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Youth Culture And Mass Media In Indonesia

By

Darmanto Jatman
Indonesian culture is a young culture, emerging from many many ethnic groups with her motto "Unity in diversity", encountering foreign cultures - sometimes called universal cultures, sometimes despised as imperialistic cultures. Communication process and system are responsible of the birth of this new culture. When young people in Indonesia declared the "Soerapah Penoeda" in 1923, that they are of the same country, nation with the same language Indonesia, Indonesia was not yet born free and independent. As bureaucracy, military, monarchical system, mass media has a great contribution to the development of this nation as a cultural system.

As an oceanic country with over 3000 islands and 176 millions people, mass media is becoming more and more important. Jakarta is the center of the whole network of communication activities including the media e.g television, radio, film, news papers and magazines. Intensive interaction among varieties of ethnic groups and also foreigners within the framework of economic activities, social, political and even military, set up Jakarta into a new cultural entity, basically urban. The language of the Jakarta is the language of the young elites throughout the whole of the nation spread out by mass media. Jakarta is becoming the model of many cities in Indonesia with her way of life, partly metropolitan, partly primordial. With a back-up of modern technology, Jakarta can reach almost every piece of land in Indonesia. Most of all leading newspapers and magazines published in Jakarta, and in order to be able to control the market throughout the country, pop culture emerges, and so "sinyo" or nextisio" culture, beside "Indojawa" culture e.g the culture of those Indonesian from Javanese ethnic group. The influence of Javanese culture should be mention here, since it is now becoming the core of the Indonesian culture or spirit, as Franz Von Hagens Suseno mentioned in his study about "Javanese Ethics".

It is worth to mention, that the middle class in Indonesia is still just a very thin layer, beside the stronger elites and the grassroots. 30% of the people in Indonesia lives in rural areas, however step by step mass media, especially radio, can reach remote area.

MASS MEDIA IN INDONESIA.

Formally there are three basic functions of Indonesian mass media: To distribute information, to educate the people and to entertain them. For years the third function seems to be very dominant, but little by little the two other functions are becoming more and more important. In rural areas education becoming more functioning, while information seems becoming more functioning in the urban area. Jakob Cetans, founder and editor of "Kompas", the biggest news paper ever published in Indonesia with about 500.000 of circulations, mentions several other functions of Indonesian mass media:
To secure the national integration
To educate people, distribute information and entertain them.
As the extension of man, media for their expressions and expiration
To stimulate creativity
Social nobility.
And for some people to tell others who (s)he is. Who is Ifang who read "Kompas" or "Suara Pembaharuan" as her newspaper, "Tempo", "S-rinah" or "Femini" or "Kartini" or "Femini" or "Fortiwi" as her magazine? Ifang is, of course, an intellectual, a career woman from a big city. Yes!

Managing more media is becoming more a business than a political action. Managers are now becoming as important as editors and so publishers. Media market should be explore and exploit efficiently. Many research have been done to open this silent mass. Youth, especially who are well educated, from middle to upper class level, usually live in the cities, are potential market. Some big newspapers devote some of their pages for the youth. Some of them publish magazines for youth, as "Kompas" did by publishing "Eli". And now there are many magazines for young people in Indonesia, mostly published in Jakarta. Just to mention several name: "Eli", "Gadis", "Hina", "Ede" and many others which couldn't survive for a longer time. Many of these magazines sell dreams and fantasies of an exotic life with lipstick, and a model of young Jakarta Metropolitan way of life with a strong pattern of consumptive behavior. "Lupus", for example, is a serial stories which is very popular among the young readers. Lupus talk in Jakarta language, talk in Jakarta way of walking...

"Lupus" is written by a youngster. Titi Said, the editor of "Famili" thinks that "Lupus" is becoming a success story because it is written by the young people for the young people. It is not so pretentious as many other stories written by elders to educate the youngsters. Fidelity is still the most important value for the youth as Erik Erikson once said, and so in writing stories and publishing magazines.

While television dedicate some of the programs for the young people - in Indonesia there is only one television network run by the government - radio, especially the non-government one, dedicated almost all of their program for the youth. Tommy Hernowo, one of the most successful manager for a non-government radio "3.2T", finds that 90% of his listeners are young people. However "3.2T" is in central Java, its most popular program, "Opera Semarang", using Jakarta language. Other most popular non-government radio "SS", on air with 90% of its program music only. And other radio, "Jathayu", shows a strong Javanese flavor to win the heart of its listeners. Its worth to mention the successful story of a weekly TV "Monitor" with a fantastic number of circulation for Indonesian standard, over than 500,000, telling its readers the other side of the TV shows, which maybe under strong censorship. Its appearance stimulates the young reader to read further and turn on their television.

While many film directors show their attention to youth culture, youth way of life, film producers perceive the potential market of these young people in Indonesia. Together they produced many film about young people life, love affairs, games, and even marriages. Aiming the Indonesian Film Festival 1977, "Seni Kusuma - Intimasi" ( Run after me, I catch you.). Several film about young people led becomes
It seems that pop culture, promoted by mass media with a business-like management style, has a very strong impact upon the Indonesian youth. Ignas Kleden, a young intellectual, think that pop culture is not premature culture. Pop culture appreciated by many social elites, but not cultural elites. It is a pity, that it impact upon young people in rural area, shows more in a consumptive way of life rather than productive. It seems that the process of institutionalization of media culture in Indonesia is going hand in hand with the institutionalization of pop culture. Even science and religion become so "popish" when they do the package for the young people through that special program for youth.

