

**The Social And Cultural Impact Of  
Satellite Broadcasting In Indonesia**

**by**

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# SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IMPACT OF SATELLITE BROADCASTING IN INDONESIA

## INTRODUCTION

Television broadcasting through satellite in Indonesia was initiated nationally in 1976, by the launching of the Domestic Satellite Communication. A transponder of PALAPA A-1 was used to relay TVRI's programme from Jakarta to 40 earth stations throughout the country (Effendi, 1992). The capability of transmitting television signals opens up the possibility of using the satellite for public information and education for the population who live in rural Indonesia, as well as, urban dwellers (Alfian and Chu, 1981).

Before discussing the uses of communication satellite for television broadcasting in Indonesia, it would be beneficial to firstly acknowledge the historical background of television development in Indonesia. Television was first introduced in Indonesia in August 1962, on the occasion of the fourth Asian Games in Jakarta. At the time, around 10.000 black and white television sets were distributed in Indonesia. At present, there are approximately 9.002.513 sets, including at 54.318 tv sets that are in public places (Ishadi, 1992).

Since the downfall of Soekarno, the New Order government under Soeharto, has underlined 3 main policies on the specific function of

television. These are:

1. To promote national unity and integrity
2. To promote national development
3. To promote political stability

These policies are essential parts of the national development program which is based on the national philosophy, Pancasila:

1. Believe in one God
  2. Just and civilized humanity
  3. The Unity of Indonesia
  4. Democracy led by the wisdom of deliberations by the representatives
  5. Social justice for the whole Indonesia people
- (Chu et al., 1991).

Until 1989, Indonesia had only one television station, TVRI, which was owned by the government. Only at the end of 1989 was RCTI (Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia) commenced, even though it was limited to the population of Jakarta and its surroundings, and only to those who could afford to buy a decoder and to pay the monthly fee. However, on its first anniversary, Minister of Information, Harmoko released a decree that permitted RCTI to operate without decoder although it could be received only by residents of Jakarta and its surroundings. Outside the area, RCTI's program can only be enjoyed by those who own parabola antenna

Since May 1991, an affiliated station started its operation in Bandung (RCTI Bandung) which is followed by another affiliated stations in Surabaya and Bali, RCTI Bali (Darmawani, 1992). In January 1991, the third television station TPI, Televisi Pendidikan Indonesia (The Indonesian Educational Television), was emerged. TPI focuses its programs in the field of education.

TPI's existence is considered important because it is stated in The General Guideline of State Policies (GBHN) that:

*"Non formal education including social services such as scouting need to be enhanced in order to development the interest, talent and ability, as well as, widening the possibility of employment or entrepreneurship within society".*

TPI plays an important role in this non formal education. It is because TPI can present the practice of skill activities audiovisually so that the audience can easily imitate.

In the beginning of January 1993, a television station (in Lampung) started its operation by airing the trial program which will be followed by five other private stations in Yogyakarta, Palembang, Pulau Batam, Semarang, and Jakarta, it means that Indonesia will have nine television stations this year.

1. THE USAGE OF SATELLITE FOR TV BROADCASTING

It should be noted down in history that in supporting the

development of television broadcasting in Indonesia, a big contribution was made by PT. Telkom in a form of supplying the TV relay media through the Palapa satellite. This satellite has inspired a remarkable growth for the information industries, electronics, etc in Indonesia, particularly the industries related to television broadcasting.

Before Palapa was launched, Indonesia was actually a part of a world satellite communication systems, by building or constructing a world station standard-A in the Jatiluhur area in the late 1960's. In describing the communication satellite relation patterns, Saleh Effendi States:

*"The satellite is actually a 'repeater' in the air functioning to receive modulated signals in a certain frequency or frequencies. These modulated signals are then transmitted back in another frequency after heightening the power of the signals".*

In other words, the satellite communication systems uses a broadcasting station on the earth which directs the signals to the space. The signals received by the satellite would then be retransmitted to the earth, and will be processed by the receiving station on the earth.

