Influencing or Influenced by: Identity Construction of Indonesian Youth in the Era of Popular Culture

Atyaka Laksmitarukmi
Sanata Dharma University
Yogyakarta, Indonesia
vivelaquavinc@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to investigate whether identity construction of Indonesian youth has relation with the rise of popular culture. The objects of this research are the popularity of TV serials in Indonesia or also known as, ‘sinetron’ (sinema elektronik) that brings some impacts toward society especially for Indonesian Youth and social phenomena that can be seen from the surroundings. In some cases, the emergence of youth that imitate particular style cannot be separated from their habits of watching television. It was known that the creation of TV serials and other TV programs are inspired by reality and real phenomena. However, to perceive it at the same way can be very confusing because the difference is very thin. This study has several purposes that related to identity construction of Indonesian Youth. First, it aims for analyzing the social phenomena that happened to Indonesian youth in constructing their own identity. Second, it has goal to find out about the relation between identity construction and popular culture in terms of influence. Third is to perceive the role of popular culture in constructing identity especially for youth. The last but not least, this study has purpose to investigate which one that influences and is influenced by between youth identity and popular culture.

KEYWORDS: youth identity, popular culture, cultural studies, television

Youth is an important stage of human life when the identity will be constructed. In this stage, a human being will be influenced by some factors that can be internal or external. The influencing factors come from their own biological and physiological stage, such as hormones, growth, puberty and other biological matters are the internal factors. Social environment, domestic life, society, culture and family background are the external factors. Those factors influence one another and they construct the identity
of a human being. Since adolescence in an important stage in constructing identity, any influence both internal and external will determine their future in terms of personality and self-actualization.

One of important thing in the adolescence stage is the stage of imitation. When teenagers look for idols and someone they can imitate. They tend to look for someone or something that can help them getting particular title such as ‘cool’, ‘awesome’, ‘and charming’ etc. The electronic media play important role in giving teenagers such information. Moreover, the internet can give more than what they expect that means everything is reachable and accessible.

From many television programs broadcasted every day, ‘sinetron’ or ‘sinema elektronik’ is the favorite among television viewers. In Indonesia, ‘sinetron’ is program that rated highly. It is actually similar with other countries in which the TV serials are also favorite program among audiences, especially those that starred teen idols. The phenomenon of teen idol popularity seems to be the most influencing factor dealing with identity construction of Indonesian youth. Since the ‘imitation’ stage, Indonesia youth today tend to behave and act like what their idols act. The clearest imitation of teenagers in imitating their idols is their way in socializing. They follow their idol’s fashion, the way of talking and behaving and sometimes they apply styles that actually have not fitted yet their age. They tend to follow what are considered as ‘cool’ and ‘good’ according to their senses. It can be the cause of the appearance of ‘anak lebay’ or usually called ‘alay’. In some ways, they start losing their own identity especially those that related to national identity.

Sets out from the concern that Indonesian youth maybe lose their self-identity especially related to national identity, further researches about identity construction are necessary, moreover, the factors that be the influence or medium of the influence
that construct youth identity. Learn about identity construction, its influencing factors or the media is a part of socio-cultural studies that can be enhanced. Finally, this study tries to find out about the relation of youth identity construction and popular culture that is represented by the TV serials or ‘sinetron’. Between them, it will be searched whether the youth identity influences and is influenced by the existence of popular culture. In the end, Indonesia youth will grow up to be an adult with moral and character. The youth identity will construct what they will become in the future. Therefore, it is very important to have young generations that have good character and they can determine themselves as valuable asset of the country.

**Research Questions**

Society and environment play important role in character building as well as identity construction because they are locations where the social phenomena take place. Therefore, it is important to know how the social phenomena construct the identity of Indonesian youth. Social phenomena consist of several things including popular culture. By perceiving the relation between popular culture and identity construction, it can be seen that the influencing party and the influenced one or they are related to each other after answering the following research question.

1) How does identity construction relate to popular culture?

