

The Representation of Persons with Disabilities in Indonesian Reality Shows

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Abstract: People in society often stigmatise minorities, for example people with disabilities (PWD). Unfortunately, the media institutions perpetuate the stigma through impressions of reality that seem to reflect the PWD real life. In this article, we examined the representation of PWDs on reality shows in Indonesia, namely “Mikrofon Pelunas Hutang” and “Minta Tolong New Season”. We used semiotic analysis by John Fiske through looking at the depiction of PWDs in those reality shows. The data analysis involves looking at the three processes of the representation, which consist of: at the level of reality, the level of representation, and the ideological level. The conclusion is that those two shows often portrayed PWDs as weak and helpless people

1 INTRODUCTION

Persons with disabilities in Indonesia are still often stigmatised as Persons with Social Welfare Problems as stated in the pages of the Provincial Social Department in Yogyakarta. On its official website (2018), they say that there are several criteria for persons with disabilities who have social welfare problems. Those are the people who experience obstacles in carrying out activities, have difficulties in working, and cannot solve their life problems properly and so forth.

This lasting stigma cannot be separated from the influence of mass media, especially television. Television supposedly has a function in providing useful information, an educational function as well as having an entertainment function (Effendy, 1993). However, in fact, the media often brings up ideological issues when they show a representation that relates to social reality (real world), then it raises ideological problems in social and cultural life (Sobur, 2016). Though the media tend to display the reality that has been edited by sorting facts or information that is considered essential (Sobur, 2016).

As a result, certain realities are portrayed by the media to audiences that are able to shape public

opinion about the real reality (Hamad, 2004). This reality construction cannot be detached from the role of language since it becomes the primary instrument for telling stories in both print and electronic media. It also occurs in reality shows, especially those which show people with disabilities.

Until now those reality shows have remained in production because people always show their interest. The reality show has an entertainment element and is able to attract viewers to enjoy 'real people's lives'. Moreover, it also highlights the nature of voyeurism, where it is used to target the audience's emotions which can bring pleasure to them (Hill in Noviani, 2012).

According to Sugihartono (2004), three types of impressions can be categorised as reality shows: firstly, reality shows that place viewers as passive viewers who follow a person's professional or personal activities; secondly, a hidden camera which is placed to record unexpected activities in ordinary or unreasonable situations; thirdly, reality game shows which film contestants who are competing to win a competition.

This study wants to see how the reality shows in Indonesia try to describe people with disabilities. Two reality shows will be analysed: “Minta Tolong New Season” and “Mikrofon Pelunas Hutang.”

Minta Tolong New Season is a television program on the GTV channel which was previously called Global TV that follows the story of people who are struggling in asking help from others. This program claims to be a social experiment that is testing people's sincerity in terms of whether there are still good people who want to help people in need. In ensuring the originality of this social experiment, a hidden camera is placed to record every event.

Mikrofon Pelunas Hutang is a program on the Indosiar channel that focuses on paying off contestants' debts. Later on, the contestants will be asked to stand on the stage to talk about their difficulties due to having a lot of debt. If the microphone that is used by the contestant to sing is turned on, then the television will pay their debt.

2 METHODS

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach based on the semiotics study by John Fiske. Semiotics is a model of science that tries to understand the world as a system of relationships through a basic unit called a sign. Therefore, a semiotics study is a study that learns the nature of a sign's existence and whether the construction is through symbols and words within a social context (Sobur, 2003).

Fiske (1987) sees that, in the television world, there is a connected code that is often used to form a meaning. According to him, the codes in the world of television are divided into three levels: firstly, the level of reality relating to appearance, dress, makeup, environment, behaviour, speech, gesture, expression and sound; secondly, the level of representation relating to cameras, lighting, editing, music and sound; thirdly, the level of ideology in which there is individualism, patriarchy, race, class, materialism and capitalism.

The unit analysed in this study is a scene involving people with disabilities in both reality shows. The first is Mikrofon Pelunas Hutang's episode *Dini Juniawati, Gadis Kecil yang Berhati Mulia* and Minta Tolong New Season's episode *Tuna Netra Minta Diantar Beli Beras, Ini Reaksi Orang Sekitar*.