According to the plans, in the beginning of 1995, another satellite, Indostar, will be operated in the Indonesian skies. This satellite will differ from Palapa which has already operated

beforehand. Indostar has a specification called "direct broadcasting". It means that the program broadcasted from this kind of satellite can be directly received by the common television sets using an antenna that is inexpensive with the strong transmitting power (100 watt, whereas the ordinary transmitting power is about 10 watts). So, the Palapa satellite is a multipurpose satellite, while the Indostar is a special satellite for televisions and radio broadcast (Kompas Daily, August 24, 1992). To be more specific, the antenna of this new satellite is designed in such a way that it does not need a parabolic antenna anymore in order to receive any broadcasting programs anywhere in Indonesia. An ordinary antenna is sufficient. However, the programs broadcasted by Indostar can only be received by those televisions and radios designed to receive these signals. The receiving set that is used nowadays can only receive Indostar's broadcast through a special adaptor. In the future, when Indostar is operated, it is said that TVRI will have a free charge facilities to use the satellite, as well as TPI. Other channels will be treated commercially by the sole owner and operator of Indostar, **Mediacitra Indostar**.

Another aim of Indostar is to increase the quality and to extend the radio and television broadcast nationally. This goal is understandable considering that so far, the coverage of RRI and TVRI nationally has only reached 60% of the total Indonesian country or only 70% of the whole population. This means that about 50 million people are still unable to receive a television programs. These two government broadcasting stations use Palapa and a terrestrial transmitting network.

Palapa is not the kind of satellite that can be used for direct broadcasting. By this reason, it has to be provided with a terrestrial transmitting network so that the broadcasted programs can be received by an ordinary television set. Those who can afford to have a parabolic antenna by the 1,5 to 2,0 meters of diameter can directly receive the signals from Palapa.

Discussion on the use of direct broadcasting systems, (DBS), have been going on for years now, between the government, and the Society and within the society itself. It seems that the parliament and the government is taking extra precautions in forming this wish of adopting the system. Eventually, it is agreed that the existence of DBS is unavoidable due to its ties to the globalization challenges, when information and communication is undoubtedly essential. Besides, Indonesia has to strengthen its horizons which can be answered only by increasing the development of information and communication. For that reason Indonesia has always been anticipating the increasing needs of the development of information and communication, mostly disseminated through electronic media.

ii. REGULATIONS LINKED TO THE USE OF SATELLITE.

On technology, the GBHN (constructed by the People's Congress in 1988) states that:

*"The uses of technology in a variety of developing fields has to be continued and broadened in order to increase efficiency and productivity so as to strengthen the competitive advantages. Special interest is needed for the uses of technology that facilitates*

*the possibilities of employment. The uses of technology should acknowledge social problems, economy and environmental issues, as well as, the entire welfare of the society".*

Through this statement it can be clearly seen that although Indonesia acknowledges the importance of technology in national development it is also conscious of the negative effects it may bring. We must anticipate these matters in advance.

In association to the use of parabole antenna, the government admits that the antenna is a high technology and that its existence brings about a new perspective that is unavoidable, especially in the countries that do not want to isolate themselves from international relations, like Indonesia. Because of this situation, the Indonesian people can take advantage of using the technology with some conditions in mind, as stated in the regulations issued by the Indonesian Minister of Informations No. 111/KEP/MENPEN/90:

The use of the parabole antenna entirely handed over to the people with the belief of their consciousness and ability to choose and sort out those programs which are useful to them.

Parabole antenna are personally owned, therefore, the Department of Informations, cq. TVRI, is not responsible for the development, maintenance and risks of them.

At a glance, it seems that the government is not particularly anxious about the possible dangers of the use of the parabole antenna. It is probably because this antenna is still very expensive. Only a limited people can afford it. Meanwhile for a wider use with distribution system, the government is more cautious as stated in the regulations:

Society may use the parabole antenna with a distributions system under

these conditions.

The Parabole antenna with a distribution system is permitted to receive and to distribute TVRI program that is channeled through Palapa communication satellite;

The local district governments, formal institutions or social groups coordinated by these local district governments may build / construct a parabole antenna with "a distribution system" out of their own funds in areas that have not been reached by TVRI's programs (blank spot); The processing and operations of the parabole antenna with the distribution systems cannot be turned over to the Department of Informations, cg. Direktorat General Radio, Televisi, and Film.

