

PAY TVS AND AUDIENCE RECEPTION: INTERCULTURAL RESPONSES TO K-DRAMA ON INDONESIAN AUDIENCE

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Abstract

Watching television has become a habitual action of human beings. In the context of the relationship between mass media and identity, television is considered as the main source that could help to reshape and develop the identity of audience considering that television is able to provide the image and meaning to the audience in establishing their identity (MORLEY, 1986; SILVERSTONE, 1994). In line with the development of technology, a rapid growth of pay TVs has been observed in Indonesia. Moreover, K-drama series have received a warm welcome from its viewers considering the increasing number of K-drama that appeared on private television and pay television stations. This study is constructed using the reception analysis framework by observing how active the audiences receive text which is not separated from their moral viewpoint, either in the phase of observation, interpretation, or conclusion. The qualitative approach applied in this study was conducted in the form of focused group discussion and observation. The findings revealed that self-identity is built based on what is watched by the informants. The activity of watching the K-drama series program is regarded as an effort of exploration which include the process of searching information and gaining a deep understanding. Specifically, the results of informants watching activities are utilised as the method to explore new information and obtain new discovery that can act as reference in building self-identity.

Keywords: *reception studies, K-drama, pay tv, teenagers and self identity.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The significant transformation of communication and information media has managed to significantly transform due to the development of various forms of new technology. The restructurization of information and communication production has become a new area of interest complemented by the following signs: (1) global network and the flow of

international information, (2) crisis development in the scope of national level, and (3) a new form of regional and local activities (MORLEY, 1995).

The scope of communication represents the symbolic limits of language and culture, in which the limits of transmission room are defined by the satellite and radio signal. As a result, the flow and pattern of human movement, culture, and information have passed geographical borders, seas, and mountains which consequently solve the previous issue relating to the limited communication among society of a community (MORLEY, 1995). Television is considered as the most effective type of mass communication media that is attributed based on its superior characteristics which include audio visual and the ability to send message to mass audience (SENDJAJA, 2003).

In present days, the activities of watching television have become the habitual action of human beings. As has been previously mentioned, watching television involves the interaction between the audience and television programs, which occurs in the time and room of a particular socio-cultural background. Morley explains the importance of the context of watching television by also emphasizing the interaction of the audience (MORLEY, 1992). In relation to this, socio-cultural environment helps to develop the watching patterns of the subjects involved in television media (MULYANA, 2017).

A cultural studies approach was adopted in a study of television watching practice to investigate "how the power of television actually meets the social experience of people who watch it"

(MAYRING, 2000). As has been made clear, the subjects are in the complexity of some socio-cultural context in their interaction with television media (TRIWARDANI, 2012).

In the globalization era, television is a source of power that provides image and symbol which enables a deeper understanding on how the identity of the audience is influenced by the media (MORISSAN, 2016). Thompson further supports this notion by stating that an audience produces meaning as part of negotiation process in identity building when they interpret text on television. In fact, identity is never eternal because it is continuously built through time and room. Hall points out that it is comprehensible as a production of meaning that has not been accomplished, while the identify of a process is always constituted based on the representation without any outside influence (HALL, 1980).

In the beginning of mass communication media in Indonesia, national television is the only reliable source of public information which is in line with the development of technology. Nevertheless, the new information media emerged in the form of digital information flow through pay TVs such as satellite television and cable television. Meanwhile, the public has gradually moved from using the conventional type of TV to pay TVs as a result of the current technology development. In relation to this, a number of companies have been given the Broadcasting Operation Permit (IPP). On top of that, the current pay television services have been observed to double in amount compared to the ones available in the early of 2007. The current available cable televisions operating in Indonesia include *Indovision*, *Astro*, *First Media*, *IM2*, *TelkomVision*, *OK Vision*, *B-Vision*, *I-Sky-Net*, *Safuan TV*, *M2TV*, and *Aora TV*.

