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SELECTIVE EXPOSURE: AN IMPLEMENTATION OF DEMOCRACY IN COMMUNICATION PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

The long debate about the impact of the mass media on the audience, bring experts on communication theory to the fact that the individual has a resistance to information (research of Lazarsfeld, 1944), and information cannot directly affect a change in attitude (research of Hovland, 1949). There is a selective process towards information done by individuals in realizing cognitive consistency.

Communication in the context of selection and resistance of information is divided into three levels. First, the intrapersonal level. At this level, individuals will hold on to the belief possessed for the selection of information. Secondly, at the next level, namely interpersonal or group, individuals will adjust the belief with the existing reality (in this case social environment/groups). Thirdly, at the level of mass communication, the individual will perform a selection of information baed on the usefulness of information to meet the needs of information.

Currently, the mass media in Indonesia tends to be controlled by the capitalist class as a result of the market liberalism system. Consequently, all forms of production of messages cannot be separated from the interests of capital owners and the political power in their circle. The information conveyed to the public is a reality that has been selected and arranged according to ideological considerations of media institutions through editorial decisions (second-hand reality).

Although the media ownership is concentrated in the hands of a few people and affects the neutrality of the news, the process of selective exposure shows that the media is not fully able to influence the formation of human perception and definition on their social reality. Developments that occur in the world of information and communication technology provide many options for information or news. The audience have many opportunities to determine selection and resistance of existing information according to their own psychological

screening. In short, the abundance of information as a result of social and technological transformation makes the audience become active beings in selecting and processing information according to their interests and needs, which also means there is freedom in selecting and resisting information.

Keywords: *resistance, selective exposure, three levels of communication, neutrality of news*

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, some laws appear based on the spirit of responsible freedom of communication, among them Law Number 40, 1999 on the Press, and Law Number 32, 2004 on Broadcasting. Essentially, both the Laws on Press and Broadcasting have the spirit to regulate the freedom of information attached to the role and function of the media to deliver quality and responsible information. The mass media must be independent, transparent and free from any party pressure that has economic and political interests.

It cannot be denied that the mass media has the role of mediation/mediator between objective social reality and personal experience. The mass media contributes to the formation of human perception and definition on their social reality. Media workers change occurrences into news events. The news is a result of compromise and negotiation on matters that are newsworthy.

Since the Indonesian political system pealed Law Number 40, 1999, normatively, the Indonesian press had embraced a social responsibility model (freedom of the press that is responsible to the community/public interest). In short, the media must play a positive role and have an obligation to the community to present quality information and also be responsible for the consequences caused by the publication of onformation (McQuail, 2005:207).

Symptoms of conglomeration, privatization and concentration of media ownership in the hands of several owners which currently flare, hinder the media to run its social function. The bigger the network of media ownership, the more difficult for the media to be independent when covering events related to media owners. The media will be filled with a great deal of consideration and conflict of interest

among capital owners and the political cronies of capital owners. As a result, the reported facts or events have a tendency to be the result of 'engineering' of media institution construction. When this condition occurs, the public's right to obtain honest and neutral information will be threatened, and the media has the potential to become a means of social disintegration and not a means of unifying the nation.

The media political economy approach confirms that the contents of the media tend to be determined by the forces of economics and politics beyond the routine management of the media. Media ownership is of significant importance to establish the ideology, news content and effects of the media to the public (Mosco, 2009).

Furthermore, Peter Golding stated that when the mass media which is a cultural producer has a role more as a profit seeker business machine, then the information will become a merchantable commodity. The media tends to be monopolized by the capitalist class in an effort to meet the interests of certain social classes. The capitalists work ideologically by spreading ideas and perspectives of the ruling class, and refuse other contrary ideas (see Murdoch and Golding, 2000).

On the other hand, after several decades and through a variety of research on how the mass media actually works, mass communication thinkers decided that a message from the mass media does not have the same effect on each individual. The effects on a person depends on many factors: psychological, message and social. This new view does not give great power to the media message, and experts realize that the audience have resistance to a media message.

GATEKEEPING AS A PROCESS OF FRAME BUILDING

Tuchman (1978) in his book *Making News* confirms that the news is not as a mirror or a reality of life, but the news is a window on the world, because the news is a product of social institutions. Media workers change occurrences into varied news according to the ideology and viewpoint of each media. The media is like a window that allows the events to be presented according to the existing window frames. Market-oriented media (the market model) will present positive news about conglomeration. On the contrary, public-oriented media (the public sphere model) tend to present negative news relat-

ed to konglomeration.

