

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Previous Studies of Audience on Television

There are many researches in media television, and audience researches on television are increasing in number. Two of the most popular objects of television content examined by students and scholars are advertisements and fiction entertainment program such as television serial. Review of previous studies related to the study of television advertisements and entertainment programs are in the following.

One of the most influential works of audience research on television program is Ien Ang's investigation of *Dallas* television serial in Netherlands in 1985. The aim of Ang's study is to examine the pleasure experienced by the audience while watching *Dallas* television serial. She tried to analyze how *Dallas* gave such pleasure or displeasure to the audiences and what ideological context underlies those audience's responses. From the letters she got from the audiences, Ang identified four major concerns from the *Dallas* audience in experiencing the pleasure: it is close to reality, it creates melodramatic imagination, it is underlain by the ideology of mass culture, and the last is that it gives comfort and the feeling of being strong to women audiences since they find it pleasurable (Ang). In analyzing the audience responses, Ang constantly looked up the social and cultural and even political

context to justify her arguments, added with quotes from several experts. The strength of this study is that Ang looked at the uncommon side of audience and television viewing, namely what makes the audiences read in such ways. Many researches on audience usually focus on how audiences read television content rather than the cause of that reading. Meanwhile, the weakness of this article is that the use of categories is not comprehensive since Ang only used categories for her first and second findings, which are elaborated in chapter one and chapter two of her work. The use of categories is not found in the third and fourth discussions.

Therefore, this study will not only do about the similar way as Ang did, but also makes it more complete and comprehensive by implementing categories and codes to guide the whole analysis. The difference lies in the object being discussed. While she talked about audience reception on a television serial, which is a fiction show, this study's object is a newer type of popular television program, a reality show that, even though seems oppositional to fiction, has gained considerably equal sympathy from the audience, especially in Indonesia. The time and context difference is also another distinction of this study and Ang's. Therefore the results might be different in some ways.

Another audience research on television program is conducted by Evan Cooper on a popular network situation comedy "Will and Grace" in 2003. This article focused on how the heterosexual audiences perceive a comedy show which features gay characters with their gay environment. The

author examined the gay humor notion on the show, the history of the show and also the views of 136 college students as respondents. The result suggests that apparently the sexual orientation of the gay character, Jack, was not the main concern in his respondents' mind while perceiving "Will and Grace". The audiences instead tend to give more attention to the humorous character of Jack (Cooper). Heterosexual audience is the target audience of Cooper's research because he wanted to see how the comedy show is perceived by the dominant population of the viewers so that he can identify the social acceptance of the homosexual content on television.

Cooper's article has a good point in the choice of the issue. In the USA, the context of his study, the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) rights was issued in 2003 with the release of *Lawrence v. Texas* landmark decision by U.S. Supreme Courts, which legalized same-sex activities all over the nation ("Lawrence v. Texas 539 U.S. 558 (2003)"). This means that Cooper's work was done and published at the best time of the issue and best time for the society as well. Meanwhile as we know, it is clear that homosexuality is the issue where Cooper's study departed from and therefore limited his point of view when analyzing the data to homosexual issue only. That becomes the weak point of his study. This study, however, analyzes through a wider point of view to make the result more representative to the phenomenon.

The difference between Cooper's study and this study is that this study does not look from one sensitive and even controversial issue such as

queer. The issue brought in this paper is less specific because this paper also seeks for issue(s) that might emerge when it comes to the interpretation.

A research done by Hodgetts, Chamberlain, and Bassett aims on the audience reception of a television documentary regarding the representation of 'youthful' elderly in the UK (Hodgetts, Chamberlain, and Bassett). Their article departs from the issue of the growing-old population in United Kingdom and the traditional and new representation of elderly in television. So the main concern of the article is the elderly population and the future one. Discussing the 'oppositional' populations of the society in one research is the strong point of their study. Commonly, studies only concern on one population of society and even if they talk about two populations, the usual one is male and female. So the issue brought in this article is considered uncommon. However, the object of the study, the documentary program is not a popular television program especially in Indonesia, so that the impact cannot be felt effectively while this paper examines a popular and phenomenal television program in Indonesia which can be more interesting and debatable.

In general, Hodgetts, Chamberlain, and Bassett's study is similar to this study but distinct in terms of the target population of society. This study tries to give references and suggestions to television producers so that they present better entertainment programs to the audience from all groups, from children to elderly, from housewives to ministers, and so on. The target of the grand purpose of this study is therefore wider than their research.

Other researches focusing on certain popular issue were done on television content, and this time to advertisements. They are: a research conducted on print advertisements or all versions of advertisements such as done by Dwivedy, Patnaik, and Suar in 2009 which investigates the audience responses on Indian print advertisement; and a research of audience reception on charity advertisements by Magdalini Tsoutsoumpi in 2013. Besides, those two researches are combined with more specific and popular issues such as gender representations (Dwivedy, Patnaik, and Suar), and portrayals of human suffering (Tsoutsoumpi).

