

RESEARCH BRIEFS

Audience Ethnography of Javanese Family Viewing Practice in Yogyakarta

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In everyday life, people today become so accustomed to watching television. In 2010, survey data from the Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics stated that in 2009, the percentage of the population aged 10 years and over that watches TV reaches 90.27 percent. In *Media planning guide Indonesia 2008* book also noted that ownership of television sets in 2006 reach 34 million households, with an audience of more than 200 million people. In early 2008, the newspaper KOMPAS made a poll showing that watching television is more of a family-oriented activity rather than individual viewing. It recorded only 4.9 percent of respondents who do not watch television with the family members. Thus, watching television is a communal behavior (Nugroho, 2008).

When television was introduced in early 1962, ownership was limited to the wealthy families. Televisi Republik Indonesia (TVRI) was the first and the only broadcast television station with black and white screen as the only option. Nowadays, television has become part of daily life in Indonesia and is no longer a luxury item. Almost every household in Indonesia now owns a television set. Even some groups of people own more than one television set and subscribed to paid television services for more channels.

Watching television is not a process that is easy to understand just by looking at the audience staring at the television screen even though it has become such a common practice and parcel of daily life today. It also involves interaction between the viewers and the television show, the course in time and spaces, and a certain socio-cultural background. David Morley (1992) explained the importance of understanding the context of television viewing in the mediated interaction of television viewers. Social and physical environment in which the subject involved with television potentially forms distinctive patterns in the activity of watching.

In cultural studies approach, what is meant by television viewing practices inquiry is how the power of television actually meets the social experience of people who watch it (Lembo, 2000). Television viewing can be said as one of the cultural practices by individuals and not the only one. It means that in understanding the television viewing practice, one cannot deny contextual setting, which is an important element in assessing the cultural practices. As Ron Lembo asserted strongly:

It has focused on the study of culture practice and power across a wide variety of social settings, both contemporary and historical.

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Analysts have paid attention to the ways that power orders and organizes even the most mundane aspects of everyday life; and, just as importantly, they have sought to demonstrate how people take issue with power and resist its normalizing influences. (2000, p. 53).

Consequently, the presence of television brought a number of differences in the interactions and relationships between family members. Television set, which is located in the family room, forms different patterns in the degree of activity or passivity, choices, interests, commitments, or attentions in watching activities. The use of television has penetrated the lives of informants from day to day. Clearly, family experience is not static (Rogge, 1991 as cited in Gauntlett & Hill, 1999).

This study explains family experiences on watching television routinely, which led them to certain habits, and how they respond to the television show they are watching. The use of television daily not only provides various experiences but also shape patterns that move dynamically, by considering the historicity and complexity of socio-cultural context that accompanies the television viewing activities.

METHODS

The research was conducted using audience ethnographic methods. This approach involves the observation into the process of media interaction and invite them to talk about the viewer's role as much and as openly as possible. The goal is to record the subject's life activities, in this case the studied families, and to understand the experience of watching television from their own perspective. According to Antonio La Pastina (2005), audience ethnography that is based on a field-work, data collection, and analysis in a certain period of time, allows the researchers to attain a greater level of understanding of the community studied while maintaining self-reflexivity and respect toward those attempting to understand the everyday life of the community. Contextual understanding arising

from the relationship between different aspects of the observed phenomena is the main strength of this approach (Jensen & Jankowski, 1991). This study conducted in-depth investigation on two Javanese families where I lived there for three months each from January to June, 2009. I was participating actively in the life of informant families to understand why and how they watch television in their daily lives. I attempted to arrange regular or in-depth conversations to complement the knowledge about the symptoms associated with the routine of watching television of informant families in order to explain the involved contextual aspects negotiated. Salim (2001) stated that an interview manifested as a spontaneous dialogue without being conditioned is more valid.

