

# The Existence of Crowdsourcing Graphic Designers in Indonesia

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**Abstract** This study focused at crowdsourcing in graphic design as internet phenomenon that bring designers and clients all around the world together in competition system. Designers offered designs, and the chosen designs would get rewards. Indonesia became one of the world's biggest source at crowdsourcing in graphic design. The questions are: How was the existence of crowdsourcing graphic designers in Indonesia? Grounded theory method was used in the research with the consideration as an effective method for reviewing the perception, feeling, and attitude of an individual towards the matter. Research reveals the pros-cons that accompany the progress of the matter in Indonesia. It also revealed designers' motivation that brings Indonesia become world's biggest potential. Both aspects would describe their existence in Indonesia. Their existence is highlighted by their involvement and motivation. Designers acknowledge others' role in guiding them. Their shortcoming was the lack of comprehension; therefore, occasionally they violated intellectual rights. The motivation in seeking, expanding network, upgrading skill, getting direct job, and raising assets, caused the growth of crowdsourcing in Indonesia. Result of the study gave opportunity to junior designers in building their portfolios, assisting financially, and as the alternative for conventional graphic design industry. Crowdsourcing also regarded as disadvantage because of the doubtful work quality since the system was opened for everyone. Research's findings would benefit the education and graphic design industry as knowledge from non-formal sector with all the uniqueness. The main uniqueness was that they learn and work independently hence in the end would deliver graphic designs that oft do not submit to the formal principles.

**Keywords** Crowdsourcing, graphic design, Indonesia.

## 1. Introduction

One of the advanced internet phenomenon was crowdsourcing. A participative activity when an individual, institution, organization, or company offered to a group of people from various background through an open invitation to handle a project by means of internet. [1] Crowdsourcing could have the shape of skills, knowledge, or funding with mutual profit as the purpose. Internet became the important mean since it enables crowd to gather and became the resource of crowdsourcing. This system requires synergy of some elements, such as the organization that would receive the result of crowdsourcing, community as the subject of crowdsourcing, online system that connecting crowdsourcing receivers and the subjects, and mutual situation between them. [2]

One of popular crowdsourcing fields was graphic design. Graphic design crowdsourcing page was bringing designers and clients from all across the world together. Usually, the applied system was paid competition. Designers competed in offering their designs and only chosen designs will get money rewards. This competition system

brought up refusal from professionals. [3] Crowdsourcing was considered as disadvantageous for the industry since the lack of design qualities, as the result of amateur designers that did not have graphic design education. This system also disadvantaged designers since it tended to speculative and had no payment guarantee.

The interesting matter of this research was refusals did not discourage the interest of Indonesian graphic designers. Right now, Indonesia and Philippines were countries with biggest number of crowdsourcing graphic designers in the world. [4] This statement was reinforced by Jason Aiken, the Community Director of 99designs.com. He stated that there were 225.000 graphic designers from 192 countries that registered in 99designs.com and 17.000 among them were Indonesian.[5] Crowdsourcing was a consequence from the widespread of internet presence. This research was accepting crowdsourcing as an important potential like the statement of Miftah Andriansyah et al (2007), understood that every subject that was connected to the internet could contribute in it and gave opportunity to the country to develop industry with support from community. Indonesia as a developing country had opportunity as crowdsourcing contributor. [6]

The existence and the indication of some crowdsourcing graphic designers in Indonesia were found at Ratna Cahaya Rina's research (2016) about Kaliabu Village in Magelang Regency which is well known for having hundreds of crowdsourcing graphic designers. Rina highlighted graphic designers' economic sustainability at the village. They relied on crowdsourcing to gain fund for starting their real jobs, such as printing shops, internet rental, etc. [7] Economic issue would be one of the matters that affect their motivations [8] that would end up as the existence of the designers. The large number of designers that have survived since 2008 until now, surely not casually formed.

