

The influence of audience on television content in post-authoritarian Indonesia

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Abstract

In Indonesia, the downfall of the last authoritarian ruler in May 1998 marked the beginning of the transition to democracy in the country. Before 1998, the autocratic government monitored firmly the media content for decades. However, a question arises, who actually controls media content in the current era of liberalization. This empirical research intends to investigate the role of audience in influencing the program content. The data collections involved various sources, including interviews with around 100 television workers, participant observations, documents, and television reports. The results revealed that audience influence on television content is best presented on the use of rating reports in developing the program content. Every program content must be blended with entertainment elements with the intended goal is to reach the highest level of marketability. This mixture finally produces a dumbing-down effect, or the deliberate diminution of the intellectual level of program contents to ensure mass acceptability.

Keywords: audience, television, content, Indonesia

1. Introduction

The fall of the last authoritarian government in Indonesia in 1998 allowed the rise of freedom followed by the process of transition to democracy in the country. For decades, the autocratic government monitored firmly the media. At the time of authoritarian era, the media that dared to ignore or underestimate government controls, they would face fatal consequences. Media permits were frequently revoked, subject to bans, and even closed down without gaining access to open trial.

For more than 50 years, two leaders, Sukarno and Suharto, who run their governments in an authoritarian manner, ruled Indonesia. Sukarno, who led the struggle for independence of Indonesia from the Netherlands, was the country's first President from 1945 to 1967. During his rule, and with the backing of the military, Sukarno disbanded political parties, arrested and imprisoned political opponents, used martial law to closed-down mass media criticism of the government's policies, and other repressive actions.

During the initial decade of independence in 1945, Indonesian media was dubbed by founding President Sukarno a 'toll of the Revolution', responsible for energizing and mobilizing public opinion (Hill, 2007) ^[14]. Sukarno determined to rein in renegade media for a range of political reasons such as considered lending editorial support for regional movements against the central government, or offending the president or senior political or military figures. Sukarno closed down newspapers, and he was adamant that, whatever the international odium associated with the press suppression, he would not allow destructive criticism of his leadership (Hill, 2007) ^[14].

As part of an effort by government to mobilize the mass media in forging a strong and unified nation, the government established the state controlled television station TVRI in 1962; it was the first and the only television in Indonesia for 26 years since its inception.

With the transition of government after the coup d'état against Sukarno in 1 October 1965 and the transfer of power to Major-General Suharto on 11 March 1966, the new government called the press to safeguard national security against internal and external threats. In promoting adherence to the state ideology, the Suharto Government sought to eliminate critical papers, domesticate the vociferous press, and ensure that press workers and management were ultimately loyal to the government. By 1969, savage bans, by the regime cut the number of newspapers and magazines, and their total circulation, to less than half ^[8].

During the authoritarian era, the government had created political barriers to entry in the media industry. The policy was aimed at producing domination by the government with the power to grant and to revoke media licenses. Through its power, the regime was able to limit market players to politically favorable parties. This was especially visible in the television industry, when in 1988 the government granted licenses to the first private commercial television Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia (RCTI) owned by Suharto's son. Another three private commercial televisions, which follow suit in the nineties: Indosiar, Surabaya Citra Televisi (SCTV), and Televisi Pendidikan Indonesia (TPI, now MNC) were also under the control of giant enterprises owned by Suharto's circle.

The restriction imposed on media prevailed until Suharto came down from power on May 21, 1998. It was a day of great importance in the Indonesian history. The day when President Suharto –pressured by waves of demonstrations due to economic meltdown– was forced to step down after more than 30 years in power. From that day, the country started its path to democracy, which also paves the way for freedom of the press.

The downfall of President Suharto allows the media to appreciate the new circumstance of being free from the government strict control and the media flourished

aggressively. Currently, Indonesia, the world's fourth-largest population, becomes the new emerging democratic country. After the shift of political power, various reforms in almost all aspects of life developed, particularly the media and press that relished the freedom the most.

Under heavy pressures from the civil society and the market, a series of liberalization policies were taken by the post-Suharto governments. The new broadcast law was enacted in 2002 and one year later, the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission (KPI), an independent state regulatory body, was established. KPI is responsible to regulate and provide recommendations in the area of broadcasting. With the current broadcast liberalization, Indonesian televisions can produce almost any kind of program contents.

When democratization removes state censorship, and the media enjoy freedom of expression, we have to deal with the following questions: Who controls the content in the media? Who actually shapes the news and entertainment content that we see or hear? How political and economic factors influence television workers in shaping content? In particular, this research intends to investigate the role of audience in shaping television content in post-authoritarian Indonesia.

This research will look at the forces at work within television organizations, especially the role of audience in shaping program content in Indonesia. So, the key research question: How do audiences in Indonesia influence television workers in shaping the program content?

2. Influential Factors

According to McQuail (2000), the media organization, where media content is made, is an essential link in the process of mediation by which society addresses itself^[19]. In this regard, structural features of media organization such as size, forms of ownership and media, industrial function can be seen as having direct consequences for the conduct of the particular media organization. McQuail (2000) refers conduct to all the system activities that in turn affect performance, in the sense of the type and relative amount of media content produced and offered to audiences^[19]. According to this model, we need to look not only at internal features of media organizations, but also in their relations with other organizations and with the wider society.

This research will look at the forces at work within television organizations, the external influences upon their activity and the influence of particular organization features on what they produce and disseminate. McQuail said, the theories, which have been formulated based on research into media organizations, have been consistent^[19]. They support the view that organizational routines, practices and goals systematically and distinctively influence content.

The questions about the degree of freedom media organization Posses in relation to the wider society, and how much freedom is possible within the organization and media-organizational routines and procedures for selecting and processing content lead to consideration of the tension. According to McQuail (2000), the following oppositions reflect the tension at the heart of media-making: 1) constraint versus autonomy; 2) routine production versus creativity; 3) commerce versus art and; 4) profit versus social purpose^[19].

The broad range of issues, which arise, can be appreciated when one takes an overview of theoretical perspectives organized around the question of influence on media content,

as posed by Shoemaker and Reese (1991) who suggest five main hypotheses^[26].