Meanwhile, Kevin Williams (2003) uses the term Image Factory (which defines the media as an image production stage) to the media reporting. The news appearing in the media is the end result of a series of a very long and complex process, starting from news planning, reporting, writing, to editing with a background of various interests of the capital owner and the politics surrounding. According to Williams, the media is a stage for building public image. The term Image Factory demonstrates the ability possessed by the media to form the perception on reality by framing a particular message in the news.

It was Kurt Lewin (1947) who conducted the initial research showing that the selection of foodstuffs to be presented as a dish for a family was only done by a few 'gatekeepers'. This inspired David M White (1949) to see the process of news selection in a newspaper. From the development of the research conducted, it was realized that in order to understand the process of making a piece of news, it is necessary to note that the content of the media is not only influenced by one factor, only the media organization, but there are other factors that influence it, such as political and economic power outside the media organization.

From the research of Shoemaker and Reese (1996), it is seen that the media organization cannot be separated from the influence of the force from within and outside the organization. These various relationships can be negotiation, exchange and sometimes also in the form of conflict, both hidden and manifest. Shoemaker and Reese divided five layers of influence on mediacontent, i.e. the individual level, media routine, organizational, extramedia (social or inter-institutional) and social system.

Furthermore, Gerbner (1969) illustrates that mass communicators are in a distressed situation. The pressure they face comes from various forces outside the organization, among others: (1) economic power represented by advertisers, competitors, foreign news agencies, the owner, and the labor union, (2) social and cultural force, represented by the political authorities and the law, experts, other institutions, (3) interests and demands of the audience, and (4) a sustainable provision of information and culture.

From the exposure of the forces existing around this media organization, five relationships were formed, that require close attention to see the influence that exists in the media organization and mass communicators, namely (1) relationship with the community, (2) relationship with pressure groups, (3) relationship with capital owners, advertisers, suppliers, (4) relationship with the audience, and (5) inter-department relationship within the organization.

The five media relations above show that the media organization is in a tugging position with the forces that exist around the media organization itself, such as economic and socio-cultural power in the production of a piece of news, where there is a tendency of the media to favor the economic and political power of the media owner.

In short, it can be concluded that the media content from the perspective of the gatekeeping studies indicate development, i.e. from the preliminary findings that indicate the influence of the individual or the editors, leading to the discovery of the research result that factors outside the organization also have a strong influence on the determination of the media content.

SELECTIVE EXPOSURE: PROCESS OF SEEK OUT OR AVOID THE INFORMATION

The discovery of the selective exposure phenomenon cannot be separated from the long journey of the reserach on the impact of mass media. Research on mass communication until circa 1950s had a tendency to pay more attention on the impact of the media on the audience, i.e. how the media influences the audience and the impact of the media on their behavior. In the utilization of the media and information, the individual is often assumed passive in receiving information rather than being active searching, selecting and filtering the information that exists. Over time, the researches of Lazarsfeld (1944) and Hovland (1949) made theorists realize that the audience had resistance on information.

Selective exposure (in the perspective of the cognitive dissonance theory) was introduced by Leon Festinger. Frey (1986) explained briefly that selective exposure is one's ability to choose between supporting information and contadictory information. In Frey's

words, it is stated as follows: "Individuals selectively (look) for decision-consonant information and (avoid) contradictory information" (pp.44). Meanwhile, Freedman and Sears (1965) stated to Festinger (1957), selective exposure is a central proposition in his theory of cognitive dissonance; to Klapper (1960), it is a factor of prime importance in determining the effectiveness of mass communication; to McGuire and Papageorgis (1961), it is a factor suggesting the need for immunizing techniques to produce resistance to persuasion; to Berelson and Steiner (1964), it is a basic principle of human behavior: and it is a fundamental assumption in the thinking of many other researches about persuasion through mass communication (pp. 59).

At the beginning of his thought, Festinger (1957) had put belief as a variable that causes selective exposure. Festinger's (1957) selective exposure hypothesis puts one's psychological condition as the cause of why one selects and avoids information. This hypothesis has put the individual as the active information processor who internally has the power and ability to select and resist information in an effort to achieve cognition harmony. This condition gives the impression that it is in harmony with the position of the cognitive dissonance theory (as the source of the selective exposure concept) which is known as an individual theory, where the process of dissonance and its application is assumed to occur through a personal mental process (Littlejohn dan Foss, 2005:77; Miller, 2005:125).

Over time, a series of reaearches conducted by experts proved that selective exposure was not only caused solely by psychological aspects. Researches conducted by Festinger (1964), Cannon (1964), Mills and Ross (1964), Mills and Jellison (1968), Freedman and Sears (1965), Freedman (1965a), Lowin (1967), Brock and Balloun (1967), Chaffee and McLeod (1968), Lowe and Steiner, (1968), Atkin (1973), Cotton (1985), Frey (1986), Knobloch, et.al, (2003, 2005) have proved that the characteristic of a message has an effect on the slection and resistance of information. The researches of Klapper (1960), Sears (1965), Schulman (1971), David (2005) and Dohyun (2010) also showed the effect of social aspects on the selective exposure behavior.

