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Elements of Transformation in Indie Publication from the Perspectives of Lejen Press Sdn Bhd

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Abstract
Some mainstream book publishing was against the indie existence in the publishing industry. Some claim that a novel in the form of indie works can threaten and damage young people's thinking because the essence of the work produced by these indie writers is essentially using coarse language and adopted free-thinking style writing. However, the Malaysian government aims to publish 31,700 book titles per year by 2020 to meet the standards of literate developed countries recommended by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). As such, publishing houses in Malaysia is taking steps to produce a variety of books to meet the government's target, including flourishing indie publications. This study has discussed the element of transformation in indie writing and book publishing in Malaysia from the perspectives of an indie publisher (Lejen Press Sdn Bhd). It was found that Lejen Press has transformed its business entity from printed media to digital media, emphasized openness and freedom of the work and has extended its book marketing strategies. This transformation has helped the company to excel in its visibility and market share in the publication industry in Malaysia.


Introduction
The word Indie derived from the English word carrying the notion of independent, free and not dependent on each other. While looking at the word indie terminologically, it is said to never been discussed by any Malaysian authority in detail, said Wahab & Kusnin (2016). By 2011, indie
publications had emerged in the Malaysian book industry and collaborated in publishing books that managed to catch the attention of the local community. It can be seen that, from the 2005 National Library of Malaysia (PNM) study, Malaysians read only one or two books a year, but the total number of books published in 2011 reached 16,000 which raised Malaysia to 23rd out of 23 110 countries in terms of publication. Clearly, the acceptance of mainstream books towards the newly established publication, indie, was a big surprise to the book industry in Malaysia as indie books received a lot of attention from the local community especially the younger generation. Indie books, with independent themes laidback style writing that touched on the realities of community life, while also discussing both political and religious matters create a new mainstream acceptance.

However, in reality, the book industry in Malaysia is not as lenient towards the indie publication. Some mainstream publishing entity was against the indie existence in the publishing industry. According to Masrom (2018), a novel in the form of indie works can threaten and damage young people’s thinking because the essence of the work produced by these indie writers is essentially using coarse language and adopted free-thinking style writing. She also noted further in the aspect of infrequent language style that constantly mixing both Malay and English together. In addition, the usage of the English language does not follow proper guidelines, such as using italics for English words in a Malay novel. Issues raised in regard to indie publishing have, in fact, begun with lack of use of proper language, the style of language used in a work and the storytelling style introduced by these indie writers.

Looking back 60 years ago, indie has been around for a long time. Whether one realized it or not, our country Laureate writer A Samad Said published Salina's novel, which at the time there was a big controversy over the story, which deal with the issues of prostitution. Subsequently, yet another Laureate author, Shahnon Ahmad wrote the novel Shit, dealing with issues of political unrest that are written in a non-narrative language in opposition to mainstream standards of the Institute of Language and Literature. It is clear that in the 1980s to 1990s, indie works had actually existed in Malaysia under the Institute of Language’s publication but this fact was not a well-known fact in the book industry in Malaysia (Zakaria, 2016).

The ongoing issues of indie book publishing are endless. In fact, in a 2015 Young Writers Forum, which is based from the Language and Young Author of the Akademi Seni Budaya Dan Warisan Kebangsaan (ASWARA) raised issues related to the usage of the language and storylines published by indie writers in which they discover that the work of indie books utilized Malay language poorly and go under very low evaluation when compared to with pure literature. According to Khan (2016), she did not place herself as a literature writer but rather put more emphasis on the storyline in the work of her published book. She also mentioned that she is not placing the language in second place but for the sake of creating a compelling story, the plot or the storyline should be the writer’s priority. Based on studies from Othman, Thambu and Boyman (2018), the elements founded in indie books, amongst others are freedom, realistic and casual/ laid back manner. It is also said that indie books are books that are not tied to any particular party and this also leads to a different flow of thinking which is freedom. Basically, the publication of indie books gives the author the opportunity to voice their opinion on an issue or open a discussion, in other words defending the individual's rights to speak freely without worrying about the sensitivity of a particular topic.