- 1) Content reflects social reality (mass media as mirror of society);
- 2) Content is influenced by media workers' socialization and attitudes (a communicator-centered approach).
- 3) Content is influenced by media-organizational routines;
- 4) Content is influenced by social institution and forces;
- 5) Content is a function of ideological positions and maintains the status quo (the hegemonic approach)

McQuail (2000) identify five main kinds of relationship, which need to be examined in order to gain some understanding of the conditions affecting media organizational activity and the mass communicator role^[19].

1. Relationship with society
2. Relationship with owners, clients and suppliers
3. Relationship with pressure groups
4. Relationship with internal organization
5. Relationship with audience

Referring back to the base and superstructure model proposed by Marx and Engels (1974, 1977) it could be said that media content influence and media power relations discussed above relate to mass media as a 'means of production' which in capitalist society are in the ownership of the ruling class^[17, 18]. According to this idea, the mass media simply disseminate the ideas and world views of the ruling class, and deny or defuse alternative ideas. This is very much in accord with Marx's argument that.

The class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. (Curran et al., 1982, 72)^[7].

From this perspective the mass media disseminate the dominant ideology: the values of the class which owns and controls the media. The mass media worked to create 'false awareness' in the average workers. This prompts a compelling position whereby media content are seen as undiversified expressions of decision class values, which disregards any differing qualities inside the decision class and inside the media, and the likelihood of oppositional readings by audiences of media.

A number of different relationships within and across the boundaries of media organization must be taken into account in any theoretical account of media organizations and occupations. These relationships are often active negotiations and exchanges and sometimes conflicts, latent or actual.

Gerbner (1969) depicted communicators in mass media as working under pressure from different external 'power roles', including audience, competitors (other media in the main), clients (such as sponsors and advertisers), authorities (especially legal and political), experts, and other institutions^[11].

According to Pringle and Starr (2005), all broadcast station content (programs) is determined by four influences: audience, broadcaster, advertiser and regulator^[23].

The audience, which seeks out a station for its programs. Listeners or viewers may be exposed to other content, such as commercials and public service and promotional announcements, but their principal goals to hear or view program content that satisfies their need at a particular time. Programs that fail to attract listeners or viewers, or fail to

satisfy their needs, are imperiled. So are the financial fortunes of the station.

The broadcaster, who is responsible for operating the station profitably for its owners. The greater the audience, the greater the likelihood that a profit can be realized. Accordingly, the broadcaster selects and schedules programs to attract as many people as possible among the targeted audience.

The advertiser, whose principal interest in using a radio or television is to bring a product or service to the attention of those most likely to use it. Programs that attract potential customers stand the best chance of attracting advertising revenues, especially if the number of people is large and the cost of delivering the commercial to them is competitive.

The regulator, or government and its agencies, whose goal is to ensure that the station is operated in a way that serves the public interest. The regulator take actions aimed at compelling or encouraging broadcasters to engage in certain programming practices to satisfy that goal.

Lewis (1969) used responses from 301 stations in the United States to determine influences in television station programming ^[16]. He developed eight categories, in no particular order of priority:

- 1) Direct feedback from the audience, including letters, telephone calls, and conversations.
- 2) Regulations, or rules and standards of practice, such as commitments to the FCC, its rules and regulations, and the station's own policy statement
- 3) Inferential feedback, or ratings
- 4) Conditional, a mix of factors, including comments about critics and opinions of friends outside the station
- 5) Production staff, the opinions of station personnel with production responsibilities
- 6) Personal or subjective judgment, including instinct, common sense, and knowledge of the community
- 7) Financial, or factors related to the station's income and expenditures, such as sales potential, sales manager's opinion, and cost
- 8) Tactical, that is, methods of program planning, the arrangement of the schedule, and viewing trends.

Commercial radio and television stations air thousands of hours of programs each year. Individual programs may be produced by the stations itself or obtained from another source. They may be designed chiefly to entertain, inform, or educate. Pringle and Starr (2005) write about these influences ^[23].

“Much is said and written about broadcast programming. However, it would be unwise to identify any one influence for praise or condemnation. The programming we hear and see results from the interaction of all four forces.” (Pringle & Starr, 2005, 102) ^[23].

This research will examine the political economy factors that affect content as mentioned earlier by the communication theorists. However, this research will focus on five factors frequently found by television workers in their day-to-day tasks in producing television content: media owners, advertisers, audience, government and politics. The five political and economy factors are widely discussed in the various media literature, and the following are reviews with regard to the factors.

3. Audience Influence

Conceptualizing ‘audience’ must come in the first place before the discussion of a relationship between media and audiences. The audience can be understood based on the following conceptions: (1) a disparate collection of individuals who happen to be consuming one text at one time; (2) a coherent social group who have in common characteristics outside their consumption; (3) a mass group whose identity comes from the very fact of their consumption (Burton, 2005, 16) ^[5].

Although the political-economy approach centers on media activity as an economic process resulting in the commodity (the media product or content), there is a variant in this approach that suggests that audience as the real and the primary product of the media. This refers to the fact that the media give public attention to advertisers and shape the behavior of media publics in certain distinctive way (Smythe, 1977). What commercial media sells to their clients is a certain more or less, guaranteed amount of potential consumers, according to a market-relevant profile (McQuail, 2000, 82) ^[19].

According to Burton (2005), in order to satisfy their advertisers media institutions need to objectify their audiences ^[5]. Advertisers must be satisfied because in most cases, media depend on their commercial payments for survival and profit. In this case, advertisers are looking at quantitative research and at ways of measuring what the audiences do with the products. More specific descriptions of audiences emphasize this view. So although given media organizations may talk in general about their readers, listeners or viewers, in fact they are thinking about consumers. The most important reason for audience's existence is to provide cash for the media institutions to continue to operate.

The number of audience is crucial for media. Broadcasters refer to ratings. Newspapers refer to circulation figures and readership. These descriptions translate into numbers. The bottom line of every audience research, even the qualitative ones, is to obtain data about who are prepared to spend, given amounts of cash on the given media service, and how far do these translate into certain numbers of certain kinds of people who are spending, or the goods and services that it may be promoting? ¹ So the relationship at the level of the executive, of policy, of shareholders, is a material one (Burton, 2005-16) ^[5].