This research intended to reveal the existence of Indonesian that invaded graphic design crowdsourcing web page amidst criticisms from the professionals. This research was considered important since the findings could contribute ideas from non-formal sector for academic and graphic design industry. The commoners that had survived were interesting from the sold-design aspect, designers' motivation and behavior, also the organizing systems.

## 2. Method

One important matter of the research was the existence of commoners that blended in internet realm, while the internet enable human to gain pseudo-identity hence it was difficult to be identified by outsiders. Designers in the crowdsourcing system mostly were not used their real identities. They tended to use symbols and words that they considered can sell their ability better as designers. Therefore, to explain designers' empowerment in crowdsourcing system, we needed a field research through participatory approach that able to reveal their natural habit and vision.

The research used qualitative approach with grounded theory method, because it was considered as effective method tool for reviewing perception, feelings, and individual attitude in this crowdsourcing graphic design phenomenon. [9] There were two kinds of location in this research, namely, physical location and internet. Physical location was the residence of Indonesian crowdsourcing graphic designers. Internet web page was the place where the designers gathered and did their activities.

Albeit this study was still in the form of early research on crowdsourcing phenomenon in Indonesia, yet deeper study about this phenomenon would generate a concept in GT method. According to Glaser, GT provided analysis tool for extracting concept inductively from the field. [10]

Crowdsourcing phenomenon that been inspected, happened in the internet, hence this early study was using interview via internet as the main procedure to gain data. According to Kozinets, research by the means of internet was designed as method for investigating human and community behavior at the internet. The advantage of netnography was that this method enables the occurrence of conversation with individual as well as group, independently. The opinion of informants performed just like comments at social media that were free from psychological and social assessments. [11]

Data collecting in netnography research was conducted through informal conversation record as well as group discussion, emails, picture download, and other activations that could be done by means of internet. Informants' identity was becoming important matter in this study about internet realm community, considering their habit in using pseudo-names. According to Kozinets, the ethics of netnography research required guarantee from researcher in keeping the furtiveness of informants' identity. [12] Only willing informant's identity that would be revealed.

## 3. Result and Discussion

Actually, before the internet, people were used to activities akin to crowdsourcing. Legends and folklores were full of contest kind of themes. Contests and competitions were included in the variety of crowdsourcing. Even though there were no written data found, ancient stories about contests in Indonesia showed that the activities have been exist for a long time.

Ancient contest that were shown, could not completely describe the mechanism of crowdsourcing, considering this system required internet media as the collaboration tool between the parties that been involved. In the meantime, internet was an ideal media for crowdsourcing system. Internet tent to fenceless, globally, and enable anybody to participate as long as they have internet access. Also, it had immediate quality, hence the crowdsourcing process was happened fast. Competition happened in the crowdsourcing activity was very dynamic, it pushed the contestant's eagerness. Crowdsourcing system usually was integrated with social media, so the involved people could be interconnected. This fact strengthened the existence of the system through intimate social network. A survey conducted by *Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia* (APJII) on 2016, stated that there were 132.7 million individuals from 256.2 million Indonesia population, had the access to internet.

### 3.1. Crowdsourcing graphic designer: opposed, yet survived

Discussion that was developed at internet about graphic design crowdsourcing was focusing on two dominant opinions, agree and disagree. Crowdsourcing supporters mostly considered this system as an alternative way for beginners and freelancers. On the other side, crowdsourcing opponents were expressing their reluctance for this system that they considered as a disadvantage for most of the subjects.

Crowdsourcing opponents came from various backgrounds such as graphic design association, freelance designers that have bad experience related to crowdsourcing system, professionals in graphic design industry, and graphic design company owners.

The American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA) web page stated that they declined graphic design crowdsourcing. The system was called as high risk speculative work for the clients and also for the designers. AIGA stated that the designers must get fair compensation in a written

agreement before they had done a job. Limited time for this speculative job reduced design process that involving research, alternative thinking, prototype development, and et cetera.