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

By relating some data and theories, the study will achieve some conclusions to answer the research questions. Since the study relates to the construction of identity, thus, theory related to youth identity is used to conduct the research. Some information about the impact of media will also be enclosed in this research as relevant explanation.
Youth Identity

Youth is closely related to the process of searching for self-identity. This searching process is supported by some factors whether it is internal or external factors. Identity construction consists of several types such as self-identity and social identity. For adolescents that are experiencing some biological matters such as growth and puberty, it affects their psychological condition. Therefore, in the process of searching for identity, hormones and other biological matters become the internal factors while environment, social life and culture become the external factor that giving much impact in constructing their identity. Identity is not merely about gender and sexual orientation but also the personality and self-esteem.

Identity deals with ‘self’ in which a human being should possess ‘self’ so other can identify he or she as human being. Later on, in social identity it will also be used for categorizing or classifying him or her. In the process of identity searching, the process of classifying to other social classification is called as self-categorization (Turner et al in Stets and Burke, 2000, p. 224). Forming identity is related to ‘role’ that one is playing in order to be able to be identified.

Referring to youth identity, the psychological condition in puberty stage cannot be put aside. According to G. Stanley Hall (in Buckingham, 2008, p. 2), adolescence is a period that can be considered as storm and stress. Since, in this period it can be easily to find mood swings, excessive enthusiasm without thinking including taking careless risks and other personal conflicts not only within self but also with other people. According to Erikson as quoted by Buckingham (2008, p.2), adolescence will experience a conflict dealing with identity and ‘role confusion’. In this period, identity formation is very critical, because human beings will be on an intersection in their own life. They need to choose and define themselves so they are identifiable by other human
beings. They must decide what they are going to do and what they want to do, therefore, in this stage, someone can be unstable, in the case of emotion and mind.

**Impact of Television as Medium**

Nowadays, television is no longer the only medium in sharing information. Internet is a bigger source to find anything. However, television is still inseparable from society especially in Indonesia. The media consumption for Indonesian is still led by television instead of other media such as internet, radio, newspaper etc. Teenagers and homemakers, especially in Indonesia, are the main viewers of television. Therefore, many television networks provide them with suitable television programs that become their interest. However, not all programs are appropriate to watch because sometimes, the programs do not fit their age. It gives significant impact in identity construction of Indonesian youth. Although KPI (*Komisi Penyiaran Indonesia*) is able to give warning and even block the inappropriate programs, it is still inadequate. Internet gives contribution in supporting the access of television programs, because the television networks provide online streaming to access them.

Raising Children Network writes, “Media influences do play a part in shaping teenage behavior.” ("Media influence on teenagers | Raising Children Network", 2016). Besides that, media influence on teenagers deliberately and indirectly. It provides positive and negative impact to them. However, children and teenagers can be helped to balance their exposure to the media. The role of adults and parents is very important. Because the influence of media is very possible in shaping behavior of adolescence, it will lead their way in searching of self-identity. Later on, it becomes the issue of imitating in the process of identity construction.
RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses some data of rating of TV serials broadcasted in Indonesia and statistic data of Indonesian adolescents. The collected data will be calculated and explained. After the calculation, it will explain the percentage of media consumption that has probability in influencing identity construction of Indonesian youth. The data that will be provided are percentage of media consumption in Indonesia, number of adolescent population in Indonesia, estimation of television viewers in spending time to watch television program and more specific TV serials or ‘sinetron’. Elaboration of each data that have been calculated is illustrated in percentage. In the end, it will draw conclusion about the influence of popular culture (TV serial) toward youth identity.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Average Time of Watching Television by Indonesian

After summarizing some sources such as websites and data issued by government institutions, it concludes that 95% media consumption of Indonesia is television. It is the largest media followed by internet, radio, newspaper and other media. Another source mention that average time of watching television by Indonesian is about 4, 5 hours or 270 minutes per day. Within a year, it covers 197 hours for Indonesia to spend in front of the television. About 25% of the spent time of watching television, they will enjoy TV serials of ‘sinetron’ (Silalahi, 2016). The calculation of spent time to watch ‘sinetron’ is illustrated by the following calculation:

\[ 25\% \times 270 \text{ mins} = 67.5 \text{ mins} \]

It means, Indonesian spend their time to watch ‘sinetron’ more than an hour per day. In fact, the duration of each sinetron will be more than one hour. Every channel also has different TV serials and almost all television viewers will change the
channel as soon as the previous serial ends. If there are three channels provide different titles of *sinetron*, the viewers will watch for about 3 hours.