The mass media audience is divided into various segments, and not all audience members are equally important. Segment of mass audience most likely to buy an advertiser's product is called the target audience or market. Target audiences are grouped in terms of demographic (such as income, gender, age, and education), geographic, or psychographics (attitudes and life-styles). The media, which could provide the best target audience for advertisers' products, are the most sought-after.

The relationship between media and audience is actually dissimilar, even when audiences are part of television program production, as in the case of reality TV or other programs that invite people to the studio. Television workers define the terms on which audiences may participate. A strict control is imposed for those who want to appear on the media. It is obvious in the case of television shows with the audiences in

¹ The qualitative audience research including lifestyle identities or psychometric profiles.

the studio (for example quiz, or music show), once they are on the show they are no longer the audiences. They are not onlookers; they are talents, part of the production team. Audiences in studio stand in a rather different relationship, with regard to textual material, than do the audiences at home. What doesn't change is that media institution still controls the players including studio audiences who are also players of a kind.

Media have the dominant and controlling role in the audience-media relationship with audiences largely lack access to the media. This dominant role still persists for examples of media where audiences appear to participate through email, letters, phone-ins and other communication devices (Burton 2005,17)^[5].

When commercials began airing on radio stations, advertisers naturally wondered how many listeners were exposed to their messages and how effective the messages were. That's why traditional advertisers, not broadcasters, were the initiators of broadcast research (Shoemaker & Reese, 1991)^[26]. However, it became the responsibility of broadcasters to provide empirical evidence of the size and characteristics of their audience. Electronic media research studies today fall into two main categories: ratings and non-ratings research. Program rating is the average numbers of audiences during a television program expressed as a percentage of the total group sampled or potential. Program Rating points can be based on the smallest time unit of 1 minute.

For television personnel, the rating results from research companies on television programs quite often bothered some broadcasters. Creative television workers including performers, writers, directors, producers and others in programming became particularly sensitive to the rating reports. Often their careers, and sometimes their incomes, were dependent upon where they stood in program rankings. Nevertheless, the slavery to the decimal point decided the fate of many programs and it caused the renewal or termination of the advertising contracts of many sponsors. Casualties were common every season in the television schedules (Shoemaker & Reese, 1991)^[26].

Broadcasting rating creates controversy in many areas. TV viewers complain that "good" shows are cancelled: radio listeners complain that their favorite station's format is changed. Producers, actors, and other artists complain that numbers are no judge of artistic quality. Radio and television station owners and operators complain that the results are not reliable; and advertisers balk at the lack of reliable information. Although there may be merit to these complaints, one basic fact remains until further refinements are made, rating as they currently exist will remain the primary decision-making tool in programming and advertising (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003)^[30].

Rating reports made based on audience research survey are the most common institutional device for making contact with the audience. Market and audience measurement research are important tools of the media sales department. Radio and television audiences are measured by diary, telephone, and personal interview. Television audiences are also measured by meter.

The research reports in estimates of the size and composition of the audience, and enables the station to advice advertisers of the number and kinds of people who hear or see its programs, and the costs of reaching particular demographic

categories. The research report serves an essential management function especially in determining programming strategy. The report also relates media to the surrounding political and financial system but convey a little that is meaningful to the individual media worker (McQuail, 2000)^[19].

The pursuit of large audiences by the television stations led media workers to eventually have a cynical view toward the audience as stupid, incompetent and unappreciative (McQuail, 2000)^[19]. The negative view result in a tension between the professionalism of the communicator, with its implied autonomy, and the meeting of apparent audience demands and desires, with their implication of limiting autonomy. The situation may also stem from the fact that the mass communicator is offering a professional service and a product, while the dominant criterion applied by the media organization is nearly always the ratings (McQuail, 2000)^[19]. Most media workers agreed that professional success has to be demonstrated in terms of rising circulation and advertising revenues. However, most people in the media, with some justification, will not recognize rating as a very reliable measure of intrinsic quality. However, the resistance to ratings and other audience statistic should not necessarily be equated with negative views of the audience. Weaver and Wilhoit (1986) found that the single most important factor contributing to work satisfaction of journalists was the possibility of helping people^[31]. They also found that the single most frequent source of feedback to journalists is from individual members of the audience.

Today large commercial television stations can obtain rating reports almost on day-to-day basis and use them to improve television programs. Media organizations are, for the most part, in the venture of producing content as a way of inviting audiences to come and generating profit and employment. They need some firm basis on which to predict the interests and likely degree of attention of audience by utilizing rating reports as their parameter.

Audiences are attracted in large numbers to many entertainment programs. If audience interest in other kind of content is high in a particular market, or if the station believes that interest can be stimulated, it may wish to produce or buy programs that respond to such interest.

Although the audience is considered the most important of the clients and influences in the environment of any media organization, research tend to show that audience as having a low salience for many mass media creative workers, however management follows closely ratings and sales figures.

4. Research Methods

Most of research methods used to examine factors affecting television contents are 'media-centric', which means taking, or recording the view from within the media. The reason for this is because only by knowing how the media operate and assess themselves can we understand how society influences the media and vice versa (McQuail, 2000)^[19].

The other reason is that data about media strategies and their money related undertakings is rare for reasons of classification information about media policies and their financial affairs is hard to come by for reasons of confidentiality (Golding & Murdock, 2000)^[12].

This empirical research examines the influence of advertisers on television program content in Indonesia during the period

of 1998 – 2014. The research focus is established based on the research questions: How do advertisers influence television workers in shaping content? The research question needs a qualitative descriptive answer from various sources, including interview transcripts, notes made while observing in the field, documents, media and television reports.

Television workers would be the center of attention of this research (subject of study), and answers to the above research question would depend on their opinions, comments, and responses, which will be collected through intensive interviewing. The interviews with 100 television workers and other data sources are expected to reveal a number of cases, which illustrate how advertisers influence television content directly or indirectly.

This research focus on ten largest Jakarta-based free-to-air national television stations in Indonesia whose content compositions are not exactly similar. The ten stations are: Indosiar, SCTV, RCTI, MNCV TV, Global TV, Metro TV, ANTV, TVOne, Trans TV and Trans 7.

5. Results and Discussions

Every broadcaster naturally wondered how many audiences were exposed to their programs and how effective the program was. As discussed in chapter two, the number of audience is crucial for televisions. In order to know their audience number, broadcasters rely on reports of program rating based on audience survey. The bottom line of every audience research is to obtain data about audience number of certain television programs. In order to serve the clients, television stations give research-based confirmation of their group of viewers size and qualities.