3 RESULT

In the reality show from the Mikrofon Pelunas Hutang episode *Dini Juniawati, Gadis Kecil yang Berhati Mulia*, the writer divided the scene into two parts. The first is the scene that shows the video clip that captures the daily life of the blind person Dini. The second scene shows Dini standing on the stage of Mikrofon Pelunas Hutang.

In the first scene, the analysis is based on the reality level and representation level, as follows:

Table 1: Level of Reality from Video Clip about Dini's Daily Life as a Blind Person

Level of Reality	Scene
Appearance	Dini described as having a simple appearance
Dress	Dini uses elementary school uniform
Makeup	Dini does not use makeup
Environment	The walls of Dini's house are not cemented and in black colour
Behaviour	Dini is polite to the teacher and helps her grandmother diligently
Speech	Dini has flat speaking style
Gesture	Dini does not have many body gestures
Expression	Dini's face looks sad
Sound	The sad atmosphere in the music video clip

At the reality level of the video clip that depicts Dini's daily life, she is described as a hard-working and simple figure. Economic difficulties do not cause her to give up; she continues to help her grandmother in selling Saroja cakes.

Table 2: Level of Representation from Video Clip about Dini's Daily Life as a Blind Person

Level of Representation	Scene
Camera	Medium shot (MS) is used to depict Dini's daily routines starting from going to school to selling the Saroja cakes
	Close up (CU) was used when Dini told of her grandmother's debt problems
Lighting	It tends to be dark
Editing	None
Music	Sad song
Sound	Dini's voice when she tells of her daily life

At the level of representation, the video clips of Dini’s daily life are mostly shot in a medium shot (MS) and close up (CU). Lighting used in this video clip tends to be dark and also accompanied by sad songs.

Based on the scene showing Dini to be blind, the level of ideology displayed in this reality show is about social class. This show portrays Dini’s life as being in line with people from the lower class who have a lot of debt because of her ill grandmother’s treatment. She also had to work hard to help her grandmother to sell Saroja cakes after school.

In the next scene, when the host is interviewing Dini on stage, the researcher analyses it based on the level of reality and the level of representation, as follows:

Table 3: Level of Reality when Dini is Interviewed on the Mikrofon Pelunas Hutang Stage

Level of Reality	Scene
Appearance	Dini described as having a simple appearance
Dress	Dini uses a simple shirt and headscarf
Makeup	Dini only uses face powder
Environment	The event atmosphere is quiet
Behaviour	Dini has a polite attitude towards the host
Speech	Flat speaking style
Gesture	Dini does not have many body gestures
Expression	Her face is sad with tears
Sound	Sad musical backsound

At the reality level, when Dini is interviewed on the Mikrofon Pelunas Hutang stage, she is described as a person who has suffered because her grandmother had a lot of debt. Dini has teary eyes when she talks about her difficulties that make the host cry sadly.

Table 4: Level of Representation when Dini is Interviewed on the Mikrofon Pelunas Hutang Stage

Level of Representation	Scene
Camera	Close up (CU) used when the host interviews Dini
	Big close up (BCU) used when Dini tell the stories about her grandmother’s debt along with her dreams
Lighting	Light and focus on Dini
Editing	None
Music	Sad song
Sound	Dini’s voice telling her stories

From the table above, the shots are mostly taken close up (CU) and in big close up (BCU). The lighting used in this scene is bright and focused on Dini. The background music being played is rhythmically sad to make a touching atmosphere for the audience.

Based on the scene that shows Dini interviewed on the stage of Mikrofon Pelunas Hutang, the level of ideology is still about class. This show portrays Dini’s dreams, her wish for her grandmother's debt to be paid off immediately and her wish to buy a keyboard and a braille machine to study.

