don't know. When I see the children playing football in Bola Kampung, it's like the repetition of the same scene. For example, like if the boy is dribbling the ball, it will look the same in the next episode when the boy is dribbling again. So it's slight like a repetition of the same animation.

Kevin: Can I add one thing?

Moderator: Yes. Sure.

Kevin: Actually the animation, they focus too much on the *kampung* cultures. Yeah, so it looks like it's so bore and not developed that much. That's the thing that I don't like about the Malaysian animation.

Modereator: Anything else that you don't like about animation that you have seen? None? Ok, then I can move on the the next question. How do you find Malaysian animation different from those in Japan or in the United States or any other country for that matter? Where are the differences that you see?

Toghzan: I think the design. Because USA for example, they use figures which are different from Malaysia.

Moderator: You mean the figure of the characters?

Toghzan: Yes, the figures of the characters.

Aziz: Is *Naruto* animation?

Moderator: *Naruto*? Yes, it is.

Aziz: But *Naruto* is almost the same, right?

Toghzan: No.

Kevin: It's very complicated.

Aziz: The storyline in communicated but the design is almost the same. Not so developed.

Toghzan: No.

Aziz: I haven't watched that (*Naruto*). I've only watched an episode.

Moderator: So what makes Malaysian animation different from *Naruto*?

Agil: The way they speak, the language and the characters.

Toghzan: The moving things.

Moderator: You mean the movements?

Toghzan: Yes.

Kevin: *Naruto* is kind of bloody. It's very complicated. A kid can't understand the storyline if he didn't watch the first few episodes. For the Malaysian animation, the storyline, everything is kind of pure emotions. It's very suitable for the children. But in some points, it's kind of boring as well.

Nadeel: That is why they're not able to make an image or reputation of animation like *Spongebob*. Every kid knows it. It's yellow and it's square. Everyone knows it. But *Upin & Ipin*, it's very famous, but still you can't. It's not in your head all the time. When you see a bald guy or two twins, it should come in your head automatically but it doesn't. Although the way they're marketed, maybe they should have included that, not just the animation itself. So that might help.

Moderator: So any other differences that you can see between Malaysian animation and animation from other countries?

Irfan: The characters itself. For example like in Japan or whatever animation, the main character is very strong and remarkable in the viewer itself. But in Malaysian animation, the main character itself does not really have a strong character. And it's quite similar with the side character. That's why the main character itself is nor remarkable in the viewers of Malaysian animation.

Moderator: Ok. So far, since all of you have watched Malaysian animation before, how has the Malaysian animation affected your animation viewing patterns. What it means is that, do you intend to watch more of Malaysian animation or do you feel that you've had enough.

Kevin: I think we can wait for the future. Because the animation in Malaysia can be improved. I cannot say that I've had enough for my life because it's not true because technologies still improves, right? And Malaysia still have yet a very long way to

go. So, I think a better way is for the future, the next few years. Maybe there will be a lot of improvements.

Agil: If they can create some animation for adults like us, not for kids, maybe we can watch them. But since those are for kids, it is not that interesting for us.

Nadeel: Maybe if they add more humor or make it more energetic. Maybe they're promoting the posters, the colors, if these are more vibrant, the characters, like Irfan said, they should focus on the main character and make it not a supernatural superhero but everyone should know that Upin & Ipin, two bald twins are those. Create an image.

Moderator: Alright, anymore additions?

Irfan: I'm looking for animation to watch myself. But if someone who played a TV channel playing Malaysian animation, I would like to see it again but not to the extent of looking for more Malaysian animation after the show is finished.

Moderator: Alright. How far do you agree or disagree with the portrayal of Malaysia in these animation?

Kevin: Possibly wrong. It looks so different compared to you Malaysians. Yeah, you didn't look that way because it just represents a small community in a village. They wear those type of clothes and nothing developed that much. So I think they should represent more than that, improve the design of the characters.

Moderator: Yes, but the characters in *Naruto* are not wearing clothing that represents Japanese of the modern era either, right?

Toghzan: But *Naruto*, they tell a different story.

Irfan: For me, the Malaysian characters are focusing on how to teach the children about social issues. Like Bola Kampung, the animation is teaching about how to control our ego, how opportunities can change our ego. The Malaysian animation is focusing more on how to teach the children good things as a child. But for the characters, they're not similar with the real one. For example, they don't separate well like how Malay characters are like, how Chinese characters are like. They are not representing the real race of Malaysians. That's why the Indians, Malay or the Chinese are quite similar characters in

Malaysian animation. They should differentiate more like how Malay characters are like, how Chinese characters are like.

Moderator: Any other opinions? Is there anyone who agrees that the characters are correctly portrayed?