Market and audience measurement research are important tools for the media sales department. The reports indicate a level on a scale that shows how good, important, or popular a television program is. The media with the best target audience for advertisers' products are the most sought-after. Currently, rating reports become the most common institutional device for making contact with the audience, and the most influential instrument in shaping the program content. In other word, the influence of audience on television content is best presented on the use of rating reports by broadcasters in developing their program content.

In Indonesia, competition among commercial television stations has never been fiercer recently in this rating-obsessed industry. It was RCTI, the first Indonesian private television that enjoyed all audience attention in terms of ratings and popularity. Since its establishment in 1989 when competition was still less intense, RCTI has always been number one. However, ten years after its birth, RCTI had to make room for other competitors -especially SCTV, Indosiar, and now Trans 7- which also staked their claim on territory where RCTI took for granted for so long.

Indonesians viewers of all socioeconomic classes enjoy watching television, and nearly all (95%) the country's middle class homes own a television, with 96 percent watching television programs almost every day. For this reason audience measurement is important for television broadcasters and advertisers. Television ratings in Indonesia are supplied by Nielsen Audience Measurement ^[2] Most advertisers and

Indonesian national television stations depend on the rating reports issued by the research agency. If a program happened to gain a low rating, the program would be repaired: broadcasters change the program's storyline and characters for improvements; and if the rating is still low, the program would be scrapped as the possibilities of getting ads for the show would be thin.

With regard to information program, television workers interviewed throughout this research said they used to prioritize and broadcast more stories about popular figures that could boost ratings in their news programs. For example, television workers have been abuzz with news of Joko Widodo who was chosen governor of Jakarta capital in September 2012 because of overpowering backing from the city's urban poor and white collar classes. Already the major of Solo, a far littler city than Jakarta, Jokowi campaigned on a supporting common people, promising Jakarta inhabitants that he could bring real change to their ambushed city.

Joko Widodo, or popularly called Jokowi, along with his Chinese deputy Basuki Tjahja Purnama, or Ahok become the media darling ever since, especially for television channels. Jokowi was popular because of his humble and clean reputation. He was seen as a man who listens to the people. Jokowi and Ahok were hugely popular with young people and they were indeed Newsmakers who attracted many audiences and high ratings on television.

In covering their stories, each television outlet deployed one team consisting of at least two reporters and two camera persons to trail both Jokowi and Ahok to cover their activities and reactions for news. One reporter was assigned to follow Jokowi as he liked to wander around the city and made an impromptu visit to unexpected places, such as slums, river banks, traditional markets, and local public office. His management style was adored by many Indonesians since it was in contrast to many leaders who prefer to work behind a desk. Another reporter was assigned to follow Ahok, because of his daring attitude while he often made cool comments. It is now common place to see reporters from televisions and other media stand guard in the City Hall main lobby -an area previously restricted to the media- to prepare themselves to cover the two leaders.

Retno Pinasti, a senior news anchor with SCTV, said audiences liked Jokowi's laid-back and informal character, so the station also covered seemingly trivial things about him to cater to people's curiosity (Setiawati, 2013) ^[24]. "Jokowi's attraction lies in his sincerity. He gives short answers and he is not afraid to admit he doesn't know all the details about certain budget allocations. Meanwhile, Pinasti said Ahok often delivers bold statements and makes interesting breakthroughs (Setiawati, 2013) ^[24].

Apart from information program, certain entertainment program genres continue to attract many television viewers as well as ratings. Some of those programs were broadcast during the prime time that span from 7 to 10 p.m. and become the most critical part of the day for most channels. This period offers the biggest potential for viewership and the best chance

programming bundles accessible to the business sector. Arianna is Nielsen Audience Measurement's exclusive TV programming examination apparatus. In addition, a range of topline reports of Television Audience Measurement (TAM) are provided to subscribers via website. In order to fulfill individual client needs customised reports also can be developed. See www.agbnielsen.co.id

² Nielsen Audience Measurement's ratings data can be obtained by a subscription. The information can be analysed through any of the perceived

to rival different channels for the supremacy of national viewership (Blum & Lindheim, 1987). Shows on soap operas, slapstick comedy, reality shows and supernatural shows were broadcast throughout prime time and continue to draw a large number of viewers since many local audiences have always been interested in these types of programs.

Among entertainment programs, television soap operas, known locally as *sinetrons* - the term 'sinetron' comes from the words *sinema* (cinema) and *elektronik* (electronic) - are always a favorite for most Indonesian audiences. However, due to its expensive production cost, only several large television stations that have the capability to consistently produce *sinetrons* and broadcast them during prime time.³ *Sinetron* is the most durable program in Indonesian television channels, and lengthy air time is usually a benchmark of a successful program in the local free-to-air television stations. On the condition that Nielsen's reports indicate good ratings, stations usually tend to extend its *sinetron*'s running time to provide more space for commercial breaks.

Nielsen Audience Measurement which tracks programs on Indonesia's 11 national stations as well as 10 local ones supplies reports on television ratings. The content of television does have a big impact on society allowing television as the most influential media sector. For example, RCTI broadcasts a *sinetron* that holds the supremacy of Indonesia's longest running TV series *Cinta Fitri* (*Fitri's Love*) with an astounding 1,003 episodes. However, as the ratings show, the most viewed types of content are sensational news and moreover television drama (soap opera or *sinetron*). Most TV stations sell drama as their main content, and the audience share for news television is diminutive compared to the others (See Table 5). RCTI leads the audience share by having *sinetron* as their main reliable program, followed by SCTV and Trans TV which predominantly broadcast *sinetron* and variety shows. Sitting at the bottom with the most diminutive audience shares are TV One and Metro TV, which fixate on news broadcasting. Unless the news is sensational, ostensibly the audience prefers drama to news. Other TV stations additionally broadcast news and infrequent investigative reports and documentaries that address gregarious-political issues, but these magnetize a more diminutive audience than *sinetron* or regalement-talkshows such as *Bukan Empat Mata* in Trans 7, as the ratings of the latter boost.