This situation has led Indonesia to become a potential market of foreign culture from developed countries with great power. In this case, it also threatens the influence of cultural identity that is usually shaped by a long tradition of socio cultural life in the society of Indonesia. Foreign cultures have become a part of the cultural reference in Indonesia as a way to maintain their existence, which further influence the cultural identity of Indonesians. Apart from that, the interest of capitalism among the owners

of television stations is considered as one of the biggest problems in this issue. In relation to this, a variety of strategies have been implemented by both national televisions and pay TVs to compete with each other in order to further attract the interest of the viewers (ANG, 1985).

Korean Drama in Indonesia Television

One of the strategies to gain profit is by importing popular television programs from abroad such as those from South Korea with the genre of drama. This situation began in the late 1990s with the increase of K-Pop products in various forms such as television dramas, movies, and pop songs, which consequently led quite a number of Korean artists to gain great popularity in the East and Southeast Asia countries.

In the last century, South Korea had no influence on any popular cultural industry; however, the current trend has witnessed South Korea as the biggest cultural exporters in Asia. Korea has been a country with the most influential cultural industry which further enables it to export its cultural products and spread cultural influence internationally (BRIANDANA & IBRAHIM, 2016). The mass media seems have acknowledged the emergence of Korean culture by labelling it as the popularity of Korean culture known as *Hallyu* in Korean language. In March 2002, *the Associated Press* reported anything related to Korea including food, movies, music, and Korean eyebrow style and footwear have become a trend which is widely accepted in Asia in comparison to other popular culture of Tokyo and Hollywood that have been dominating the industry (ADI, 2012; LITTLEJOHN & FOSS, 2009).

In the case of this study, the interpretation of pay TV will be performed on the K-drama known as *Descendants of the Sun* that is widely available on KBS World channel on numerous pay TVs which include *Indovision*, *Astro*, *First Media*, *IM2*, *TelkomVision*, *OK Vision*, *B-Vision*, and *I-Sky-Net*. The reason of choosing the drama series is due to the top rating gained by it immediately after its first two episodes were shown. According to the data provided on www.muvila.com, the K-drama of *Descendants of the Sun* managed to achieve the rating of 22.9%,

which indicates that it is superior than other dramas available on the pay TV starting from February 29, 2016 to March 14, 2016 (ANG, 1996; MULYANA, 2008).

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

THE CONCEPT OF ACTIVE AUDIENCES

According to David Croteau and William Hoynes, the concept of active audiences is a critique to media power and a trust to individual/audience power. It is important to note that media is not an institution that has a great power to influence audiences through the message threads that are sent. Moreover, the audiences act as the party that has the power to interpret the message freely and acts or behaves based on the meaning generated from the media text. Most often than not, the meaning of the media text is interpreted based on their social and cultural condition as well as personal experiences (GUNTER, 2000). The approach describes that the audiences are able to supervise their own situation which gives them the power to decide. In this phase, the selective unity is based on the background of idea, will image, and need, which further implies that they have the power to interpret text in the media (KIM, 2008).

The typology of active audiences consists of two dimensions, namely qualitative orientation and wordly dimension. The qualitative orientation is obtained from the viewers in terms of the communication process, while the wordly dimension is necessary to be carried out in a period of time or phase in the sequence of communication (LULL, 1980). In this case, the qualitative orientation requires the viewers to have three nominal values as follows: (1) *audience selectivity*, (2) *during exposure*, and (3) *after exposure*. The concept of active audiences provides response to the qualitative interaction of the viewers towards the communication and time consideration which include the types and degree of activities that are related to several phases in the communication process (ARYANI, 2006; PAWITO, 2008).

Tabel 1. Communication Sequence (SWANSON, 1977)

COMMUNICATION SEQUENCE			
AUDIENCE ORIENTATION	Before Exposure	During Exposure	After Exposure
Selective	Selective Exposure - Seeking		
Involved		Decoding and Interpreting	
"Using"			Social Utilities

In the first type of activity, the choice of links towards the phase of disclosure before a sequence of communication will be investigated. Most of the established studies clearly indicate that "the viewers' activities" are frequently used as the synonym of choosing the investigation of disclosure. A considerable amount of literature suggest that it is crucial to be "*selective*" when proposing the time before the disclosure because the individuals tend to make decision based on the communication setting and choice of purpose, in which its orientation is obtained from the interaction of the individuals' activities in order to satisfy their social and psychological need. Moreover, the media quality is expected to be good to ensure that they have the best experience for the medium (BARKER, 2005).