Aziz: Yes, exactly. Outside of the city, I think that people is living like this quietly and friendly. Not in Kuala Lumpur. They portray not the city town. They portray the village.

Agil: I think the Bola Kampung that Kevin kid, he was supposed to be Indian, right? But he looks like an African girl.

Moderator: So that falls back to character design?

Toghzan: Yes. Exactly.

Moderator: Alright. If let's say you had the opportunity, you had the power, you had the authority to change anything about Malaysian animation, what would you advise?

Toghzan: I think, first of all, the design of the characters and I think the names. They're using the names like Kevin, Ivan. Not like local names.

Moderator: But just to inform you. Actually, the Malay version of *Bola Kampung* has Malay names. For Ivan, it's Iwan. For Donovan, it's Azizul. Just mentioning that actually they do have Malay names. It's just that when they dubbed it into English, they changed the name as well.

Matilda: I think they should change the location where they took the scene. They're based on the village. But according to *Bola Kampung*, there's a scene that showed that some footballers, they went for some holiday. They run past village, but the village and the city looks like it's the same thing. There's no difference between the city and the village. They should change that.

Moderator: Anything else?

Nadeel: A bit more stronger characters. Like the main character should be very strong. It should be linked with the commercials. They should be very strong. They should be able to make an impact on the kids and make it more entertaining. These are very good but the music and the beat is a bit slow. So if you're watching or coming after school, you'll probably just sleep.

Moderator: Okay. Fair enough.

Matilda: And also the main character, they don't really show who's the main character. It's like, all the team are the main characters. They have to change that.

Moderator: Anything else? Anything that you want to change about Malaysian animation? Anything you can advise?

Agil: Mostly it's the characters. In all the animation we have watched, they're much similar.

Moderator: How about the plot, the objects in it?

Agil: They should come out of the village and go to the city as well.

Irfan: They should come out with more cultural, more local animation itself to make it more interesting. Maybe like legends of Malaysia itself or old stories that come out in Malaysia itself.

Moderator: You mean myths and folklores?

Irfan: Not too much following the westerners but how about we improvise the legends and the folklores that are already in Malaysia.

Aziz: I think so far for the children, it's ok. These animation, they have to consider these animation are not for the adults. These animation are for the children. Yes, they have age limit, right? So I think for them it's quite simple and quite good to watch.

Kevin: Yes but for the kids, they will have very high image of the idea of cartoons. That's why my nephew didn't like it at all. He prefers the western cartoons because they are more different and much more fun when you watch it.

Agil: Yes, each character, you can remember. There are some things about the characters you remember. Like you can put that in mind that when you see something, you remember them. But in these characters, in Malaysian characters, nothing specific about any specific character.

Moderator: Okay. So is there anything that you think that I missed, or anything that you want to add? Not just for the previous question but for all the previous questions. Or is there anything else that you feel you want to say or you want to comment on Malaysian animation?

- Agil: Yes. And also in *First Met*, as I told you. The 3D animation one. The features of the characters were pretty. So it was nice, but the moment, sometimes it's confusing to watch. I didn't get it when I watched it. But the characters are damn good.
- Irfan: I think Malaysian animation is in the right track to improve. For national skills, it's already quite good because they capture the children's attention in Malaysia. For example like Upin Ipin become booming in Malaysia itself. Children like to wear Upin Ipin clothes. Children like to wear Upin Ipin souvenirs. And it's quite good for Malaysian animation. So I think they have the potential to be more better in the future. And they have the passion to improve all the animation.
- Kevin: Sir, can I ask you a question? Actually Upin & Ipin and Bola Kampung, is it about the Chinese and the Indians here? Are they interested in the animation here, or only the Malays.
- Moderator: I wouldn't know. Because honestly, this is one of the pioneer researches on audience reception on Malaysian animation.
- Kevin: Because I heard that Upin & Ipin is kind of like popular. But I'm not sure like if it's only popular for a particular Malay community or also for the Indian and Chinese community.
- Moderator: Well, most reasearches on Malaysian animation haven't gone that far because basically Malaysian animation is roughly still young. So research on Malaysian animation has just started off with a number of research in the previous years. This resarch itself is focusing on three aspects as I mentioned earlier. One of them is audience reception to see how people receive it. There is another target group on audience reception. And this target group are mainly made out of Chinese and Indians. To find out what they think. Once this research is concluded, and if you have the time and you have the opportunity then probably you can see what they have said in the research itself in the thesis. Is there anything else that you want to add? Nothing? Alright, so thank you very much. This concludes our focus group discussion today. I would like to thank you again on behalf of myself and of course the University of Malaya for your contribution and for your support in coming for this focus group discussion. Thank you very much.