Television stations used to extend its contract with production houses if the program ratings were satisfactory. The production of *sinetrons* and other television programs continue if Nielsen reports indicate the ratings are high, and television stations terminate production if the rating agency says the *sinetron* is 'bad'. Nielsen Media Research offered rating reports to television stations and advertisers on the basis of weekly, daily and even a minute-by-minute audience measurement, gauging how many viewers stay tuned not only during the program but also during commercial breaks. Currently, most producers of television programs utilize

minute by minute (MBM) rating reports to design their program content.

Table 1: Audience share in free-to-air television in Indonesia, 2011

No	Television	Audience Share	Main Content	Group
1	RCTI	17%	Soap opera, comedy	MNC Group
2	SCTV	16%	Soap opera, import drama	EMTEK
3	Trans TV	14%	Variety show, soap opera, comedy	CT Group
4	MNCTV	12%	Religious drama, local music	MNC Group
5	Trans 7	10%	Sports, reality show, news	CT Group
6	Indosiar Visual Mandiri	10%	Soap opera, import drama, reality show	EMTEK
7	Global TV	8%	Nickelodeon, F-1 racing, MTV	MNC Group
8	ANTV	7%	Lifestyle, Family entertainment, sport	Visi Media Asia
9	tvOne	5%	News, sports	Visi Media Asia
10	Metro TV	3%	News, talkshow, documentary	Media group

Source: Media Partner Asia (MPA) Analysis, 2011

According to Yul Andryono, RCTI's Executive Producer for Drama, the MBM rating reports determine *sinetrons*' storyline, including actors that must be maintained or dropped for the next episode (Y. Andryono, personal communication, February 10 2014). He explained if the Nielsen reports indicated higher rating in a certain scene, meaning audience like the scene. Maybe they like that type of scene, or the actors who appeared during the scene. So, in the next episode, production house must give more time to develop that type of scene and give an opportunity for the actor to appear longer in the *sinetron*. On the contrary, if television noticed the rating dropped during a certain scene so the story have to be changed, or the actor be dropped. Andryono said (personal communication, February 10 2014):

"Our programming department, assisted by data from Nielsen, checked the daily and weekly rating progress, minute by minute *sinetron* progress. For example, if actor A showed up and the rating was high, while actor B showed up and the rating was down, so actor A must be played more. For instance, if actor A was killed in a traffic accident, and later the audience number declined, so actor A must be resurrected" Since many television stations are still unable to produce *sinetron*, commercial televisions depend on production houses. Most successful *sinetrons* in Indonesia were made by local production houses. However, the success was not one-sided since television stations also played significant role in *sinetron* content. Yul Andryono said the production house used to follow what television wanted with regard to the storyline and braced for an impromptu change, although the production house's scriptwriter has prepared the scenario from the beginning. He said production house could not turn down television's request for a story change since the station kept monitoring *sinetron* performance through day-to-day rating reports. Andryono said, "We pay production house around 300 million rupiah (US\$30.000) for one episode, that's a lot of money, how can they say no to us."

The stations' daily feedback on the rating performance allowed the stations to review and adjust the story. Production houses were obligated to complete the 60-minute *sinetron* production process in less than one day. It is a common practice among Indonesian production houses to produce hurriedly a very brief one-day *sinetron* production to meet a deadline in order to satisfy audience demand, and this process called locally *kejar tayang*. In order to wrap up one episode in one day, the production has to therefore continually keep

³ Television stations normally paid between Rp250 – Rp350 million (or around US\$25.000 – US\$35.000) to Local production houses for an episode of a *sinetron* series. A production house usually sign a contract to produce a standard 13 episodes. A popular *sinetron* player can get up to Rp 50 million (US\$4166) for one episode of a *sinetron* series, while a newcomer may feel content with only a "transportation fee" for a few minutes appearance on the television screen.

ahead of the screening deadline. Andryono said, "Shooting of Sinetron was made in the morning for broadcast in the evening still in the same day".

One of the country's famous production houses is Multivision Plus owned by Surabaya-born Indian-Indonesian Raam Punjabi. He pioneered Indonesian sinetron that became the country's most popular television program and was dubbed 'the king of sinetron'. The Punjabi family is Sindhi who came from the province of Sind in Pakistan, an adjacent parts of Rajasthan and Gujarat in west India. The family was part of the over 100,000 Indian diaspora in Indonesia following the social disorder caused by India's partition in 1947. Along with thousands of other Sindhis who moved to the South East Asian archipelago, Raam and Dhamoo's parents moved to Indonesia (Aiyar, 2013) ^[1].

Multivision's former senior official and Raam Punjabi's important aide, Groza Subakti, said "Textile was the main business of the Sindhi community in Indonesia. The Punjabis run a textile business in the East Java city of Surabaya. The family moved to the capital, Jakarta when Raam, Dhamoo and another brother began a business importing and producing movies in 1972." (G. Subakti, personal communication, February 12, 2014)

In replication to the elevate of private television stations and the demise of the film industry in early 1990s, the Indonesian television drama industry commenced to develop well and be prosperous. In order to accommodate the high demand for local content to fill broadcast hours, many film companies shifted their business to production houses (Widodo, 2002) ^[29]. Following the establishment of RCTI, the country's first television station in the 1990s, Punjabi's Multivision commenced to get many orders to produce television programs. He was successful producing some of the most popular sinetron. Since then, for almost 15 years, his sinetrons could be seen on almost all TV channels. Multivision dominated Indonesian sinetron market, which reportedly once controls 80 percent of the industry.

Multivision's first big competitor came in 2003 when Dhamoo Punjabi and his son Manoj Punjabi who parted ways with Raam set up another production house MD Entertainment which quickly became a key player in the film industry. A MD production, *Cinta Fitri* (Fitri's love), is Indonesia's longest running soap opera. The company has seven hours of soap operas running on different channels every day. In the period of 10 years after its birth, around a third of the market for popular sinetrons was produced by MD Entertainment; and that's not including some of the country's most successful movies.

MD Entertainment in 2008 produced *Ayat Ayat Cinta* (The Verses of Love), the first movie in Indonesia that broke the box office record held for 10 years by *Titanic*, a Hollywood blockbuster movie. Four years later, in 2012, with an estimated 4.6 million viewers, *Habibie and Ainun*, another MD production, became the highest grossing movie in Indonesia of all time. Manoj is today the king of Indonesian entertainment, replacing Raam Punjabi (Aiyar, 2013) ^[1].