In a series of researches of these experts, it was proved that psychological, message and social aspects can cause selective exposure.

The behavior to select or resist information is not only caused solely by the psychological aspect but also by message and social aspects.

Supporting the results of research by previous researchers, McQuail in his book *Communication Models for the Study of Mass Communication* (1996) explained a communication model related to the theory of consonance and dissonance. The communication model proposed by McQuail illustrates that individuals have a tendency to avoid media sources that would increase dissonance and accept opinions from consonant media sources. This communication model has the same thoughts as Littlejohn's (2009), related to the understanding of how humans process information. Namely, that individuals as social beings will process information by involving a self-cognition system, besides joining in paying attention to the social environment around their lives.

The main characteristic of the communication process of McQuail's model of the consonant and dissonant theory shows that the messages received will be examined and filtered by the message receiver, with a general effect to lower the chance of the emergence of dissonance, and maintain dissonance with the environment (A). Should there be a new opinion or contrary opinions, then dissonance will appear (B). Dissonance, will drive the social (in the form of group norms) and psychological (in the form of ego-involvement) processes. In this case there are two possibilities that occur, namely (1) change the perception of information sources (C), and (2) change the opinion or attitude possessed. The smaller the difference between the message and opinion or attitude possessed (small differences), the smaller the chances of change. If difference is the medium, there will be adjustments that will likely be followed by a revision of opinions or attitudes possessed. But if the difference is very big, then it will usually involve group norms and self-ego (e.g. commitment, belief, attitude, opinions, etc.), which will cause rejection of the messages as well as the source, and strengthening of the opinion or attitude possessed (McQuail and Windahl, 1996:33-35).

Furthermore, it can be concluded that based on previous research by experts related to selection and resistance of information, the communication process can be divided into three levels. Firstly,

the intrapersonal level. At this level, the individual will hold on to the belief possessed to perform a selection of information. Secondly, at the next level, namely interpersonal or group, the individual will adjust belief with the existing reality (in this case social environment/group). Thirdly, at the level of mass communication, the individual will perform a selection of information based on the usefulness of information to meet the needs of information.

DISCUSSION

Currently, the relation between the media, the community and culture in Indonesia has a tendency to be patterned on materialism relation, which is a pattern in which the social structure affects culture (+), and culture does not affect social structure (-). As a result, the mass media is seen as a culture dependence on power/political structure and economic power (Rosengren in McQuail, 2005:79).

In the media institution, information is nothing but a commodity just to be traded. Consequently, all forms of production of messages cannot be separated from the interests of capital owners and political power in their circle. The information conveyed to the public is a reality that has been selected and arranged according to ideological considerations of the media institution through editorial decisions (second-hand reality).

The phenomenon of the increasingly concentrated media ownership does not only occur in Indonesia because this is a symptom of capitalism occurring globally in many countries. The existence of media ownership concentration is contrary to the model of social responsibility (the current press system in Indonesia). Namely, the media has an obligation to the community to provide quality information and is also responsible for the consequences caused by the information publicized. Related to this matter, the government, if necessary, may intervene (provided it is for the public interest) by making regulations to reduce media content that has the potential to become causes of nation disintegration, or to serve as guidelines and framework for the media in carrying out its positive role in society.

In Indonesia, some laws appeared based on the spirit of a responsible freedom of communication, among others Law Number

40, 1999 on the Press, and Law Number 32, 2004 on Broadcasting. Essentially, both Laws on the Press and Broadcasting have the spirit to regulate the freedom of information attached to the role and function of the media to deliver quality and responsible information. The mass media must be independent, transparent and free from the pressure of any party that has economic and political interests.

To complement these two laws, Law Number 14, 2008 on the Openness of Public Information (OPI) was stipulated. This Law has the spirit of building an open and prosperous information society, i.e. public agencies are required to provide transparent public information to the mass media regarding their performance and accountability to the people.

In fact, the existing laws have a dilemma. The Law on Basic Press Number 40, 1999 which provides a strong foundation for the realization of freedom of the press in Indonesia, raises the complexity of freedom of the press and a strong business competition. There are many new publications either in the form of tabloids, magazines or newspapers emerging; from politics, economics to pornography. The quality of the publications are varied, from reasonable quality to 'junk' quality. This condition leads to a picture of a liberal-pluralis or marked model, where the issues covered by the press are increasingly diverse.