Meanwhile in the reality show Minta Tolong New Season episode *Tuna Netra Minta Diantar Beli Beras, Ini Reaksi Orang Sekitar*, the scene that is being analysed is when Saman is looking for people who want to help him at the roadside. The analysis examines the level of reality and level of representation, as follows:

Table 5: Level of Reality Saman looking for people who are willing to accompany him in buying rice

Level of Reality	Scene
Appearance	Saman described as having a simple appearance
Dress	Saman wears a faded shirt, cloth pants and is using a stick to walk
Makeup	Saman does not use makeup
Environment	Saman is looking for people who are willing to help him at the roadside
Behaviour	Saman has a polite attitude towards his surroundings
Speech	Saman's speaking style is gentle and he always repeats his story about his desire to buy rice with a little money
Gesture	Saman does not have many body gestures
Expression	Saman loves to smile
Sound	There is no back sound

In the table above, Saman is described as a friendly and courteous figure when asking for help. He always repeats the story about his difficulty in buying rice to the passing by people.

Table 6: Level of Representation when Saman is Looking for Someone to Accompany Him Buying Rice

Level of Representation	Scene
Camera	Long shot (LS) used to portray when Saman is looking for someone who wants to help him
	Medium long shot (MLS) used

	when Saman asks people passing by to talk
	Medium shot (MS) used to show when Saman is talking intensely with the person whom he wants to ask help from
Lighting	No lighting and reliance more on the sunlight
Editing	None
Music	The sound of passing vehicles
Sound	Saman's voice in seeking help

From the table above, the most widely used of the shot types are long shot (LS), medium long shot (MLS) and medium shot (MS). Because the program *Minta Tolong New Season* is claimed to be a social experiment event, there is not much artificial lighting and sound.

Based on the level of reality and the level of representation of the reality show *Minta Tolong New Season*, it can be seen that the level of ideology discussed is about class. People with disabilities, namely Saman, are described as those who are unable to solve their own problems meaning they need someone else to help them.

4 DISCUSSIONS

Based on the analysis, impressions of *Mikrofon Pelunas Hutang* and *Minta Tolong New Season* have a similar tendency in commodifying poverty. This conclusion is similar to that of previous research entitled *Poverty Commodification in Indonesian Television: Comparative Study between "Jika Aku Menjadi" in Trans TV channel and the program "Bedah Rumah" in RCTI channel*. In this study, the commodification of poverty in reality shows is illustrated through dramatic moments. It is evident from the depiction of the poverty situation, the sensation of joy, inviting sympathy and emotion, and stimulating the laughter of viewers (Arya et al., 2013).

The difference between this research and previous research is that this research describes people with disabilities who have become a subject of poverty commodification. Persons with disabilities are described as people in the lower class, who cannot solve their own problems which makes them need the help of others. This image is shaped by reality show impressions that position the lower classes as a group of fools who have dysfunction in their social lives (Liestyna, 2009).

In order to give a focus and arouse the audience's sense of interest in the *Mikrofon Pelunas Hutang*

program, most of the shots that are taken consist of medium shots (MS), close up (CU) and big close up (BCU) shots. A medium shot is used to highlight the human figure in the frame, such as through eye contact, clothing, hair colour and appearance (Thompson and Bowen, 2009). A close-up is used to show the human face by revealing the details of the eye and highlighting the emotions through the eyes, mouth and facial muscles clearly (Thompson and Bowen, 2009). A big close up (BCU) is a shot type that highly accentuates every detail of the face, like facial movement or expression.

Unlike *Mikrofon Pelunas Hutang*, the picture shot from *Minta Tolong New Season* is mostly using a long shot (LS), medium long shot (MLS) and medium shot (MS). The long shot (LS) images are to display the environment around objects, people and actions and often show better physical space connection (Thompson and Bowen, 2009). Meanwhile, a medium long shot (MLS) further highlights human figures such as showing clothing details, gender and expression (Thompson and Bowen, 2009). The use of this shot is because *Minta Tolong New Season* is a social experiment that is trying to take pictures from a distance and use a hidden camera.

5 CONCLUSION

Although following different themes, the reality shows of *Mikrofon Pelunas Hutang* and *Minta Tolong New Season* present similar ideology relating to social class. People with disabilities who are represented in both reality shows are described as being weak and from a low social status. The conclusion from this study is that reality shows in Indonesia still present people with disabilities as a category of people from low-class society who cannot solve the problems they face.

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