According to a former journalist Anirudya Mitra who moved to MD Entertainment as a co-producer and scriptwriter, Manoj and his production house managed to help several television stations expanding their market share (Aiyar, 2013) ^[1]. He gives an example of how Indonesia's SCTV channel shot up to the number one position from fourth place in terms of

market share when it began airing MD sinetrons in 2007. Similarly, MNC TV's (another channel) fortunes transformed to the top from the number seven position, when MD teamed up with the station in 2011. Anirudya Mitra said, "Whatever Manoj touches kind of turns to gold." (Aiyar, 2013) ^[1].

Most Punjabi's sinetrons had a story line around love and tragedy played by attractive actors surrounded by luxurious houses and fancy cars. Beauty and luxury became common features in sinetrons during the era. According to Groza, the Punjabi family imitated Indian cinemas for their sinetron. Many Punjabi's sinetron were produced exactly like imported television soap operas from India and Latin America. Raam Punjabi even hired the Indian television drama director in order to make sure that the appeal of Indian television drama was transferred to Indonesian sinetron.

He said many plots in the Indian drama film was also found in Punjabi's sinetrons with the story mainly centered around family matters imbued with dramatic reversals of fortune, and convenient coincidences. The story revolves around long-lost relatives and siblings separated by fate, or boy met girl... girl's parents declined... they parted away, and eventually after lots of tears and drama, they saw their love again.

For some people, the luxury shown in Punjabi's sinetrons was in stark contrast with many Indonesians who still lived under the poverty line (Endah, 2004) ^[10]. He was accused of producing decadent soap operas. Punjabi's sinetrons were then often receiving harsh criticism from media observers for only selling daydreams, for not reflecting the real Indonesian life. But Punjabi seemed to know well his Indonesian television audiences. Indonesian society was like a pyramid in term of social economic status, with poorly educated, low-income people making up the majority of the lower structure. They are usually not critical and enjoy watching the dream lives of wealth and ease shown in the sinetron series. The television industry is capitalizing on the situation by producing more lightweight shows. Punjabi said, "I know that my viewers are middle- to lower-class people. But I can't use their problems as story ideas. It would only depress them." (Junaidi, 2005) ^[15].

Sinetron producer, Manoj Punjabi, said that the storyline in sinetron was the result of both audience or rating demand and industry direction. "If we make something that audience can't relate to, they won't watch it. We adapt to the people," said Manoj, whose production house MD Entertainment was responsible for the success of Indonesia's longest running sinetron series.

According to Wishnutama, former CEO of Trans TV, some 98 percent of Indonesian audiences prefer local to international content, so high-quality programming doesn't work for them. "We once ran this sitcom called *Kejar Tayang* inspired by my favorite show Friends which eventually went to the dustbin after years of sinking ratings. Our focus group discussion found that the content was too witty for our audience." (Paramita, 2011). He said the audience still wants the overly dramatic sinetron with all its nonsense. Wishnutama said, "I've tried hard not to have sinetrons in our programs, which has positioned us in the upper and upper-middle class of viewers. But neglecting the demands of the lower and lower-middle classes would push us to the bottom of the ratings. Understanding intelligent content requires time and higher education. Meanwhile, there are not that many university graduates yet in Indonesia." (Paramita, 2011) ^[22].

Putu Wijaya, one of the most prolific drama writers, who has indited more than 50 sinetron designations, expounded how people in production house think about television viewers. He verbalized television channels and production houses relegated television audience into two categories, class A and class B (Widodo, 2002) ^[29]. Putu Wijaya explained that the audience classification has been a useful tool for television and sinetron workers to imagine their target audience although he sometimes observed these classifications as being arbitrary and inconsistent.

Class B viewers comprise middle and lower-class families. This type of viewers is considered not interested and quickly get bored with long dialogues or discussions of difficult concepts when they watch television programs including sinetron. Instead, they are stimulated by action, more susceptible to manipulation of emotions and keen for ebony-and-white morality. Putu Wijaya verbally expressed when an order for a production of sinetron series designates that it is for Class B, he will automatically have in mind an audience of housewives and blue-collar workers such as maids, drivers, food vendors or low-level civil auxiliaries. According to Putu Wijaya, sinetron for Class B audience often relies on simplicity at the expense of thinking and narrative aspects. In practice, this indicated linear plotting: less description of events in a story, very few flashbacks, and no multiple framing (Widodo, 2002) ^[29]. Stereotypical character of a person demonstrated visually through outfits, mimics, body parts, and gestures; events or characters were exaggerated to display conflicts and amazing enthusiastic expressions on exceptionally solid domestic issues. Clashes occurred between relatives or among people inside of a given social setting.

Class A consists of middle and upper-class families. This group of viewers classification would incorporate experts, high positioning civil servants, journalists and upper-scaled business people. The crowd is envisioned as more responsive to long talks on more complicated matters, more disparaging of consistent representation of reality, ready to comprehend complex plotting, tolerant of less obvious issue solutions, keen to artistic manifestations and more educated. Putu Wijaya said when he gets a request for a Class A, he feels more liberated to express his tasteful innovativeness (Widodo, 2002) ^[29].

Sinetron makers frequently believe that Class B viewers won't be critical in looking at the rationale of sinetron's storyline. Viewers consider sinetron generally as exhibitions for excitement, which require not inexorably speak to reality. With regards to his "unreasonable" sinetron, Punjabi claims that he was not a merchandise of dreams, rather, of wishes. He said everybody yearns for an agreeable life.

Believed that poor people must be sick of destitution; Punjabi decides to show extravagant autos, charming ways of life, delightful stars and pleasant houses. He asserts that his sinetron is well-known on the grounds that viewers have the capacity to recognize themselves with characters and circumstances in the sinetron. Viewers distinguish reality in sinetron as not quite the same as the social reality in which they live. Sinetrons are seen as a medium to show modernity and for viewers to connect with themselves in virtual reality to feel a high-class touch (Widodo, 2002) ^[29].