Through this last statement, the government forbids any sort of foreign broadcasting programs to enter Indonesia. The 35th article of this statement goes on to say:

Television programs that are deliberately broadcasted to Indonesia by a foreign television station abroad, is prohibited to be seen and heard to by the public throughout the Republic of Indonesia.

Private owned television broadcasting stations are prohibited to relay or cooperate in any form to pave the possibility of rule no. 1 to be able to operate.

The broadcasting means (transmitting system), both on earth or in the space (satellite) that is owned by Indonesia is prohibited to provide any means of facility that makes possible to a foreign tv station to broadcast in Indonesia.

Why is there this certain anxiety toward foreign broadcasting programs ? La Rane explains:

*"According to some scientists, Indonesia is in a transitional stage, where traditional values are passing away while new values are not formed. Foreign programs bring foreign values.*

*These foreign values may destroy Indonesian culture, and can harm national defense. Foreign mass media that enters another country, be that printing media or electronic media like television, are created in countries that have different cultures and ideologies. Therefore, their ideology may enter another country, either directly or indirectly."*

Contrary to the Minister of Information, Harmoko, one of the communication science experts, Alwi Dahlan, said that there is an international regulation that stipulates when a satellite frequency is broadcasted to another country, there must be a permission from that country . But there is still difficulty to regulate the spill over programs. Dahlan commented on the case of two international stations (CNN and Emerald), that have tried to lease transponders of Palapa in order to transmit their programs in Indonesia.

Dahlan does not agree on the opinion of negative effects of foreign television programs. According to him, it is just an exaggeration. Because those who can access to the foreign programs are people who are not that to be influenced easily. Consequently, it is useless to try to restrict these foreign broadcast due to the existing advance of communication technology nowadays. Dahlan offers an alternative to legalize those foreign programs in Indonesia under certain conditions. Therefore, it needs cooperations between the ministry of information as a gatekeeper of information flows and PT Telkom as the institution in charge of satellite operation. Prof. Dr. Endang Saefullah, an expert of Space Laws from University of Pajajaran (Bandung), says

that it is time for Indonesia to enter international conventions in order to answer those problems caused by the use of satellite. It enables Indonesia to anticipate the advancement of communication technology for both hardware (like parabol) and software, (such as broadcasting programs). by doing so, Indonesia will have the capacity to anticipate foreign television programs transmitted to its area.

According to La Rane, both statement are based on the idea of communication technology's advancement. To totally isolate ourselves from the external world is not a good alternative, but to openly expose ourselves is not a right choice either. A philosopher, Dr. W. Poesporodjo, also from the University of Pajajaran, claims that escaping from reality indicates no charater at all. On the other hand, simply accepting the foreign culture as a whole, is a shallow existence, shallow culture, narrow cultural perspective, even ruining the culture itself. Facing and answering to the challenges is an honorable choice, but its's not an easy thing to do. Of course the mental and cultural state of the society must first be established so that intentionally or not (spill over) the programs of foreign broadcasts may not damage the national culture because the people is prepared to handle it, and at the end it can enrich the national culture.

#### SATELLITE USAGE EFFECT TOWARDS PROGRAMMING

As stated previously, the use of a Palapa's A-1 transponder to relay TVRI broadcast had caused a broadening of the stations coverage abilities. Not only does it mean that the number of

viewers have been enlarged, but also a change in the composition of its audience. Television that could only be enjoyed by those in the big cities, nowadays can also be enjoyed by those in rural area. Due to this phenomena, before planning the programs, we have to conceive the taste of the Indonesian people that are so heterogeneous, as well as, anticipating the possibility of misintepretation to the content of the program. One of the concrete example is the elimination of advertising in TVRI since April 1981. The Soeharto government assumed that advertising on television can raise the consumerism of Indonesian society, especially for those who live in rural area.