**Data of Adolescent Population in Indonesia and Under PG Viewers**

Taken from some sources (BPS, Bapenas, BKKBN) that conducted census from 2010 until 2016, the population of adolescent in Indonesia covers 25% from the whole population, 255 million people. It means that more or less 64 million adolescents within range of age 10-24 years old are in the process of searching their self-identity and the imitation stage is ongoing.

A concern was issued by KPI (*Komisi Penyiaran Indonesia*) in 2013 after they found that almost 40% of television viewers in Indonesia are children with spending time of watching almost 35 hours a week or about 5 hours per day ("Penonton Usia Anak Capai 40%, Orangtua Harus Waspada", 2016). Not only they are over-exposed of imitation source but also they possibly lose their time to study and doing school assignments. It can affect their education as well.

As a sample, if we consider 40% of the viewers are children and adolescents while 27% of Indonesian population is adolescents, we can calculate the amount of television audiences that are still under parent guidance. 40% of 64 million people means 25.6 million people (children and adolescents) are over-exposed of television. By considering that number, there is a probability of imitation processes is ongoing in their stage of identity searching.

**Identity Construction in Relation with Popular Culture**

Television is one of examples of popular culture. Any programs provided by television network will give impact to the audiences positively or negatively. The difference is the range of age that makes the impact is also distinct from adults and adolescents. Adults tend to be able to be more selective in searching television
programs that are suitable for them. Besides that, they are also able to filter programs that can be beneficial and do not pick randomly. Different from adults, children and teenagers tend to pick programs that are entertaining and popular among their social circle. It is because they prefer following trend rather than following their own area of interest.

Youth or adolescents will need to pose their own self. However, they are also afraid of not getting acknowledgment from others because they are different. As the results, they will look for something that can help them getting acknowledgment from their surroundings. Although, there are many ways, one the most common and possible to do is by following trends and usually it is started by finding the trendsetter. Television with its various programs is considered as one of the sources in finding trendsetters. Television commercials also put their products to gain more customers and it is quite effective. Television is a resourceful medium where teenagers easily find their idol. If the idol proposes new style or trend, teenagers will happily follow because they want to be as ‘cool’ as their idol. Indeed, the social circle will start paying attention and they get the acknowledgment as they want.

Indonesian youths are familiar with term ‘cool’ or ‘keren’ and they want to get that title. Thus, in their way of socializing, they will be grouped or categorized in particular title. However, by appointing himself or herself in a category, it is what Stryker (1980) in Stets and Burke (2000, p. 225) defines that self-categorization is equal and relevant with the one’s identity formation. As time goes, someone will be able to be mature and thinking deeper and he or she has already settled with his or her identity. Nonetheless, when it comes about the case of adolescence, it is difficult to determine particular identity because according to Erikson, adolescence is a critical period of identity formation because an individual is overcoming uncertainty. An
individual will learn about their awareness of strengths and weaknesses. Besides, individuals will find their own specialty and quality. This period is a crisis can also be a milestone to know their future, values and identity (in Buckingham, 2008, p. 2). It is along with a Sociologist, Emile Durkheim (1982) proposes in “What is a Social Fact” that community and surroundings form individual’s responses and preferences (Curran & Takata, 2001). For adolescents, the process of self-identity searching can lead to identity crisis and role confusion and it is inseparable from their surroundings and society they live in.