The second type of active audiences relates to the phase of the viewers' psychological involvement in indicating some disclosure. In contrast to the selective disclosure which mostly look for the choice of behavior, this particular type can be comprehended from information process or constructivist perspective, whereby the individuals are required to provide the meaning behind the message (SWANSON, 1977).

Furthermore, it is also necessary for the viewers to use their activeness in the communication process. In this case, 'using' means that the activeness tends to have psychological and social role upon the individuals. Therefore, they are required to use the dimension of orientation value that should be applied in all principles of the communication process (KIM, 2009).

The final point of the theory from *selectivity*, the *involvement* to *using* is related to the conceptualization of the three developmental aspects of the viewers' activities. Moreover, it is necessary to know how all of these tend to have an orientation towards the communication process. Generally, a viewer can accept the orientation towards the communication process consistently, or at least towards some situation or the type of communication message sent by the media (BLOOM, 1990; RENCKSTORF, 1996).

RECEPTION ANALYSIS

Reception analysis approach is adopted in this study because it allows the audience to receive text actively. Moreover, it is also closely related to the moral viewpoint in which involves the phase of observation, interpretation, or conclusion. The reception research is based on the consciousness of the subjects in understanding the objects and events by relating them to their individual experiences. Hence, the reception analysis will be able to explain why the audience means some things differently, including the influence on different psychological and social factors as well as the social consequences. The purpose of the reception analysis emphasizes that media text can obtain meaning when the acceptance event and audience actively produces the meaning from media by accepting and interpreting texts in accordance to their social and cultural status. In other words, message provided by the media is subjectively constructed by the audience (MORLEY, 1986).

This approach also attempts to open and describe individual understanding factually, including their experience and feeling. The reception analysis is described as a textual comparison analysis that is performed from the viewpoint of media and audience that yields an understanding of a context. It is worth to note that readers or viewers cannot precisely establish the meaning intended by the text producers. Hence, audience will only actively do the interpretation of meaning in the text (MORLEY, 1992; CHEN, 2011).

Conceptually, audience tend to consume media in various ways and needs, which particularly refers to the thought that focuses on an individual's subjective experience (meaning-construction) in

understanding a phenomenon. In the context of this research, the aim is to observe more closely to what actually happened to individuals as the customers of media text and how they see and understand media text by relating it to the media (GILLESPIE, 2005).

The reception analysis in the present study adopted more than three categories as developed by Stuart Hall considering that he referred to the unraveling direction in constructing self identity and aspiration towards self development. Moreover, Giddens states that self image becomes a reflexive project in modern context (CHON, 2001).

Stuart Hall (1992) also adopted the hegemony concept developed by Antonio Gramsci which stresses that hegemony is an unstable fluid, while popular culture is a competition between dominant, negotiated, and oppositional ideology (HALL, 1996). According to Stuart Hall (LIVINGSTONE, 1998; DAPHNE, 2007), there are three categories of encoding/decoding described as follows:

1. Dominant Hegemonic Code.
The audiences obtain meaning from the television programs and they decode it based on the preferred meaning (preferred reading)
2. Negotiated Code.
The audiences can refuse and accept meaning relayed on the television.
3. Oppositional Code.
The audiences read preferred code or meaning, and they reestablish it and then proceed with an alternative code considering the distinctive viewpoints.

SELF IDENTITY

Erikson draws that identity is a subjective feeling of self-consistent that evolves over time. In other words, an individual remains as the same person despite being in various places and social situation. As a result, it allows for an accurate response when another person realizes the continuity of the individual character. Alternatively, it implies that the identity of the individual and others is able ensure the subjective feeling (SWANSON, 1997).