However, Punjabi's notion of giving luxury and dreams to audience of middle-to-lower-class might be rejected by those who have different views about the taste of Indonesian audience, especially viewers of sinetron. According to

Rachmah Ida, a media researcher at Airlangga University in Surabaya who has invested years examining and analyzing television viewers' responses to sinetron. She discovered the audience is entirely not the same as the one envisioned by the sinetron makers. She burned through four months in a Surabaya Kampong watching ladies watch sinetrons. She observed viewers to be profoundly reproachful of the program and the characters. Their education had ceased after middle school, yet their tastes were very refined. They regularly mocked the charm and settings; for them the storyline was most critical, especially if it related to their reality (Graham, 2007) ^[13].

She added that middle-to-lower-class viewers are contemptuous of many stock characters in sinetron like the femme fatale, and the scheming mother-in-law. These type of viewers can't be fooled because such figures don't include in their day by day life. They giggled and sneered at a few circumstances that don't bode well, or out senseless. "The audience isn't passive. It's critical of much of the fare. The women I encountered saw most sinetrons as Jakarta-centric and unreal," Rachmah Ida said, adding that television is important for many middle-to-lower Indonesians. Audience want television drama with stories that identify with the lives they lead. She found that most women in Kampong don't want the imaginary world constructed by men in the metropolis (Graham, 2007) ^[13].

After persisting on television screens for 15 years, and along with the emergence of new themes, many Indonesian viewers fed up with stories about beautiful and rich people they watched every day. They found a liking in a new type of sinetrons which gave Islamic background in its storyline. A new trend, then emerged, Indonesian television drama evolved from rich and beautiful people in an urban depiction to representation of daily lives full of humorous moments and actors whose appearance similar to ordinary people; Indonesian sinetron transformed from something that only offered dreams to something else that's more down-to-earth.

According to Rachmah Ida, Indonesian sinetrons currently tend to fall into four main categories. First, moral Muslims: this type of sinetron revolves around an easily angered individual goes astray to evil ways, however is safeguarded by relatives and considerate companions wearing all around squeezed hijab and sarong who lead the crook back to the mosque. Second, morbid mysteries: superstition, black magic and frightening, but imagined supernatural events; deceitful folk in serious discussion with the evil one; the resurrection of the dead; people transforming into animals. Third, broken families: insidious relatives and conspiring maids mix toxins and devise the destruction of the individual they abhor the most. Fourth, student crises: kid (with enormous car) meets attractive girl (with huge ambitions); kid loses the girl to spoiled opponent, girl apologizes as she understands the error (Graham, 2007) ^[13].

Manoj Punjabi said that the most critical component in a religious sinetron was the script. He anticipated that religious sinetron would continue going solid over the next five years (Arditya, 2013) ^[2]. He said stories are not difficult to make, however the script and the dialog are hard since it sets the feeling of the sinetron. Punjabi said he hired scriptwriters who truly comprehend about Islam and television viewers, and those are elusive. "We make the trends. It's not easy; we have to be consistent and persistent. We could make 10, 20 shows

before being able to put on one successful show. Once we succeed, others will follow and the trend will roll” Manoj said (Arditya, 2013) ^[2].

Islamic sinetron is a phenomenon that has been around for almost 15 years. However, according to a program creator and media expert Maman Suherman, production houses utilize religion just as packaging so really there is nothing religious about the Islamic sinetron since the substance is practically not different to other mainstream sinetrons. He said sinetron frequently showed performing artists playing clerics or those who lived in *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) yet the story still centered around: love, conflicts in family or the ludicrous portrayal of black-vs-white characters (Arditya, 2013) ^[2].

Most television stations refer to rating reports in planning their new program or improving the running programs. Rating report, which represents the audience demand sometimes override the owner’s influence in determining television content. For example, owner of Trans 7, Chairul Tanjung, once suggested that the station should maintain its popular talk show *Hitam Putih* (Black and White) in prime time. An account of the station’s executive producer Mardatillah said it was Tanjung who requested that the show should be maintained since it was a unique and inspirational show (Mardatillah, personal communication, July 21, 2013).

Hitam Putih featured a host Deddy Corbuzier who played up the puzzling and to some degree haughty side of his stage persona with his unmistakable bare head, curved eyebrows, and all-dark garments (Emond, 2013) ^[9]. Master illusionist Deddy Corbuzier managed to put his guests in the hot seat answering his questions that elicit frank and honest responses. The guests run the gamut from celebrities to common people who managed to resolve their past troubled life which brought a positive response from viewers who considered the show as inspirational. However, on January 16, 2014 - after three years on a television screen- the program should stop since it was unable to defy the declining rating and share. Responding to queries from his loyal viewers about the program terminates, Deddy Corbuzier wrote on his Facebook the following lines (Corbuzier, 2014) ^[6].

"As we may know at the present time what people enjoy is far from inspiring things. So program like this would lose its share and ratings, because share is in the hand of diversified people. We don’t blame anyone. It is the television world and society. And we give in now... Not to die, but to think and to create again. We can’t go against the flow and we stick to the heart... Sorry if I have to surprise million of viewers by terminating *Hitam Putih* show”.

Deddy said the station management of Trans 7 actually still gave him the opportunity to continue running the show, but only on weekends (Saturday and Sunday) from previously daily. However, he opted not to continue the program despite mounting requests from loyal viewers who plead for the continuity of the talk-show. Deddy said he was unable to go against Indonesian television program mainstream or duplicating other popular program at the expense of the program’s educational and inspirational values.

According to Yanuar Nugroho (*et al.*, 2012) a media expert from University of Manchester, who conducted research on Indonesian media recently --, there is a tendency television station to emulate the highest-rated programs, resulting in duplication of television programs ^[21]. He said the media clearly have a tendency to work on the desire of

manufacturing people and after that claiming that the desire represent general population’s need. That is the manner by which the media shape people’s taste and enthusiasm in many issues. To put it plainly, the media business has turned out to be more a profit-oriented industry than a public medium (Nugroho, *et al.*, 2012) ^[21].

As indicated by Rachmah Ida, sinetron – in every its form – had gotten to be trapped into seeking profit motivation. She discovered the reiteration of similar, tiresome template in sinetron stories. She said private TV stations tend to play safe by remaking previous popular program or duplicating other successful program from other stations with a specific end goal to minimize their risks and uncertainties as opposed to having the strength to present option or new programming (Graham, 2007) ^[13].