It is also said that indie books have inspired other authors to create books in various genres and storylines. In their research, they noted that indie books are about the tastes of a younger generation who love free thinking content, casual and not heavy reading. In fact, indie book prices are
comparatively cheap and affordable. In addition, most published indie books, tell the true story of the reality of common people and provide both lessons and guidance to readers.

In addition, in this rapidly evolving century, technological developments cannot be the reason that prevents writers to write. Writers also cannot simply fantasize in the Institute of Language and Literature, for their readers. Generally speaking, it is irrelevant if the author continues to tell the tall tale and creating imaginary images for their reader. In line with current technological developments, changes need to be made fast to keep pace with other countries. Thus, according to Izzahanid (2016), Malaysia’s participation in Jakarta as a guest at the Indonesia International Book Fair (IBF) 2016 was a good strategy to study and compares both book industries between the two countries. The organizers of the IBF pledge to commit and ensure that Malaysian publications are available in the Indonesia local market.

This two-way communication to the other nations is not a competition of any sort but rather a way to ensure that the book produced by the author is known throughout the country and outside of the country, which in turn bearing the name of the country itself. In times of modern facilities and technologies, however, should not prevent any writer from introducing their own work. Today’s media platforms also could be seen as playing an important role in assisting with book development in the country.

As such, indie publishing today focuses solely on the work published by the younger generation. Thus, indie is not only focused on the strategy of introducing books abroad but studying the strategy of marketing in the said country is very important. As a result, some of the elements that have been a factor in changing indie book publishing today have helped the book industry grow. This study is significant as the force in the distributing business is moving from publisher to author – we’re amidst an indie upheaval. Be that as it may, this insurgency didn’t eject for the time being; it’s been changing the substance of distributing for a long while. Throughout the years, as innovation changed and permitted individuals to create music and film autonomously, creators needed a bit of that pie as well, and consequently indie distributing, or independently publishing, was conceived. At long last writers could join forces with others to compose, structure, distribute and advertise their books from the customary courses. Independently publishing has taken colossal steps since its origin, and today, it is a real, definitive approach to put up a book for sale to the public (Why Indie Publishing, 2019).

Contextually, this study intends to see the key concepts implemented by Lejen Press to shift “from a product-centric business focus to one that puts the relationship with the customer first.” This study intends to explore what are the elements of transformation in indie publication from the perspectives of Lejen Press Sdn Bhd?

Method
This study has adapted a qualitative research design. According to Crossman (2020), this method is the best method for collecting non-numerical data and it helps if the researcher wants more detailed data that can be parsed. This study has conducted face-to-face interview with CEO of Lejen Press Sdn Bhd, Muhammad Aisamuddin bin Md Asri. Interviews are better than questionnaires because it shows that the researchers are prepared and they meticulous and therefore can get more answers to the research questions (Green, 2017). Data were then transcribed verbatim and findings were transformed into a conceptual framework.
Result

From Printed Media to Digital Media

Undoubtedly, the upcoming year-to-year changes have brought about a transformation in the book industry in Malaysia. In the 1990s, every time work was published, it would go through newspapers, magazines, and television as a way to read the written material. Thus, according to Sannusi and Mustaffa (2015), the development of media technology has had a huge impact on the printing industry in this country. In addition, a data analyst in his study, Rich Edmund, said the amount of print media sales has shown that large-scale transfers occur among readers from conventional media to technology media which has astounding numbers. In the United States almost the entire press and magazine distribution was downgraded to 5.5 percent. Clearly, technologically advanced technological changes have affected all countries, especially in the publishing industry.

According to Yusop (2018), “writers in the 1990s through the early 2000s, almost 100 percent of these writers were born from mainstream media and the Language and Literature (DBP)”. However, in 2011 indie emerged and became known mainly by the young indie writers from the younger generation. Therefore, the way the work produced is different from the work of other writers debuting from mainstream sources. Indie writers produce works based on their environment and the reality of people’s lives. In addition, the style of writing a novel has also changed according to the artist’s own writing.