The establishment of self identity is apparent in the elements of self-identity establishers, which can be implied as the effort to look for information and

gain a deep understanding. Moreover, this process is also known as exploration which describes the effort to carry out choice or alternative made by the individual known as commitment. Apart from that, teenagers have the ability to look and find new things that they are not familiar, which makes it more necessary for them to explore information as much as they need. Hence, self-identity should be relevant to the exploration to completely establish it. Moreover, the will power of teenagers to carry out the preferred alternative is relevant to the commitment of self-identity establishment (MAROPO, 2014).

Exploration is an activity that is carried out to reveal and look for possible information and alternative to develop future interests. Moreover, the variety of information and alternative can be compared to one another in the sense which one is the most beneficial and able to provide a better guarantee. The information search can be carried out by reading various sources of information (books, newspaper, and other mass media) as well as observing life activities of those who have close relationship with the teenagers such as parents, teacher, important person, and others. Furthermore, the exploration activity can be conducted by asking someone to be a direct participant in a life domain (DAYMON, 2007; JOHNSON et al., 2010).

The use of knowledgeability can be described as someone that possess a lot of knowledge on various aspects, particularly in relation to various alternatives that are useful for the establishment of self-identity. On top of that, the individuals revealed that they have obtained a variety of knowledge from many sources and media. Moreover, they possess information for their self interest with several advantages and disadvantages (MAROPO, 2014).

Other than that, teenagers' exploration power can be observed by how far it directs all their activities to reveal the information required for the establishment of self-identity. Their activities are apparent from the flow of information they search, considering whether a part of the knowledge will have various orientation in indicating if the teenagers truly possess wide knowledge.

The next exploration phase refers to how deep the reasoning provided by the teenagers when they conduct inter-alternative comparison of self-identity establishment with each advantages

and disadvantages. Therefore, an alternative is chosen on the basis of complete and mature consideration. The teenagers are aware that they should have some alternatives when making a choice (DERRIDA & STIEGLER, 2002).

The emotional tone indicates a sense of happiness, proud, and excitement when they search for information that is required to establish their self-identity. Moreover, they will have a better feeling when discussing the various alternatives related to the direction of their self-identity establishment. Apart from that, they will also feel proud if they witness others who have similar tendency.

The criteria or element of the teenagers' exploration in the framework of other self-identity establishment is the tendency to make decision immediately. In other words, they will be able to make decision immediately if they are equipped with enough information and have considered each preferred alternative. Therefore, it is important for each individual to learn to make decision immediately (MCQUAIL, 1997).

All criteria of the exploration are synchronous with one another and highly valuable to ensure that they possess high exploration capability. Hence, the higher the score of each element has, thus the higher is the exploration level. The knowledgeability indicates how many teenagers that possess the knowledge of alternatives, which allows them to choose either the advantages or disadvantages. An individual is said to have high level of commitment when he possesses information to assist on his choice perfectly (JIM, 2002).

METHODOLOGY

The present study employed reception analysis to investigate the social and cultural background of the viewers. According to the methodology term, the reception method involves interpretative constructivist paradigm (MOORES, 1995).

This study is conducted based on a cultural studies approach by utilizing the encoding/decoding theory of Stuart Hall. Hall's theoretical framework suggests that the audiences should encode the message before interpreting it. The encoding and decoding framework is extracted from a dominant stimulus response model. Baran and Davis explain Hall's three categories of

encoding to the audiences which are *dominant*, *negotiated*, and *oppositional readings*. *Dominant or preferred readings* occur when the viewers totally violate the government's ideology, whereby the interpretation is conducted in line with the purpose of meaning choices coded by the television producers or writers' text (HALL, 1992). Meanwhile, *negotiated readings* take place when the viewers make a personal interpretation that is different from the content of the message. Finally, *oppositional readings* are produced when the viewers interpret a message that directly contradicts the message code (ESPERITU, 2011; GAUNTLETT & HILL, 1999).