This elimination sprang a lot of controversary within the society, particularly among the intellectuals. One of the argument claimed by those for television advertising, was that the impact on rural consumption would be negligible because the advertised goods were mostly beyond the means of the village people. However, report of a research on social impact of satellite broadcasting on rural society in Indonesia done by Godwin C. Chu, Alfian and friends, states:

*"Our research found just the contrary. More than half of the advertised goods were priced below US\$ 1.25, and 85 percent were below US\$ 2.50. Most of the low cost goods were foreign origin, and the anecdotal evidence collected by our researchers showed that the villagers buying them eagerly. For example, we have found that the villagers were buying Ajinomoto, a Japanese gourment powder which was advertised on television, instead of tradisional Indonesian spices".*

Disputes on TV commercials on TVRI have been continuing. Justifications made by those who could not accept the government policies, among others are, that if private television stations are permitted to broadcast these commercials, then why not TVRI? There is no use in denying the fact that financially, operating a television station is not easy, and subsidies from the government is not sufficient. How can TRVI maintain itself under such circumstances?. Even though 20% income of private television commercials are handed over to TVRI, but still it isn't sufficient.

On television programming, Minister Harmoko said that television stations will be able to broadcast good programs if supported by society. The good program, according to Harmoko, is a program that is able to present society's creativity of good quality. Therefore, the society should prepare itself in the field of arts that may be viewed on television (Kompas, June 5, 1992).

This statement is parallel to the stipulation of the general guidelines of State Policies that says:

*"In the attempt to develop the character of national culture, there comes the necessity to grow the society's ability to place forward rural social cultural values, as well as absorbing positives external values needed for innovation in the development processes. This means, preventing colonial and narrow-minded rural attitudes, as well as, negative foreign culture influences."*

In a section that underlines the distribution of information and Mass Media, the GBHN states that information development and Mass Media have to create an atmosphere that encourages social involvement, participation and responsibility in national development.

If we elaborate The Minister Harmoko's statement with the Indonesian GBHN, we can conclude that in planning television programs both, television station and viewers, take on the responsibility. Personally, I believe that the most part of responsibility lies on the side of the TV Stations that broadcast the programs, since television stations is the party that distributes these programs throughout Indonesia because it has the capability to do so. In other words, society has a less active role compared to the television stations. As stated previously, in deciding the programming policies, television station has to acknowledge the composition of its audience which inevitable means it has to know viewing patterns of the audiencess. A research conducted by the Board of Research and Development, the Ministry Department of Information, cooperating with the East West Center, categorized viewing patterns based upon the respondents' strata to the most 16 popular TV program:

**Group 1**

- news
- western movies
- sports
- comedies

**Group 2**

- children program
- cartoons

**Group 3**

- modern music
- western music
- modern drama

**Group 4**

- traditional drama
- traditional music
- Indonesian movies

- religious programs

#### Group 5

- Chinese movies
- educational programs
- heroism programs

The programs in each group have a strong correlation one to another in the sense that, for example, those who usually watch the news, would also watch western movies, sports programs, and comedies (Ishadi SK, 1992).

With an increasing numbers of parabole antenna and the broadcasting of 4 private television stations, the society's viewing patterns are changing very vastly. The audience is no longer oriented towards the broadcasting station but focusing more on the programs broadcasted (Ishadi SK). A research on the uses of parabole antennas concludes that the viewing time of television programs from abroad of respondents of the higher strata is less than those of the middle class (strata). This would caused by the number of "outdoor activities" of the upperclass group. These activities include the working activities and socializations, as well as, fulfilling leisure time. Another factor causing a limited time spent on viewing foreign television programs is the avaibility of other forms of mass media (local TV, newspapers, magazines, etc) and non-mass media, like recreational places. With their High income, the upper groups can change their media consumption easily (Puri, 1988).

This fact may cause anxiety for the middle class people outnumbered the upper group. However, as a whole the research concludes that eventhough programs of Communist countries, like

the People Republic of China may be viewed through the parabolic antenna, in general, the owner of the dish have no interest to watch them because the quality of the visual is not so good.

In the Indonesia's case, the present problem is actually not the uses of satellite. Even without using satellite (the parabolic antennas) the viewers daily watch entertainments from abroad, or to be precise, from the west. From movie programs to video clips broadcast by private television stations, are mostly American production. I personally, assume that government should monitor the programs, so that it can control the possible negative effects of those programs. Due to this reason, I would conclude that it is important for the government, in this case the Ministry of Information, to monitor the programs of these private television stations. So that any probable deviation of Pancasila and The General Guidelines of State Policies (GBHN) can be identified immediately. Moreover local production program should also be increased in these non-governmental television stations.