Two informant families came from Solo but are living in Yogyakarta. Both informant families are headed by retired parents who are living with their children (married or not married). Pojok Sekip's family, is a Catholic family from middle economical class background and incomplete family form. Since her husband had passed away, Mrs. Sus is the head of the household. Ms. Yes, the only daughter who lives with her, is a divorcée and has a daughter named Titin. There are also four boarding girls who came from different cities with different socio-cultural backgrounds namely, Tin, Riris, Ninit, and Icha. The dynamics of the Pojok Sekip family's daily activities moves dynamically with the presence of the boarders. There is no male in the house. The second family, named Pandega Marta's family, is a Christian family from upper economical class background. Mr. Pam had three children. He lives with his wife and a son named Aan. The rhythm of daily activities of this family was monotonous since the same activities were repeated every day. In addition, each informant family has more than one television set at home. It is also considered determinant on how they watch television. The basics of informant family selection are the differences in the composition of family households, that is, the number of family member, kinship, religious affiliation, social class, and economic condition. Distinguishing factors

are meant to see the involved contextual aspects that are negotiated in watching television. Another reason is the ease of access for the researcher to enter the area of their daily life in the natural settings required by ethnography methods.

The collected data and information were processed using interpretive descriptive analysis. The analyzed data include dialogue, commentary, and stories recorded in the observations throughout the study period. The data obtained were interpreted as a description of the study phenomenon and were classified in order to analyze the problems thematically and systematically. This research centered on the informant figure as a subject in television interaction. Key person of informant family have been determined first in order to be the center in explaining watching television without ignoring the existence of other informant figures. Determination of key person was based on the intensity of television usage, relationships in the family, and proximity to other informant figures.

RESULTS

Television as the interior object is not considered as home decoration, but to create social spaces in informant families' daily life. Watching television is a cultural practice that is integrated in daily activities. Informants staring at the television interact, rather than communicating, with the television. The watching experience is not a passive process. The patterns of inter-informant activities formed patterns that move dynamically with the involved contextual aspects negotiated in the course of television-mediated activities. It explains how informants as active person and moving dynamically from time to time establish the patterns of typical viewing habits.

The involved contextual aspects were divided in two parts. First, one is called personal context derived from the characteristics of the individual. The informants used the personal experience as their frame of reference to interpret what they saw on television. They gave attention and showed their emotions if they had similar experience with the

television show they were watching. In other words, the informant contextualized what the television displayed. For instance, Ms. Yes observed that the celebrities' divorce process was not as complicated as what she had experienced. She gave commentary when she saw a television reality show that did not match with what she experienced before. There was a simplification of reality on television. "It was very easy for the celebrities getting divorce, while I had been waiting for long time in tribunal meeting. I must be patient to be called by Romo", she mentioned. Likewise, Mr. Pam confidently expressed his personal opinion to choose Sri Mulyani as vice president in the 2009 election when he watched political news that addressed the issue of co-vice president of SBY. He believes that Sri Mulyani has intelligence and competency as vice president because he had attended a training event where Sri Mulyani was a speaker. Mr. Pam uses his personal experience to address emerging issues or topics in television news.

Next, religious knowledge is used often as reference in responding to television news, especially the news concerning matters of religious life. It brings its own sensitivity to the informants. As the church steward, Mr. Pam responded to the television issues related to the minority pressure as part becoming Christian. He believes that the SBY's party who had a majority vote could not be dominated by the coalition parties. On the contrary, Mrs. Sus showed anxiety to possibility of Sharia Law implementation so she would vote for Megawati as a president at her friend's suggestion. In the other hand, Ms. Tin as a Muslim did not give justification on television footage that showed scenes of violence in the religious soap opera. The scenes contain elements of occult or mystical that appeared in religious soap opera stories in TPI's channel. Most religious-based soap operas just did not interest her because exaggerated religious practice can eliminate the message. In the end, there was a perception, built by the informants, about the issues television showed based on their religious understanding.

By using the cultural reference and intellectual ability, the informants indicated how the reality

was seen on television. While watching the soap opera "Cinta Fitri" Mrs. Pam stated, "I thought that the actress who claimed as Javanese only has an accent but could not be Javanese". She also mentioned that the manner in conversations was no longer polite since speaking to the elder by using high tone and loudly as angry man was common. Ms. Tin also mentioned that the kinship in the "Cinta Fitri" is typical of Javanese family. She noted Hutama's extended family live in the same house and display of togetherness in solving family problem, including the marriage problem that happened to the children in Hutama's family. In addition, Ms. Yes gave the support opinion that it was not a mistake when Farel family are still living with his parents as she herself is still living with her mother even though she was married. Intellectual ability became references for the informant's family while they watched television show, which test their competence. Mrs. Sus did not give full attention to a cooking show if the recipes displayed had been mastered. Instead, the episodes that contained unfamiliar recipes or rarely cooked will draw her attention.