Crowdsourcing system that required online media for gathering the crowd had consequently open for anybody, including commoners that are considered not to be competent enough to do specific job. The openness of this system raised controversy. Graphic design professionals criticized crowdsourcing as a system that ruined profession order (Rudi Sumarno, interview, 2-11-2016). It was disclosed that most crowdsourcing graphic designers were not armed with enough skill, knowledge, and designing ethics to do the jobs.

Other problem that became controversy was the scale of funds flowing in graphic design crowdsourcing system. If each web page in average had paid hundred million dollars to designers, so that we could imagine the scale of fund flowing in those dozens or hundreds web pages all across the world. Clients' flow of money through crowdsourcing web pages to designers' bank accounts of course impacted to graphic design industry. Currently, advertising companies and like had reached peak point of concern. Clients were shrewder in efficiency. There was no more dissipation, especially for design, advertising, and promotion. All companies must be thrift for they were not only competing with competitor companies, but also must face freelancers (Lanny Azhar, interview 3-11-2016).

Other professionals considered crowdsourcing as speculative work. When designers wanted to have professional portfolio, they would show their artwork at sites such as Deviantart, Behance, or worked for clients without asking for payment. Therefore, the designers could build their reputation correctly even though they did not get payment. Crowdsourcing designers were suggested to consider long term pace in building their reputation, hence would not be trapped in crowdsourcing's fast income.

Crowdsourcing web pages were also judged as not securing designers' interest. These web pages were more inclined to the clients through their money back guarantee, so the clients did not need to pay if there were no design that they were interested. Yet without payment guarantee, it was not immediately made the designers had no income. Under that circumstance, they still could make million to dozen million Rupiahs per month.

Meanwhile, crowdsourcing supporters, mostly the subjects that were gained benefit from the system. Graphic design crowdsourcing web pages were considered as good enough for learning vehicle. Especially for the beginners, gaining client were not an easy task. Hence beginners welcomed crowdsourcing web pages for becoming their mean in introducing their skills to clients, and also, they could gain pretty much income.

### **3.2. Motivation shaped existence**

There were not found yet the certain data regarding the presence of graphic design crowdsourcing in Indonesia. Observation since 2008, said that graphic design crowdsourcing had been explored by professionals and academics at cities in Indonesia such as Surakarta, Yog-

yakarta, Surabaya, Jakarta, and Bandung. They knew the system's existence by internet news and participated amidst their activities as jobholders.

Designers' involvement background at crowdsourcing system was various enough, yet mostly admitted there were other's role in introducing and teaching them so they can participate. Ari was the example. He was a high school alumna, had participated in graphic design crowdsourcing system since 2010, while he was working as a messenger in an advertising agency. He frequently accompanied graphic designers of the office while they were working overtime. There was common knowledge that a lot of graphic designers did other activities at the office, one of them was crowdsourcing activity. It was begun by watching while graphic designers were working, Ari encouraged himself to learn graphic design. Ari learned independently. He searched for graphic application tutorial at YouTube web page. After he had learned for almost three months, he dared himself enrolling as a designer at Mycrobust.com, a graphic design crowdsourcing web page (Ari, interview 6-11-2016).

Over period of six years, Ari had changed his account for three times. The alteration was necessarily being done because his old accounts was banned for multiple rule violations. During that period, he was participating at 3.656 graphic design jobs, mostly were logo designing, and he succeeded in 103 jobs. Designs chosen by clients were paid at range between US\$200-US\$400. If the average payment for Ari's designs were US\$300, then every month Ari gained US\$400, minus administrative costs approximately 15%. Income worth almost US\$400 per month was a pretty large amount for Indonesian, especially for a part time job.

At the beginning of his graphic design crowdsourcing carrier, Ari did not realize that there were ethics, especially on design copyright. Ari only knew that clients wanted certain design and he looked for references from internet search engines. His lack of knowledge on copyright was also seen while he was knowing that others' designs got high rates. He would immediately make similar design.