Popular culture, in this study takes an example on television serial, is part of community that has role in constructing youth identity. The exposure of new trend, new style and persona of the idol become important factors in which the process of identity searching, an individual is very influenced or inspired by the idol. Later on, it leads to form an individual who, maybe, consumptive, trend-addict and other personalities. Nonetheless, we need to note that there are some positive impacts as well because human beings will grow up and someday, they will be mature in the way of thinking. It opens chances in choosing their way in the future. By growing up, they can choose between right or wrong, bad or good, to accept or to deny.

The exposure of popular culture that has role in forming their mindset and identity is closely related. By providing sources that are needed by adolescents during their identity formation, popular culture is inseparable from the searching process of self-identity for the youth. In Indonesia, by reviewing the number of adolescents and the number of audiences on television serials, the popular culture gives many influences in youth identity construction. Despite, the influences are triggered by the need of the youths to find an idol or persona so they can impersonate in order to be accepted in the society they live in. The term ‘persona’ is used because we cannot see
through the idols themselves and it is possible to assume that they also wear a mask when presenting themselves for public, the familiar definition proposed by Carl Jung (1966, p. 264).

To see the relation between youth identity and popular culture in general, they relate one another. Popular culture will be nothing without the needs of adolescents in searching for idols or trend. For instance, if adolescents in Indonesia have no interest in watching television, the network will not provide TV serials as their main program. The stars of the program also will not get popularity or fame. It will be useless to create new trend because the audiences do not care. Popular culture, as soon as they get popularity, at the same time, will be renowned and people start to be familiar with their presence. It is applied to teen idols as well. Their names begin familiar after the popularity as long as the audiences pay attention about their presence. The main concern now is, although they are influencing and influenced by each other, the level of influence is more important. It sets out from the social phenomena that it is barely easy to differentiate between reality and life as described in the serials. The easiest example to find is about the student’s uniform. Many students in Indonesia tend to wear their school uniform follow their idol’s way of wearing uniform in the serials. Sometimes, it does not reflect good student, yet they will ignore the school regulation just because they think, their way of wearing school uniform is ‘cool’. Another example is the tendency to violate school regulation because their idols do same thing in the ‘sinetron’. We may need to go flashback. Formerly, when television especially ‘sinetron’ is still limited, the scriptwriters found their inspiration to create story and plot based on what they see in the reality. However, to be seen currently, it is difficult to conclude the influencing part or influenced part.
CONCLUSION

The process of searching for self-identity relates closely to youth and adolescence. Some factors support this process internally and externally. In youth identity construction, self-identity and social identity will form their personality and self-actualization. The stage of imitation is one of the processes that must be experienced by an individual that is triggered by the needs of getting acknowledgment from their social circle.

Adolescent is an important period in which the formation of identity is important also critical. An individual will be positioned in confusion in which they have to pose, define and determine themselves as the attempt to be identifiable. Response and preference become very imperative to be decided because it is the milestone for their future and path to their maturity.

As part of popular culture, television is the largest media to be consumed by Indonesian. The second position in Indonesian media consumption is taken by internet. However, the difference is very significant almost 60%. The viewers of television are teenagers and homemakers. Hence, many television networks broadcast television programs that meet their interest. The most favorite program for Indonesian is ‘sinetron’ and every channel provides various titles of them to entertain the audiences. The spread of popular culture likewise television gives positive and negative impact to the audiences. In the case of youth identity, in which youth need to pose their own self, television become the most accessible way to find idol, persona and trend-setter as their attempt to be identifiable by others especially in their social circle.

Mindset and identity construction of youth has close relation with the presence of popular culture. It is not about a process of searching self-identity but also finding a figure that can be impersonated. In general, between popular culture and youth
identity construction, particularly Indonesian youth, they influence and are influenced one another. However, specifically, the development and spread of popular culture around the globe from time to time play bigger influence in constructing youth identity. By over-exposing the TV serials as the part of popular culture, youth tend to follow without reviewing the pros and cons. Concisely, the exposure of popular culture give bigger impact in influencing the identity construction of Indonesian youth.

REFERENCES


