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<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Zulkarimein Nasution</td>
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The Role Of Television As An Agent Of Change

By

Zulkarimein Nasution
The Role of Television 
as an Agent of Changes

Zulkarimein Nasution

The Situation

When Indonesia started its first television broadcasting in 1962, there were only about thousands receiver available in this country, and Jakarta was the only place for people to watch the program. Now, situation is completely changed: there are another three private TV stations (RCTI, SCTV, and TPI) besides TVRI that ready to serve the audience almost all of the hours time. The number of receiving-sets at present estimated around 8,948,195 TV sets, while TVRI’s coverage extends to 37% of the entire Indonesian Archipelago, and reach 68% of the total population (approx. 180 million people)

Considering the facts that demographically, Indonesia belongs to so called “young nation” then above figure reflects that the proportion of young age group in the audience of TV in this country is quite meaningful. This phenomenon perhaps would have a significant meaning into the whole society, includes the lives of the children here.

Children and TV

According to Schramm, et al., (1961), children used television to satisfy some need. They draw an analogy between television and a “great shiny cafeteria”. Today the cafeteria has been changed to a supermarket, where children can select what they wanted at the moment. What were those needs? The authors posited three primary reasons why children watched television: (1) for entertainment, (2) for information, and/or (3) because of its social utility.

Overall, they considered the use of television for entertainment and for information to be the most important uses. They argued that the chief needs for which children went to television were the need for both fantasy and reality.

Furthermore, the authors reasoned that any particular TV program might serve all three purposes for a child. A crime program, for example, would be likely to entertain many children. At the same time,
however, it might teach some children specific skills and gives information about "what the world is like". In addition, the program provides the child with something to share and discuss the next day. However, it should be noted that different children might view the same program in different ways.

Agent of Change: Change in What?

Many researches and studies on inter-relation between mass media—specifically television—and children could be found in communication literature. Unfortunately such studies has not yet explored intensively in Indonesia. Ideally in order to discuss the role of TV in changing children’s life, we need to know exactly what it was in their lives which made them reach out for a particular experience on television. Only then could we know how their lives interacted with and were influenced by television. This makes the following analysis is more appropriate to be viewed as some observations rather than a scientific study.

Although many people might treat television as just another piece of furniture, it is a fact that many parents, teachers, educators, and social scientists realize that TV provides important experience for children growing up today.

Of course television is not children’s only socialization agent, and there are many other factors that influence their life such as family, environment, school, etc. However, the role of TV in the children’s live today could not be viewed as a less important small thing.

In the United States, as Dorr (1986) observed: “It has significantly altered politics, education, marketing, news, popular culture, social life, and family life. It has changed what children and their parents do at home, what the home environment is like, where they turn for information and entertainment, and what information and entertainment are easily available to them at home and at school.”

Has the same change happen in the other countries? Has TV altered what children and their parents do here in Indonesia? The answer could not be completed here. But some observations hopefully will stimulate our thinking about this matter.

Today many adults and possibly all children are completely unaware of these change. It could be mentioned here, that in
Indonesian context, TV has changed children’s life at least in the following aspects:

(1) **Knowledge acquisition.** Both in terms of *what things they know* and the *way they want to know things.*

TV as we know, makes children knowing many things that they did not know before. In Indonesia, it is very clear that TV programs enhancing the use of Bahasa Indonesia. A visit to a remote place today will proof that the number of children using Bahasa Indonesia has increased significantly. Even though their “internal family-communication”, still using local language, but “external communication” mainly with outsiders, most likely in Bahasa Indonesia. This is just a small example of so many things they have learned from TV.

As the children watches the TV screen, it seems to them that everything is easy to know. Difficult and complex matters became so simple and “playful”. This facts influencing children’s perception about ways to know something. Children now tend to prefer way of knowing things (includes their school subject) in an instant way. Lots of indication shows that today’s children are less passion in their behavior, they don’t like to work hard in order to understand something which are mostly required in their school learning.

(2) **Media habit.** Consuming TV with its attractive shows, in fact, has reduced children reading activities. Some parents complaining about their children learning results in schools, because the kids prefers to watch TV rather than read their school texts or doing the home work.

(3) **Perception of the world.**
   * **Wider horizon.** In one hand, TV has opened the world to the child. It made them aware of the outside world which is full of variety. Gradually they are “moving” from local cultural orientation and “loyalty” into national or even global orientation.
   * **What the children watch in TV also shaping their lifestyle,** especially in term of their taste for food, entertainment, choice of goods and soon.

(4) **Identification.**

The "magic box" also offers many models for children to be copied. It became usual now that children tries to imitate what they saw in TV. In other words they are going through the process of identification: wanting to be like others; someone they admired or respect to. Most of these model are filmstars, pop singers, or the
hero or heroine of their favorite program. Identification process then took it forms in clothing they wear, their ways of speaking, their daily song, etcetera.

(5) Moral Standard.
 "Until several years ago", said Alfian (1977), "kissing scene in Indonesian movies was a taboo. Now it has become an accepted fact. This change is considered by some people as a sign of progress or modernity which was achieved after so many years". This is a little example on how TV would change the moral standard of the children.

As the TV program today become more and more varied it could be expected that the influence of foreign (i.e. new moral values) will be increased. These program content will in turn changed the moral standard among the children who found that "traditional" values that they were taught before are different with what they see in the TV stories. Which one should be followed?

Where will all these changes lead? And what shall we do about it? The answer need to be explored thoroughly and in a comprehensive way. As Gerbner (1973) suggested, that the consequences of mass communications should be sought in the relationships between mass-produced and technologically mediated message systems and the broad common terms of image cultivation in a culture. If the citizens of a self-governing community do not like those terms, they cannot satisfy themselves by injecting a few messages of a different sort. They must attend to the structures and policies that produce most messages in ways functional to their institutional purposes.
REFERENCES