Lack of graphic design ethics was also happened on other crowdsourcing designers. Usually, it was happened to them who pursued the carrier by self-taught, with level of education maximum on high school alumnus. As revealed by Andreas, a graphic designer from Magelang, he stated that most of his colleagues was junior high and high school alumnus. Armed with basic graphic design abilities that they had learned from others, the precursors on crowdsourcing realm, they joined the competition and able to survive with minimum income US\$200 per month (Andreas, interview 13-11-2016).

Ability and knowledge issues could be very varied, considered there were various clients with various requirements. Certain client from certain company would have different requirements from an individual client. Nevertheless, design ethics were still becoming issue that should be concerned.

Lack of knowledge in graphic designing caused beginner crowdsourcing graphic designers could only copy existing designs. Nowadays, design references could easily be found in internet. Experience could be differed among



designers. Ari for the example, he could past through learning period hence he found good designing manner. In that way, a designer could gain certain creative quality that could be accounted for.

Income earning motivation became the most prominent boost. Discussion among crowdsourcing graphic designers mostly about the amount of winnings and money they earned. The drive to earn bigger amount of money making them tenacious in their participations. Mostly they had participated in thousands of crowdsourcing graphic design jobs with various stages of successes. People with high school education background that just learned graphic design naturally had lower level of success compared to them who had higher education with more experiences.

When we compared Ari's successes data to other designers with better education background, we would see the difference. Ardian was graduated from a fine art college that has joined this system since 2010. Ardian involved in 618 jobs, and had won 92 times. His success rate was 14.89%. Armed with fine art education background, he mastered better techniques and concepts, hence his success rate was far better.

Designers' existence in crowdsourcing system were not attached on location, but there were some of them had gathered in a community. One community that stand out was built in Kaliabu Village, Salaman Sub district, Magelang Regency, Central Java. At a glance, Kaliabu Village was not different from other villages in Indonesia. The villagers' bread and butter were varying, such as bureaucrats, merchants, farmers, and cattlemen. Some of them were unemployed. Most of the villagers was junior high and high school alumnus. But there was an interesting activity at Kaliabu Village since 2012. After hours, they started their activity as graphic designers. They competed in crowdsourcing graphic design contests at crowdsourcing web pages. There were various crowdsourcing web pages that accommodated hundreds of graphic design contests day by day, offered hundreds to thousands of Dollars as the prizes. Contest holders were clients from various countries that needed graphic design services.

Right now, the number of graphic designers from Kaliabu Village were around 250, and were accommodated in a community named Rewo-rewo. It was pretty surprising that in two years, the community was gaining six billion Rupiahs (Desainer Kampung, 2014). The considerable income described that villagers without art and design education could compete with educated and experienced designers in many contests. Fahmi Baehaqi, a crowdsourcing graphic designer proudly said that.

*There were enough evident that plenty of local designs from Kaliabu Village were used by overseas companies. Most of the clients came from Australia, US, China, and some of them were from Indonesia. In 2012, there were only two designers in this village. Two years later, there were two hundred and twenty designers. Their background was varying from bricklayers, farmers, and factory workers. If people underestimated our ability, we had no problem with that. The most important thing for us was the artwork, not the designers' background. [13]*

Basically, clients recognized designers' identity only by watching their artworks that was placed on the crowdsourcing web page, without knowing their background. Khoirul Muhibin was the example. He was a farm and construction worker, but after hours, he started his activities as a crowdsourcing graphic designer. Even though it was a freelance job, graphic design crowdsourcing had impacted the subjects' increasing income.

Phenomenon happened at Kaliabu Village, in fact, was not the first time happened in Indonesia. Graphic designers from Surakarta and other cities such as Yogyakarta, Bandung, Jakarta, Semarang, and Surabaya had rushed crowdsourcing web pages since 2008. A lot of them were self-taught designers. February 19, 2012 at Surakarta, crowdsourcing graphic designers from various cities held a meeting and established a group called Mycroburst Indonesia.

Community bound enable the designers in sharing information and experience. This kind of network was very useful especially for beginner designers that pursue designer carrier as a self-taught. Learning process through community was happened by tip and trick success sharing and remind each other, especially about ethics and regulations that bound in graphic design realm. Designing rules usually stated at every crowdsourcing web page, but most beginning designers did not read them. This condition was caused by the lack of knowledge, awareness, and language barriers.