There is also a study of audience acceptance of *green advertising* in mass media by Dhani Sari in 2012 (Sari). The impressive point of those three studies is that each study poses one interesting and contemporary issue emerging in society and also media. These kinds of specific analysis are needed to enrich the critical thinking in cultural studies. It is an advantage but at the same time, it can also be a weak point. Specific issues often limit the point of view when a researcher is analyzing an object or a phenomenon. This limited point of view prevents them to see the bigger picture of the condition or situation beyond the analysis. The focus of those three studies is similar: on how audiences make meaning of advertisements from the view of certain issue. Instead, this study aims to look at the bigger 'area' of a phenomenon in television as an effort to see the bigger picture beyond the results.

2.2. Related Studies on Indonesian Idol

Related to audience research, Penelope Coutas in her article puts one of her concerns at the audiences of Indonesian Idol in terms of their interactivity with the program. She argues that Indonesian Idol's audiences are classified into two types: the 'viewer', which are more passive—they just watch the shows without voting—compared to the 'fan' which are more active because they contribute to the creation of the *Idola* through their votes.

What Coutas wants to emphasize here is the audience has the role of agency in lifting up not only their favorite contestants but also the existence of Indonesian Idol itself (qtd. in Heryanto 128). Coutas put her audience research on the relationship between audience and television on a certain content of Indonesian Idol. Coutas chose that focus because in 2006 when she made the article, Indonesian Idol was in its peak of popularity, beating AFI's popularity that the concept of *Idola* reached a different definition. She stated that Indonesian Idol generates a new concept of idol or *Idola* because in the program, audiences witness the 'birth' of an idol and Indonesian Idol involved them in the process (qtd. in Heryanto 113). This article has its strength on the depth of analysis done by the writer and her carefulness in revealing several important things that we have not known of before.

Meanwhile, the weakness of this study lies on the limited area of focus or concern. If Coutas concerns on the *Idola* and voting system, which is a selected content of the program chosen by Coutas herself, this study

concerns more on the program in general, without focusing on certain feature of Indonesian Idol. The focus of this study is hoped to complete the good work done by Penelope Coutas so that research results on Indonesian Idol will be more insightful and comprehensive. Coutas' concern on studying Indonesian Idol shows that she worked more on the Indonesian Idol program itself than its audience. She treated Indonesian Idol program as her main text, and that is what makes this study different from hers since this study uses audience responses as the main text.

Another research concerning Indonesian Idol has been conducted by Elena Zachnas who aimed to see people's preference on Indonesian Idol by seeing the change in rating and the communication strategy to promote the program (Zachnas). Her work concerned more on the communication strategy as the means of promoting Indonesian Idol and her main text is the rating of the program.

Zachnas's study is quite different from this study mainly from the point of view. Her study is in the scope of communication study instead of cultural study. Also, the theory applied is not merely the theory of media television but also theory of marketing communication. Therefore, the result is only based on the rating of the program and the analysis is focused more on the communication point of view. Moreover, her study was conducted in 2005, which was the time when Indonesian Idol was a new comer in Indonesian television. Today in 2014 there might be some changes on people's opinion. One weakness of this research is that in examining people's

preference toward Indonesian Idol, the primary data does not include audience opinion obtained directly from the field. Therefore, this study would enrich and deepen the analysis of Indonesian Idol.

Besides Coutas's and Zachnas's studies that used textual approach, the following two other researches concern more on the audience of Indonesian Idol. The first is a research conducted by Anindita Dewi. She studied the code switching in Indonesian Idol 2012 judges' comments and also examining viewer's attitude towards the code switching (Dewi). Here Dewi integrated textual and audience analysis to study the code switching in the language used by the judges while commenting on the contestants' performances. The integration is the strength of her study because it is not an easy work and the result is good. Her study has different focus and topic than this study. While she learned the code switching, which is a specific event related to language, this study copes broader range: the phenomenon of singing competition as new entertainment in Indonesian television.

The second audience research is about media effects. Windy Putera conducted a study on the influence of Indonesian Idol Spectacular Show to the motivation of joining vocal training, with a case study on Yamaha Relasi Music & School of Vocal using questionnaire to collect the data (Putera). This study has its strength in the concern of media effect, especially Indonesian Idol. There should be some impact of such popular television program and it is also an importance to examine. However, Putera's study used quantitative method and the weakness is that it is not supported by an

interview which would be better to know more from the audience. This is the shortage that would be covered by this study because this study enables the respondents to share their feeling in any amount, whether a sentence or ten pages so that the data is more various.

With some critical reviews of previous studies, the researcher believes that this study with its concerns and coverage has not been conducted by other people. The researcher hopes that this study would enrich the previous studies and researches, especially those concerning audience. The researcher also hopes that this study would help people understand more about how people perceive a popular television program and make meaning from them.