With the diversity of existing issues, the mass media in Indonesia tends to be used to transfer negative life values that are less appropriate to the nation's noble values, the cultural values of Pancasila, as well as religious values; such as mystical soap opera stories, infidelity, 'puppy love', the use of rude and non-standard Indonesian language in soap operas, films, or variety shows on television, exposure of violent and sadist scenes, idolization of effeminate roles, news content that no longer care about the privacy space of one's life and too much gossip, pornographic magazines, pornography through the internet, etc.

The delivery of information as mentioned above will form a mass culture on the message recipient. In other words, the readers or viewers consciously or unconsciously will imitate the behavior pattern of the broadcasts seen, or the reading materials read. Consequently, promiscuity among the young generation will flare, the practice

of abortion becomes something commonplace, infidelity among the society becomes rampant, regardless of age or social status (even members of Parliament are attached to infidelity cases), hedonism and consumerism lifestyle increases, gay or lesbian sexual style are considered fair, pornography increasingly flares and crime rate including sexual crimes also increases. Ironically, this condition occurs equally at all walks of life both in urban and in rural regions.

It cannot be denied that if the management of the mass media in Indonesia is only based on the economic and political interests of the media owners, and not based on the foothold of the values and morals of Pancasila as well as religious values, then sooner or later the mass media will become 'toxic' to the society's life. The root cause of social diseases/issues of the society is potential in creating hostility, conflicts and deterioration of society (social disintegration).

On the other hand, it should be realized that the abundance of communication (communicative abundance) or a cornucopias of communication makes an individual have a great deal of opportunities to make selection and resistance on the existing information according to self-cognition. The abundance of information has also become a trigger on the changes of pattern in information consumption which was originally passive, sitting and waiting in front of the TV screen or radio, or reading newspapers delivered by the newspaper boy, to become an audience who actively seek information by using Google or Yahoo search engines, and search buttons on the remote control for the television media. Individuals become active beings in selecting and processing information according to interests and needs. The individual is no longer a passive being in receiving information, but instead the individual acts actively in finding and resisting a piece of information (Youn, 1994; Atre and Katz, 2005; Stroud, 2008; Bennet and Iyengar, 2008).

The interaction that is established in the group, both interpersonally and as a group, may effect belief. Belief, which are values convinced and ingrained in oneself, as a result of communication that is established between individuals and the group, may change according to the group's subjective norms. If the norms of the group is in accordance with the belief that one has, then the belief will not change.

However, on the contrary, when the group norms contradict with the belief, then it is possible that the belief may change. The change in belief depends on how closely the interaction relationship is between the individual and the existing group. The closer the relationship, the more rapid the change of belief is made, and vice versa. The changes made are an embodiment of efforts on the achievement of cognitive balance.

On the other hand, selective exposure done by individuals may be caused by other purposes, such as fulfilling the need for information and not only confined to the intent of creating consonance between attitude and belief alone. This occurs as a result of the era of sophistication on informatics and communication technology (such as the internet, e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, etc.), where information is a cornucopia in human life. Anticipating the abundance of information, individuals will select information that is considered to have benefits according to their interest and needs.

CONCLUSION

The role of social mediation on the mass media can be defined as the position of the mass media between the society and social reality, in addition to being a liaison between the society and relevant institutions. The mass media in Indonesia tends to be controlled by the capitalist class as a result of the market liberalism system (based on the Basic Law on Press Number 40, 1999). Should there be a role of social mediation performed, it is in a pseudo form and selective on the delivery of information that does not discredit a certain elite class that holds the policy and capital controls on the media industry. It gives an impression that there is no dominance of a particular class. However, in reality, there remains an 'invisible hand' which regulates and controls the media, but not as strict as in the times of the New Order.

In its reporting, the media tends to lose its independence because of the intervention of capital owners through the media network. Consequently, all forms of production of messages cannot be separated from the interests of media owners. The information delivered to the public is a reality that has been selected and arranged

according to ideological considerations of media institutions. This condition illustrates the weak bargaining power of journalists when dealing with the interests of media owners. This unbalanced relationship also makes journalists understood as workers and not media professionals.

On the other hand, communicative abundance or cornucopias of communication makes individuals have a great deal of opportunity to make selection and resistance on the existing information according to self-cognition. Individuals become active beings in selecting and processing information according to interests and needs. Individuals are no longer passive beings in receiving information, but instead individuals act actively in finding and resisting information.

Eventually, one thing to keep in mind and noted is the fact that exists is that the realm of mass media in Indonesia is inseparable from the current development of globalization, where domination by a small number of bearers of capital interest in the Indonesian press industry is also part of the penetration and expansion of global media conglomeration.

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