Communication among community members matured the motivation on each designer. Before joined the community, most of the designers only motivated in income gaining. After that, there were other motivations such as network spreading in crowdsourcing system. Associated with fellow designers would improve regulation understanding and designing techniques. Skill and knowledge enhancement on designers would facilitate their interaction with clients. When a client was satisfied by their designs and felt comfortable with the designer, usually repeat orders would happened without going through open competition.

Learning process happened naturally through community. At first, the subject that was interested in crowdsourcing system could learn from the ones that were previously pursued in this field, as it happened on most of self-taught graphic designers that joined crowdsourcing system in Indonesia. The self-taughters usually experiencing excessive euphoria. This condition could be seen from the large number of crowdsourcing competition they were joined, just like designer 1 on table 1. This kind of designer usually had low success rate, but still could survive and made enough money by joining more competitions.



For in-deep design analyzing, we needed a detailed method, yet in the meantime, to understand designer's motivation in self-development, quite presumably reviewed by visualization technique achievement and message delivering. Visualization technique could be described by the ability in presenting visual elements and fonts at the logos. Message delivering could be read from the message clarity based on the purpose that was aimed by the clients.

**Table 1.** Some of designers' participated job and winning.





Designer	Participated	Winning
1	3.656	103
2	120	2
3	95	5
4	34	3
5	46	1
6	82	4
7	618	92
8	1.423	118
9	3.851	169
10	1.038	60
11	1.107	89
12	711	55
13	518	53
14	2.086	46
15	1.825	54
16	344	10

The advantage of research on graphic design crowdsourcing system was the completeness of data provided by crowdsourcing web pages. Each registered designer could be tracked their artwork progress and performances. The data was useful for picturing their existence from the artwork aspect. Table 3. Showed the progress on designer's visualizing techniques and message delivering in graphic designing.

**Table 2.** Ari's portfolio 2013-2016

 <b>LABELZAP</b>
<p>1. Made at 1-6-2013 on Zilliondesigns.com prize US\$199</p> <p>Zap label was a brand for cell phone apps that was used for giving information about consumers' goods through barcode scanning. The information given by the apps would show certain product content, diet function, and other important information by touching the barcode with the cell phone.</p>

<p>2. Made at 22-4-2013 on Zilliondesigns.com prize US\$210</p> <p>Asun Ltd was an international distribution solar cell panel company. It did not merely sell goods, but also offered financial service, investment, insurance, and farming enhancing business based on solar energy.</p>

**Table 2.** cont.


<p>3. Made at 13-10-2014 on Zilliondesigns.com prize US\$215</p> <p>Intrepid Homes Construction was a housing developing company. The company wanted the logo appeared integrated with the writings. Client suggested to merge one of the letters as part of the image.</p>

<p>4. Made at 12-1-2015 on Zilliondesigns.com prize US\$200</p> <p>Clearbrook Investment Management was a company that run in financial service. They wanted a logo that reflected their stability and integrity.</p>

<p>5. Made at 12-4-2016 on Zilliondesigns.com prize US\$200</p> <p>Northern Radiant is sales company. The client wants city of North Minnesota landscape used to visualize their logo design.</p>

<p>6. Made at 22-7-2016 on Zilliondesigns.com prize US\$500</p> <p>312 Spirited Ventures was a restaurant group for middle class target. Managing a middle-class restaurant was different from managing an extravagant restaurant or even a fast food one. Client wanted a logo that visualized kitchen utensils at the writings.</p>

Ari's design no. 1 was made at 2013, showed simple basic technique of graphic design. The usage of triangle sphere with radial pattern was very common in logo designing. The colors were basic colors that were easy to be composed. The usage of bold and thin font type was also common in earlier logo designs. Message delivering aspect showed there no correlation between product performance (application for scanning) with image that was visualized. Radiant form that was expressing a blast was not precise enough for communicating scanning speed (zap could be interpreted as 'fast moving'). This kind of analysis was still premature and needed a further validation by the designer.