2.3. Theoretical Framework

Theories and approaches in reception study are considered new because reception study is part of audience study, which gained popularity and much appreciation in 1980s. Joke Hermes called this 'New Audience Research', an era when the study of audience put more concern on the ethnographic point of view and began developing in the mid 1980s (1). Here, one of the most popular works that became the pioneers of audience research's development is an essay by Stuart Hall entitled "Encoding/Decoding" published in 1980. His views on mass communication study resulted on a theory of the same name with his work's title. In the essay Stuart Hall proposed the theory of Encoding/Decoding, specifically the three

reading positions. Hall stated that there are processes when people receive media messages, especially television. There are two privileged process: encoding is when the media production concerns with the meaning and ideas to create discourse to the audience such as ‘knowledge-in-use concerning the routines of production, historically defined technical skills, professional ideologies, institutional knowledge, definition and assumptions’ and decoding is when that connotative and literal meanings take effect or influence people with ‘very complex perceptual, cognitive, emotional, ideological or behavioral consequences’. The process of decoding is also influenced by the same aspects as the ones in the decoding process (Hall 129).

In the process of encoding/decoding, Hall tried to show that televisual discourse is constructed by purposing three decoding positions. They are: (1) the dominant-hegemonic position, when the viewers fully take the connoted meaning from a television program and decode it with reference of what they have encoded before, (2) negotiated position, when most of the viewers notices the connoted meaning of a message while at the same time makes exceptions to the meaning, and the last is (3) oppositional position or code, when audiences understand the literary and connotative meaning of a message but decode it in the opposite way (Hall 135–136). Hall’s theory of encoding and decoding gives major contribution to the development of the new audience research era, and together with David Morley’s *Audiences: The Ethnography of Media Consumption* in the same year in which he applied the Encoding/Decoding theory (Hermes 6). Those two works then became the

hallmark of the new period of audience study. They inspired many other great works of audience research by scholars and academicians and today the Encoding/Decoding theory is still a relevant and applicable tool to analyze a text.

One of the other great works following the success of Hall and Morley on audience research is Ien Ang's book *Watching Dallas* published in 1985. In terms of theory, Ang mentioned 'symptomatic reading' as her main tool of examining the pleasure of watching *Dallas* television serial in Netherlands. Ang said that the text, her respondents' letters are seen as a discourse produced by people when they want to express their own views on a highly controversial television serial. She believed that people have to 'call on socially available ideologies and images' in order to make meaning of *Dallas*. Ang tried to reveal the social and cultural meaning of *Dallas* and from which ideological context it comes from (11). In other words, she believes that a certain ideology in the society influences the making of social and cultural meaning of the text by the audience.

Ien Ang analyzed the text (letters from respondents) through 'symptomatic reading' as she believes that the ideas written by her respondents are structured in a certain socio-cultural manner. 'Symptomatic reading' itself is an approach proposed by Louis Althusser in his 1970 work with Étienne Balibar *Reading Capital*, a critical reading of Karl Marx's *Capital*. Analyzing a text through symptomatic reading means we regard meaning as cultural instead of natural, self-evident, and limited to the author's

intention only. It is interested in the way culture constructs and ‘determines a reader’s reading of a text ... rather than describe what it means’. Symptomatic reading tries to use the text to reveal the discourses that constructs the text and where the discourse takes place in the larger social and cultural system (Estevez).

Ien Ang applied an approach that came from an earlier time of the new audience research era. This is because 1970s was the roots of the new audience research with its historical background that gave the way to the rise of the tradition (Hermes 1). Therefore to sum up, Ang believed that symptomatic reading is needed to look beyond these ideas to get the meaning and the ideology that underlies it. Her work *Watching Dallas* in fact has been a very influential work in cultural studies (*Ibid*).

It is necessary to take a look at Althusser’s approach of symptomatic reading. The idea of symptomatic reading departs from a common problem in the practice of reading and interpreting a text. As Minette Estevez asserts, a text always becomes more and also less than what the author wants it to be, as a result of the different cultural context and codes that establish the text when it is written and when it is read. She gives an example of how classic literature usually gets different interpretations by the reader from different periods of time and that is caused by the changing culture and customs people are experiencing throughout the time. As an effort to reveal a text’s meaning more precisely, still according to Estevez, a “close” or “careful” reading is done (Estevez).

However, Louis Althusser disagrees with this approach. He prefers symptomatic reading, which tries to explain how a text means and why it is so rather than a description of what it means (*Ibid*). In other words, as he wrote in *Reading Capital*, symptomatic reading is more about unwrapping the wrapped things in a text (Althusser 13). Symptomatic reading then believes that a text can give information about under what situation it was written, and also under what situation it was read by the readers. Althusser was inspired by Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic concept of conscious and unconscious mind. The unconscious "mind" of a text is what he is interested in exploring (Estevez). Ien Ang's decision of choosing this approach as her tool of analysis is a clever one as her purpose of study is not limited to whether *Dallas* television serial is good or bad but more to from what concept such responses come to audiences' mind. Just like Althusser wants, Ien Ang is interested in what people have in their unconscious mind when they are watching *Dallas*.