Primary data in the research comes from a focus group discussion with 15 teenagers in Jakarta. The data collection method in the research was carried out in two ways, i.e. focus group discussion and observation. The reason for choosing focus group discussion relates to the role of informants. They are considered important in the research because they can give information regarding the research subject, they watch Korean Drama from Pay TV. The second data collection method was carried out with a kind of nonparticipant observation.

• Focus Group Discussion

The study of audiences performed using the method of focus group discussion is for the purpose of gathering the opinions of the participants from a group or community in a natural way, which indicates freedom in research (BRIANDANA & IBRAHIM 2015).

The subjects of the current research include informants who watch foreign shows through pay TVs and domicile in Greater Jakarta. The informants are divided into several categories based on the following criteria:

- a. The informants have to be teenagers.
- b. The informants subscribe pay TVs.
- c. The informants should be those who watch K-drama series of *Descendants of the Sun* on KBS World Channel.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the data collected through focus group discussion, it was revealed that the

informants prefer watching K-drama series due to several important factors. The factors include that the drama story must be interesting and not boring, always raise social values, and instill the harmony of family and struggle to maintain love. Moreover, the music or theme song in K-drama is always considered great because the production team has prepared it perfectly before the shooting or the soundtrack is produced far before the drama is shown. Moreover, the prepared soundtrack is popularised before the drama is shown which allows the viewers to imagine the story from the beginning (HALKOAHO, 2012).

The next factor refers to the attractive attributes of the K-drama actors that seem to attract the interest of the women viewers. The oriental face of Korean actors is indeed very different from the actors of China and Japan, specifically their nose and height. Culture is the next factor that managed to develop the interest of the audiences in K-drama. The findings of this study revealed that K-drama frequently shows Korean and Asian cultural values such as politeness, honor to parents, loyalty to family, the values of togetherness or the value for collectivity, and the sanctity of love (JENSEN, 2002).

Kdrama uniquely presents the values of the daily activities of modern Korean society which have undergone advanced technology and high economic growth. The final factor is related to the location setting and qualified production result. Commonly, the production of a K-drama requires at least four months for the beginning phase prior to the real production of the story. The production team is required to conduct a research for each scene, character of the actors, and soundtrack. The shooting will only start after everything has been accomplished. Finally, it is widely known that majority of the K-drama show takes place one year later due to the long production process which allows the K-drama series to be produced superbly.

- Drama and Emotional Tone

The relation between the collected data and theory in the current research can be described based on how the relationship of *melodramatic imagination* is observed as stated by Ian Ang in "*Watching Dallas*" (1985). The attitude of the actors

that portray individualistic values, the difference of social class, patriarchal values, and materialism seem to have a close relationship with the conflict and scenes in the story. These are used to yield dramatic and interesting elements. According to the informants, they were emotionally involved when they watched the happy and sad scenes. Hence, this shows that most of the informants cried when they watched the dramatic scenes (RITSON & RICHARD, 1999).

Apart from that, it was found that the resolution of the informants' opinion seems to criticize those who have different social class background. In the case of the K-drama series, *Descendant of the Sun*, some changes managed to be observed from the actor's character. For example, in the beginning of the K-drama series, the actor was described to have an arrogant character with high individualistic values and all luxuries surrounding him; however, the arrogant and vainglorious character changed when he fell in love with a woman which encouraged him to do anything to win her love (JENSEN & JANKOWSKI, 1991).

According to the data analysis result, the audiences' characteristics for the K-drama series on pay TVs managed to be investigated. In this case, the particular media type contains the audiences' special characteristics that cannot be found in the audiences' conventional television. The characteristic is called "Selective Watching", or in other words, it refers to the specific choice of the audiences in choosing the programs to be watched. This particular invention allows the audiences to look for the preferred program based on the schedule from various sources actively. It also directs the audiences to ignore any programs that is not up to their preferences. Moreover, they frequently restrict their daily television watching time despite the fact that they are allowed to choose their specific programs. In this matter, the informants become specific audiences in the choice of television channel on pay TVs that are appropriate to their preference, particularly for the K-drama series of *Descendant of the Sun* (SHAW, 2010).