One interesting matter that could be observed from a self-taught designers' portfolio, like Ari's, was there was independent learning motivation with the aid by community members. Quality of visualization and message delivery seemed getting better on the recent designs (2016).

Design no. 6 showed good ability in controlling visual elements. The usage of two dividing lines made the logo looked more prominent and had appealing composition dynamic. Courage in using one basic color was a mature decision. Type selection supported straightforward expressions of image elements. Message delivering as 'group of middle class restaurants that were not too extravagant yet not a fast food also' quite successful with the right composition of image and font.

Crowdsourcing graphic designers' motivation were progressing from the desire to merely make money, they were developed becoming more complex motivations, such as. 1) Motivation for fund gathering. Self-taught crowdsourcing graphic designers were got a lot of impact from the system. Basically, their income was getting better. Indonesia was the biggest contributor for crowdsourcing workers. This may be due to limited employment, minimum wages, and currency exchange rate factor. For Americans, maybe the prizes offered by crowdsourcing web pages were not appealing enough. The opposite situation was happened for developing country people like Indonesia. Even though most graphic design crowdsourcing systems were in the form of competitions, yet it was still made them gain relatively large income. 2) Motivation for network expanding. Graphic design crowdsourcing system in Indonesia enable the subjects to gain network by the means of community. Graphic design crowdsourcing sites usually provided forum for brainstorming, either online or in-person meetings. This was reinforced with initiative from subjects to form independent communities, as it happened in Surakarta and Magelang. 3) Motivation for skill enhancing. Crowdsourcing system was social media based job. Most crowdsourcing designers in Indonesia joined community network. Communication among community members enable mutual learning and experience sharing. Beginners that had no design education usually learned a lot from community and members that joined graphic design crowdsourcing earlier. 4) Motivation for getting direct jobs. Crowdsourcing graphic designers were not uncommon to get direct jobs without going through competition. Usually designers that could show the best skill that would be chosen. Therefore, generally designers treated clients at the best manner. Almost all of the clients' requirements would be fulfilled without any meaningful rebuttal. This fact could be seen from the clients' wishes that were poured in brief and always been fulfilled by most designers. 5) Motivation for fund raising. A lot of designers reduced crowdsourcing activities after got enough fund to run another project. They thought that becoming a real entrepreneur could give more regular income.

## 4. Conclusion

Crowdsourcing was a participative activity by the means of internet media when there were a party that offered to another party to finish a certain job through open invitation. Graphic design crowdsourcing brought designers and clients from all over the world together in a competition sys-

tem. Designers offered designs and chosen designs would get money as rewards.

The existence of crowdsourcing designers was opposed by professionals. Yet generally, crowdsourcing subjects considered the system as an alternative for beginners and freelancers. Crowdsourcing opponents objected by the competition system that was considered disadvantageous for most of the subjects. The reasons were 1) Job quality that was dubious because anybody could enroll 2) Pro bono jobs were more promising than joining a speculative work 3) there was no payment guarantee for the offered job. On the other hand, crowdsourcing subjects thought that the system was still promising since 1) there was opportunity for portfolio building as a tool for getting real clients 2) helped people who did not have steady job 3) as an alternative for conventional graphic design industry.

Designers' engagement background in crowdsourcing system were varies, but most of them admitted there were the role of others in introducing and teaching them so they could participate. Lack of understanding in graphic design realm made beginners occasionally stuck breaking intellectual rights.

Graphic designers' motivation sustained progress, started from motivation 1) income seeking 2) network enhancing 3) skill increasing) job hunting, and 5) fund gathering.

Crowdsourcing phenomenon had spread fast in a relatively short term. But there were few that had investigated this phenomenon. Crowdsourcing system was also regarded as a potential phenomenon that was needed further investigation, especially on the strong motivation the designers had and the potency utilization for common progress.

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