Furthermore, according to Yusop (2019), after realizing that reading groups in new media are more of a focus than print, many authors have used e-books and Wattpad in publishing their work. Among them is the novelist Latifah Emir Ahmad who has chosen electronic mediums such as Wattpad. She also noted that the conventional book market slowing has forced her as a writer to think of new techniques or strategies for publishing her work. It is also seen that from her point of view, the local people have used smartphones and existing technologies to obtain interesting information, data and news at their fingertips. As a result, the book industry in Malaysia has also been affected by the steady decline of the print media.

A huge amount of printed books have a huge impact on publishers, thus increasing the risk of dumping unsold books. This is because electronic media has allowed people to read and access information through their smart phones. According to Sannusi and Mustaffa (2015), digital content and smart phones have impacted the print media in Malaysia, including the decline in print distribution, revenue generation from become affected, creating new challenges in formulating new media revenue strategies, and also setting content strategies in digital and Blogger as competitors - “Citizen Journalist” versus “Professional Journalist”.

Muhammad Aisamuddin Md Asri (Personal Communication, 2020) as Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Lejen Press stated that two writers from Lejen Press, namely Maria Isabella and Jeffrey Zain had utilized their own Wattpad, to publish their work. The author also uses electronic media such as Wattpad to introduce his work to the public. He added that by using the Wattpad app, the author was able to capture the attention of readers and to some extent promote the book he wrote. Looking at the current economy, Malaysia’s economy seems to be declining, thus affecting the book industry. Also, according to Yusop (2017) she states that our local book industry needs to make changes that are relevant to the development of the digital world and economy in this era. However, according to Muhammad Aisamuddin Md Asri (Personal Communication, 2020), although printed books could not be appreciated by the public and suffered losses, the presence of digital media such as e-books and Wattpad could help authors and publishers introduce their work to the public all over the world. For
example, Malaysian students studying abroad such as Egypt and Canada, or Malaysians working in Australia or otherwise can read indie books by simply buying an E-book or Wattpad, and they can easily access and read it.

**Openness and Freedom of The Work**
Works published by indie publishers, are written in a casual storytelling manner. Narratives with a variety of genres such as horror, romance, thriller and so on allows readers to choose and buy according to their tastes and interests. According to Muhammad Aisamuddin Md Asri (Personal Communication, 2020), he said recently he have seen a lot of changes in the country as well as the book industry that initially was the publisher of Lejen Press, from 2011 to 2012, selected horror books only. However, during this period, both the publishers and writers need to look at the customer's demand and market demand. This is because they do not want books written by the author without analyzing the needs of the readers nowadays would ending up bringing disadvantages to the publisher.

According to Ashaari, Hamzah, Yaakub and Rasit (2018), indie books are notorious for expressing dissatisfaction with the government through sharp political criticism. This is because, the openness and freedom of the work are no longer being restricted and any writer are free to share their work or ideas. It is clear from the above statement that indie writing allows the public to voice their rights and thus contribute to a broader sense of readership.

**Book Marketing Strategies**
Without realizing it or not, technological changes have managed to introduce comics in the world. Existing platforms can be used with effective techniques and marketing strategies. According to Hasan (2017), books in Malaysia will face many challenges due to the economic recession. Revenue from book sales in the store also accounted for 30 percent of book sales and further impacted the book industry. In addition, publishers are also advised to look for broad markets and use existing media platforms due to a need for them to be creative to find strategies that can ensure that books written by indie authors are well received by readers.

Therefore, according to Muhammad Aisamuddin Md Asri (Personal Communication, 2020), due to undeniable economic uncertainty, he had to find a way to ensure that the books from Lejen Press were constantly in a good place in the market. Although there are small traders who often take indie books to their warehouse, in the present situation one cannot rely entirely on retail sales to sell the books. He also said that it would be great if the author also played an important role in promoting the works which in turn will encourage them to get to know the book's fans.

As such, Lejen Press's publishing strategy had taken its toll in the early days of indie book publishing. These include #JelajahLejenFIXI, Comic Lejen, and LejenStage.