Furthermore, the informants also perform a simple negotiation mechanism, which related to physical and social-cultural background. They use the whole cultural resources while watching television. The informant's subjectivity related to power relations, culture, and customs that exist within the informant. Firstly, the informants have daily tasks as their domestic obligation in everyday life. Even though the Sus family and Pam family had a part-time housemaid to clean the house, the household tasks seemed to never end. The boarding girls took care of their own needs and some of them took advantage of laundry and catering services in order to gain more free time. The housekeeping tasks usually accompanies the informant's viewing practices or not at all. For example, Ms. Yes left sweeping task because she did not want to miss the story of the soap opera. Mrs. Sus was baking when she watched Obama's inauguration shows. In the study by Sunarwati (2009), routine (anything done out of habit) is the basic element of everyday social activities.

The term day-to-day contains routine properties owned by social life when life is stretched across space and time. Watching television was a daily action, which the informant did without omitting the other daily activities. They also did not make themselves specialized to watch television. At least, watching television may accompany the informants' daily activities as domestic tasks, as shown in their multitasking practices.

Secondly, television became the center of the furniture layout and interior in the informants' house. As they had more than one television set, and one was placed in the living room and one in the bedroom, which serves as watching arena. Watching arena took a particular place in the house, the public sphere, or the private sphere. Living room as public area meant that everyone has equal access to use but bedroom as private area demonstrated that only certain people had access to the venue. The difference of the television placement formed diversity in the ways and habits of the emerging watching practices. The layout of the television formed certain psychological atmosphere that brought particular convenience in watching television. A chair or floor cushion that was placed facing the television was selected to be as comfortable as possible in accordance with their wishes. Another function was as "unofficial" dining room or the place where the girls study for homework or exams. For instance, Ms. Yes or Mrs. Sus is often found to fall asleep in a lying position on the floor of the living room while watching television. Titin also put her books scattered on the table in front of television. In that occasion, she did not give full attention to television. In connection with the house situation, the television was often left turned on when the informant was home alone. The presence of noise from the television set eliminated the silence and drove away their loneliness. Even though not in the mood, Titin turned on the television when she was alone at home. So did Mrs. Pam. Indeed, Lull explained the role of television as a loyal friend as well as providing a busy atmosphere (Morley, 1986).

Finally, there were also other media options, such as VCD/ DVD player, radio, computer/

laptop, internet facilities, newspapers, and fixed or mobile phone. The informants interacted with other media choices in their daily lives. In fact, all informants had their own cell phone and the television equipped with the video player (VCD/ DVD). The Sus family subscribed to the daily newspaper “Kedaulatan Rakyat”, while the Pam family subscribed to “KOMPAS”. Mr. Pam’s computer also had 24-hour internet facility, while the boarding girls are connected to the Internet by using a USB modem. The ownership of information and communication media technology formed distinctive patterns in the usage of media. The informants performed the plural mediated interaction pattern, indicating that they use two or more media technologies in parallel. For example, Mrs. Sus or Ms. Yes usually did calling activities, send-receive SMS, listening to music via mobile phone or computer, and playing games on laptop during the time of television watching. In brief, they did not really watch television and did multitasking practice. At other times, they performed a single mediated interaction patterns, the informants often turned off the television when they were accessing other media choices. For instance, Riris used the internet or read the comics in her bedroom. Ninit or Icha watched movies with the DVD player.

CONCLUSION

Watching television is a daily action in informant family. Each family member has its own viewing patterns, different from each other. A person watching experience cannot be said to represent or equated with the others even if they had an alliance, in the same space and time to watch. Watching television is not a passive process, but process of negotiations involving the subjective perspective in the act of receiving the meaning of the messages conveyed by television. In the end, Sus family and Pam family negotiated the involved contextual aspects in using and responding to the television. Personal experiences, knowledge of religion, cultural references, and

intellectual ability were negotiated to obtain the television reality understanding with what they were experiencing. In addition, domestic obligation, physical characteristics of watching arena and the house situation, and ownership of other media choices helped to determine the differences the way the informant families watch television in everyday life.

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