Moreover, the informants indicated that it will be more appropriate to categorize them as 'program

audiences' instead of 'television audiences'. This further indicates that they do active watching on their preferred program content in a 'conscious way' when they watch the K-drama series on pay TVs. In other words, they tend to really focus when they spend their time to watch their preferred program. Hence, this contradicts the background of "television audiences" who tend to frequently watch in random. Their attractiveness to the program is only incidentally at certain time and according to certain circumstances. With the directed and in-focus attention to the program content, the informants can interpret each part shown in a program, which in this case the K-drama series of *Descendant of the Sun*. They are able to absorb values contained in the program actively (HAROLD, 1947).

Moreover, the analysis result is not consistent with the findings of Goodhardt, Ehrenberg, and Collins (1975) as well as Boggart (1972) who state that the watching direction has moved towards "television as a product category", whereby the audiences are more attracted to television as a media without having any specific preferences to the available channel or program. Contrastingly, the findings of this research revealed that the audiences who use pay TVs tend to select specific programs and channels in accordance to their need and attractiveness.

K-Drama and Self Identity

In reference to the data analysis result, it was found that the informants adopted their watching result to build their own self-identity. The watching activity of the K-drama series program in the current research is used as an exploration, or in other words, as an effort to reveal information and gain a deep understanding (HEO, 2002).

Specifically, the informants utilised the watching activity result as a way to reveal information and find new things that can guide them to build their self-identity. In their watching activity, the informants identified themselves to one or several figures with the purpose of reflecting positive values as a reference to build their self-identity. Moreover, the description of figures in the watched show managed to provide reference for the informants to establish their self in future (IWABUCHI, 2004).

Apart from that, the figures represented positive values and attitudes as the model behavior and attitude, while the negative values should be avoided by the informants. Hence, this reaffirms that the watching activity is definitely related to the social lie of the informants. The emotional tone built from the watching activity can trigger a sense of happiness, proud, and spirit on the informants considering that they have to search the information required to build their self-identity (YANG, 2008).

4. CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study are able to conclude that the characteristics of personality found in the K-drama series are values realized by the individual character, which at the same time reflects a person who has more material capability. The ideology of patriarchal capitalist can be clearly observed in the antagonistic character of egoism and individualism in the early part of the drama, whereby the preservation of the rich storytelling and modern love story theme seems to connect the gap between the rich and poor individuals in the story. Meanwhile, the ideological opposition that managed to be obtained from the drama include arrogance and wealth obsession in representing the status of rich individuals. The stereotype of upper class or rich people was successfully realized by the protagonist actor. However, the actor who was very arrogant and egoistic at the beginning of the story then gradually changed his character due to the influence of the woman he loves. The character of the protagonist actor realized in the K-drama series of *Descendant of the Sun* is a stereotype of the common people, but the values of politeness and kindness managed to be delivered across through the sympathetic and modest attitudes established in their social environment.

Moreover, it was also found that the informants who watched the drama *Descendant of the Sun* were deeply touched by the conflict and certain characters in the story, which then instill excessive emotion among the audiences as a result of the happy and sad scene. On top of that, most of the informants cried and showed empathy when they watched dramatic scene.

Finally, the findings also revealed that the watching results helped the informants to build their own identity. The watching activity of the K-drama series program in this research is utilised as an effort of exploration such as looking for information and gaining a deep understanding. Specifically, the result of watching activity was also utilised to gain information and new discoveries that could be used as a reference in building their self identity. On top of that, they also identified themselves to one or several figures considered in order to reflect positive values that could help to build their self identity. The description of figures in the show that was watched can guide the informants to establish their self in the future. Overall, the figures managed to represent positive values and attitudes which will be regarded as the model behavior and attitude, while the negative values should be avoided by the informants. Finally, this reaffirms that the watching activity plays a role in shaping the social life of the informants.

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