MEDIA CULTURE.

To win the heart of its audience, the public media in Indonesia, turn to be so attractive, exotic. Some general principles for mass media, "actuality", "punctuality", "proximity", "magnitude", "significance", "prominence", turn to be a way of thinking, a way of life at least for its producers, a culture. "Celebrity" is one of the most prominent "character" of the media. They produce their own world with their autonomous value, commitment, ethics. They produce an idol rather than a real man. A hero rather than a common people. A star!

To meet with youth culture, there is no trouble for media culture, especially in Indonesia where modern media culture is still very young, still seeking its identity, its role and position in the society. There are many youngsters who find their "idols" from mass media, especially film, and make their idols as their model in their personality development. That's why many educators want to take advantage of this reality by using film as a media for youth education beside of many other messages from many other elders who feel responsible for their youngsters, including politics. However, many mass media which are able to avoid these burden, unable to avoid promoting "new" values: Fame and richness. As for film makers, profit is becoming a powerful god, as beauty was before.

The development of media culture linkage with capital growth. Not only information means business, entertainment means business, but media means business too. Media culture then has its own "logic". To enliven this media culture, somebody should have strong empathy, or "mobile personality" as Daniel Lerner ever mentioned. Professional ethics for media workers show a glimpse of the media culture, its complexity in dealing with "the private" and "the public". Some of these media values or norms leaks into organization, group and even personal life, such as privatization, simplification, actual.
Some "rebellious" expert try to show how youth culture in Indonesia develop within the framework of strong paternalism. They try to show this culture as repressed and submitted to the so called "just" culture, which dominated by elders' elite. In Javanese culture, seniority means a lot. There are many taboos to preserve this so: Junior not only have to respect their senior, but to obey. These media help to create a new equality between those seniors and juniors. A pity that even in the media people can still find this unequal treatment due to the norms which still going strong in the society. Youth culture look as a premature culture, inferior to the dominant culture. There are several kind of attitude toward this "high" culture: Submit, against, or just trying to get along peacefully. This kind of attitude can be found in their encounter with foreign culture. However, acculturation, inculturation, assimilation happened during their interaction. Among youth itself, there are a lot of varieties due to differences in religion, ethnic groups, education, rural/urban, man/woman, rich/poor.

A poem written by a young poet, a youth, may help to catch a glimpse of Indonesian youth culture: Biarin! (I don't care!)

You say, life is just rotten, I say I don't care
You say, life is meaningless, I say I don't care
You say, I have no character, I say I don't care
You say, I have no insight, I say I don't care!

Well, if don't say that, what I gonna do then
Killing my self ?! That's more rotting then let life gonna turn it on.

( Yudhistira Ardhi Nugraha ).

When this youth says "I don't care!", it expressed many kind of attitude. Sometimes it looks so permissive, so defensive, sometimes it looks so aggressive toward others e.g elders, the oppressor. These kind of attitude could be found among youth who live in big cities especially in slum area where hostile attitude toward foreigners and juvenile delinquency can be easily found. "I don't care!" is not only an expression of permissiveness, but it is a "window", an art of living in "La vida!" (Oscar Lewis) situation.

However, among their own peer group, we can find that fidelity, solidarity, conformity, loyalty, are still regarded as great values and commitment for Indonesian youth. Family environment, school environment, village environment, seems to be more influential than mass media to develop such positive attitude among youth. Nohtar Buchori in his research among 5 ethnic groups finds that "well education", and "real social status" are strong aspiration among the youth. In this rapid social change, value confusion seems to be the most terrible enemy for youth in Indonesia. To face the uncertain situation, many youth "run" to religion and formal education, while some of them create that "I don't care" culture.
Many experts try to design a kind of cultural engineering for these youngsters by introducing achievement orientation or self-actualization orientation as David McClelland and Abraham Maslow did before. However, study by Noeljani Kartawinata among Javanese youth shows that solidarity is still the most important value before achievement and power. While study by John Ninopam shows that the behavior of so-called middle class people in Indonesia, just an imitation of the elites. And study by Sudjoko shows that most of the television programs expose the life of these middle & upper class rather than the poor. And Jim Supanggat found that sticker with "Rambo" picture and a girl opening her blouse with several words (be patient!) are sold to many many youngsters in Indonesia, which show that mass media has a responsibility in creating a pop culture for the youngster.

SOME QUESTIONS TO BE PURSUED BY RESEARCH

These questions are basically sorted from layman's especially youth who need clarification to confirm their attitude or opinion:

- What kind of media youth in Indonesia need?
- How does youth in Indonesia use media as a means of expression?
- Are youth in Indonesia critical to their media?
- How does media influence youth?

Some other questions, concerning the media as it is now, may provoke another research, such as:

- Content analysis on leading newspapers and magazines in Indonesia about youth news
- Market policy of youth magazines
- Advertisements which sell product for youth in Indonesia

This paper is just a brief paper to be followed by a more detailed study on the subject "Youth Culture and Mass Media in Indonesia".

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