Uni Lubis, the chief editor of ANTV, said the trend of copying other successful television programs was motivated by commercial concerns. The television business relies on upon advertisers and advertisers rely on the rating of a program (The Jakarta Post, 2013). She said stations depend on the Nielsen research agency to find out the ratings of their shows. She recalled that her television management policy of audience segment-based selection had very nearly disposed of her news program. She said the management of ANTV once proposed that the station’s news program went off the air, in light of the fact that in view of a survey, the lion’s share of the station’s audience were female, and they expected that women didn’t have to watch news programs on the grounds that they weren’t sufficiently intelligent (The Jakarta Post, 2013) ^[28].

A media expert Ignatius Haryanto from Institute on Press Studies and Development said television programming just designate a little parcel of time for news, with the exception of in a news station. Yet, aside from that, media content, including news, is moving towards commercialization, and sensation. Numerous essential public issues are being disregarded since they are less fascinating and less profitable. At last it is about ratings; and ratings have debased public agenda and taste (Nugroho, 2012) ^[21].

Recent research into the nation’s television viewing habits has revealed most Indonesians like to watch soap operas and reality shows more than any other programs. However, the very same people consider news and talk show programs to be the best in terms of education. In other word, the majority of Indonesian viewers still prefer to watch soap operas and reality shows, although they realize the two programs, lack of educational values (The Jakarta Post. 2009) ^[27]. Agus Sudibyo from the Science, Aesthetics and Technology (SET) Foundation that involved in the research said that some audience consider news and talk shows as the most valuable program to watch, but the same audience still want to watch sinetron and reality shows, which they themselves consider are low quality (The Jakarta Post, 2009) ^[27].

Indonesian television viewing habit changes drastically during the month of Ramadan since more than 90 percent of Indonesia’s 240 million people embrace Islam as their religion (Nielsen, 2010) ^[20]. Ramadan is the ninth month of the Muslim year, during which Muslims do not eat, drink or have sex during the day while it is light. Ramadan provides a hefty market for television stations to exploit. Television stations saw a significant increase in term of audience number during the fasting month of Ramadan. A number of television viewers were up by 21% compared to regular days, especially

in the first half of fasting month. The biggest increase of 32% was seen among children (5-14 years). School holiday in the early fasting month seems to contribute to the additional child viewers. Meanwhile, there was an increase of 18% in the number of female 15+ (above 15 years old) and male 15+ viewers (Nielsen, 2010) ^[20].

Television gained more audience in the period between 2 to 5 a.m in the morning -an estimated 8 times bigger than regular days- when Indonesian Muslims ate their meals in a late supper time before they fast during the day in the month of Ramadan (Nielsen, 2010). Islamic teachings recommended Muslims consumed their meals very early in the morning before fasting. This tradition is locally known as *Sahur*, regarded as a benefit that allows Muslims avoiding weakness caused by the fast. Children shown the most fantastic 17 times increase. TV also drew female 15+ viewers (above 15 years old) eleven-fold that of regular days and male 15+ viewers, which was six times bigger than regular days (Nielsen, 2010) ^[20].

The largest audience number ever existed was at the time right before and during fasting breaks (4 to 7 pm) since there was an extra 28% viewer watched television. The biggest contribution still came from children that increased 35%. On the contrary, during *tarawih* -an extra prayer performed by Muslims, mostly at mosques, at between 7 to 9 p.m. during Ramadan- number of TV viewers was 5% lower than regular days.

During the fasting month, a large number of Ramadan programs compete with each other to draw attention from the audience in a once-a-year program battles. National TV stations raised broadcast hour of their religious program to 115%, especially during the first half month of Ramadan, resulting in a total of almost 190 broadcast hours. At fasting break times, the additional broadcast hour was obviously seen, from nothing in regular days to 42 hours. Broadcasters offer more entertaining programs at *sahur* time. The broadcast hour at *Sahur* increased 16 hours to 79 hours. Pushing entertainment broadcast hour jumped 221% to 158 hours.⁴ Audience's time spent watching on national TV was also growing 3 hours on average during Ramadan. At *sahur* time, audience watching time increased four hours in total, and an hour increase at a fasting break time. Children's watching time also showed the biggest increase, in line with the growth in number. Children spent six hours longer to watch TV which increased their watching time to 36 hours during the first half of fasting month. Meanwhile, female 15+ and male 15+ watched three hours longer to 39 hours and 33 hours consecutively.

The sinetron along with slapstick comedy shows, sermons and Koran analysis sessions as well as religious music, were several programs that television stations offered to attract audience during the fasting month (Shahab, 2006) ^[25]. With more religious programs, TV viewers also spent more time to watch the programs. Audience spent 1.5 hours in total to watch religious program, or 55 minutes longer than regular days. One hour of which was spent during the fasting break. Though soap opera series and comedy broadcast hours did not

increase as much as variety show or religious programs, both programs lead the top most watched programs at *sahur* and fasting break time in the first half month of Ramadhan (Nielsen, 2010) ^[20].

Based on data explained above we can conclude that audience influence on television content is best presented on the use of rating reports in developing the program content. Most advertisers and television broadcasters depend on this audience feedback managed and issued by the rating agency. A low rating program brings consequences repairing or changing the program content and if the rating is still low the program would be removed since the possibilities of getting advertisers for the program would be thin.

6. Conclusions

Audience influence on television content is best presented on the use of rating reports in developing the program content. In Indonesia, competition among commercial televisions is fierce, and for this reason audience measurement is important for television broadcasters and advertisers in this rating-obsessed industry. Most advertisers and television broadcasters depend on this audience feedback managed and issued by the rating agency. A low rating program brings consequences repairing or changing the program content and if the rating is still low the program would be removed since the possibilities of getting advertisers for the program would be thin.

Pertaining to news, television workers used to prioritize and broadcast more stories that could boost audience numbers in their news programs. Every program content must be blended with entertainment elements with the intended goal is to reach the highest level of marketability, accessibility, and comprehensibility. This mixture finally produces a dumbing-down effect, or the deliberate diminution of the intellectual level of program contents to ensure mass acceptability.

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⁴ For example, in 2010, popular entertainment programs consisting of 75 hours of variety shows, e.g. Opera Van Java, New Star, Gado Gado Teamlo, Pesiari Sahur, etc, and 32 hours of comedy, e.g. Saatnya Kita Sahur, Sketsa, and Kolak Komedi Lawak.

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