**#JelajahLejenFIXI**
According to Muhammad Aisamuddin Md Asri (Personal Communication, 2020), Lejen Press has established its strategy to introduce its work to the local community by using #LejenFixi Explore. He said indie books were initially unknown to the public. Around 2011, the local community was startled by new publications such as an indie book release. As such, Lejen Press is using #FrequencyFIXI to University or book exhibitions all over Malaysia. He said this way indie books can share the concept of indie books with the public. In addition to drawing people in to read more, he also received
feedback from readers about indie-themed books. The existence of the #LejenFIXI Tour from one place to another indirectly has many followers or fans familiar with Lejen Press.

**Lejen Comic**
Lejen Comic is a selection of bestseller books and comics. At the same time, according to Muhammad Aisamuddin Md Asri (Personal Communication, 2020), Lejen Press's production has traveled from one state to another in Pahang, Pulau Pinang, Perak, and many more. The outcome of this tour has been collected to create a travelogue comic produced by the publication. Indirectly, there had been a carefully calculated planning in Lejen Press book publishing industry in which different strategies are employed to ensure that each published book can be recognized by the local community in Malaysia.

**Lejen Stage**
According to Muhammad Aisamuddin Md Asri (Personal Communication, 2020), Lejen Press has collaborated with a theatre production. Some of the publication best seller books have been produced and have successfully performed, in which the theatre adapted by Lejen Press’ specially selected novel, Awek Chuck Taylor, in Petaling Jaya in 2014. And in 2015, once again the novel had been performed in a collaboration with the Seyogia Theatre at Medini Mall, Johor Bahru. And once again the Seyogia Theater is set to go live in 2016 with the same performance-based from the novel. Following this, it is a strategy adopted by Lejen Press's publication to ensure that its books are known to the public. However, according to Muhammad Aisamuddin Md Asri (Personal Communication, 2020), he states that in an unstable economic situation, the book industry is facing a downturn. Aisamuddin who is the CEO of Lejen Press does not deny that each marketing strategy implemented such as Lejen Stage and #JelajahBukuFIXI are quite costly for the publication. In addition, the book industry’s concerns are not simply looking at the economy in this country but also the attitude of the Malaysian community who is not that supportive of the local book industry.

**IAMLEJEN Portal**
According to Muhammad Aisamuddin Md Asri (Personal Communication, 2020), his publication now has its portal for both its writers and fans of Lejen Press. I Am Lejen portal were created specifically for writers to introduce his work to the public. At the same time, the author will receive a payment based on the total number of his articles are being currently viewed. This is an indirect strategy implemented by publisher Lejen Press in effectively generating changes and transforming the book industry, especially by effectively using existing media electronic in the book industry today.

**Conclusion**
Overall, our Malaysian book industry is constantly competitive in publishing great books to attract local readers. Predicting and studying the aspect of themes, storytelling and marketing are necessary as it frequently changeover time. This unpredictability that in each of the coming years has given the writers a higher standard to work with and they are expected to produce a better work to keep up with the readers’ demand. However, according to Muhammad Aisamuddin Md Asri (Personal Communication, 2020), even though all publishers play a role in building strategies but if the economy looks unstable, the book industry will eventually have a huge impact from it as well. Expecting the public’s support to buy the book is a far-fetched goal not to mention to urge them to
make books as a compulsory thing for them to buy. Also, although each publication has developed its marketing strategies, separate efforts are being made to ensure the enforcement of those strategies in each of these publication. Elements in marketing strategies will also varies due to the many development of modern technology nowadays. This study has discussed the factors of change in publishing in the book industry. Some elements proposed may apply for other publications besides Fixi. It is also one of the strategies to establish and boost our country’s book industry further than any other country. Contextually, this study has proven that Indie publishers has managed to getting a book published and ready for the world to read can take a long time, especially when an author plans to publish with a traditional publisher. Not only do authors remain in control of their book, but the timeline is much shorter – typically within a few months, not years – which means authors will have their book in hand in less time.

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