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Defining Media Literacy in Indonesia

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Abstract

While families now live in a media saturated environment, activities to promote media literacy in Indonesia have only started this decade. This paper describes the conceptualization of media literacy that is used by media literacy activists in Indonesian context, which has influenced the variation of media literacy strategies and activities in many areas. In addition, this paper draws a map of media literacy actors, beneficiaries, strategies, and challenges. Using focus group discussion, data was gathered from media literacy activists in Jakarta, Bandung, Semarang,

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Yogyakarta, and Surabaya – five capital cities with high media penetration. The data were analyzed and discussed in the National Workshop on Media Literacy 2011. The result showed that each institution in each area has developed media literacy activities according to local context, and there is an agreement that media literacy can be defined as the ability to use media critically. Most of media literacy actors are from academic or NGO backgrounds, who emphasize more on children and young people as their beneficiaries. Promoting media literacy is still seen more as an effort to protect than to empower the audience.

Key words: Indonesia, media education, media literacy, civil society, children, young people.

Overview of Indonesia context

Indonesian families today live in a household with abundance media access and supply. Through their television set they can watch 11 national (terrestrial) TV channels and some of 105 local TV stations, most of them broadcast for 24 hours per day (Hendriyani et al., 2011). Families that have cable channels or satellite disc could enjoy more TV programs than those who have not. No wonder the family’s time spent on television is high. As illustration, the Nielsen Media found that the average time spent for younger children (5-9 years) was 4 hours in 2000, 4.3 hours in 2005, and 3.9 hours in 2010. Older children (10-14 years) spent more time watching television: 4.2 hours in 2000, 4.6 hours in 2005, and 4.4 hours in 2010. The people meter data was collecting from ten big cities in Indonesia.

Of course, television is not the only medium in Indonesian families’ homes, although it remains as the dominant medium, available in 98% of homes. Most of the household in Jakarta has mobile phones, books, a video player, radio, magazines, a
game player, and a computer [Hendriyani, et al, 2011]. The Nielsen company survey found that internet penetration reached 17% of the Indonesia population in 2009, compared to 8% in 2005 (Kompas, December 8, 2009). The number is still growing fast; for example, in November 2009 there were only 12 million Facebook users in Indonesia (Prihadi, 2009), reaching 26 million by August 2010 (Wahono, 2010).

Despite the overwhelming access and supply of media in Indonesian households, there are very limited policies that regulate the media in Indonesia. As of 2002, less than 10 years ago, the government issued Broadcasting Act that provides a legal foundation for the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission (Komisi Penyiaran Indonesia [KPI]) to regulate the broadcasting system in Indonesia, such as the frequency of television broadcast, the ownership of the television stations, and the quality of television programs. KPI issued the Broadcasting Code of Conduct and the Broadcast Program Standard in 2007, regulating the content and the conduct of broadcast industry for the first time after years of market-driven practices (Hendriyani et al., 2011). Concerning internet, only in 2008 has the government issued the Information and Electronic Transaction Law to protect people from cyber crimes. Until now there is no regulation for popular “new” media among children and young people, such as the mobile phone and electronic games. To make it worse, pirated video games and DVDs can be easily found in certain shopping centers, making it easier for children to buy games such as Grand Theft Auto or any kind of DVDs.

Tracking down records from internet, we found that concerns on media and audience’s relationship were already voiced since 1991 when the first commercial television broadcast nationally, ending the monopoly of the single state-owned TV
station. A seminar on children and television was held that year by Indonesian Children Welfare Foundation (Yayasan Kesejahteraan Anak Indonesia [YKAI]) and the Asian Media Information and Communication Centre (AMIC) where the participants brought up the needs to protect children from negative media effect. Unfortunately, records following the seminar of any activities for advocating or promoting positive media usage, among children in particular and society in general, are rare. After 2002 various organizations have held plenty activities to educate people about media effect using various different names: media education, media literacy, media awareness, media literacy educations, information literacy, and smart in using media. In January 2011 the First Conference of Media Literacy was held, gathering activists from several regions in Indonesia. The variety of programs and research results shared in the conference showed that these various different names is an implication of the diverse perceptions on media literacy as well as the confusion between media literacy, media watch, and media study programs.

The purpose of this article is to assess the variation of media literacy definition used by media literacy activists in Indonesia. This article also finds out media literacy actors, beneficiaries, strategies, and activities in Indonesia. Furthermore, this article investigates obstacles in promoting media literacy and recommends ways to overcome them.

**Literature review**

There are many variation of definition of media literacy in International community. Each country has different backgrounds or concerns that influenced the way it saw media
literacy. One of the most common use definition comes from the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy, which describes media literacy as “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and produce media for specific result” (Aufderheide, 1993, p. v). More practically, Potter (2005, p. 22) defines media literacy as “A set of perspectives that we actively expose ourselves to the media to interpret the meaning of the messages we encounter”. Canada Ministry of Education (1989) puts emphasis on the critical thinking ability in its media literacy curricular, while Japan Ministry of Education puts emphasis on ability to use interactive media (Sakamoto & Suzuki, 2009). The latest development of digital media is embraced by the Media Awareness Network (2011) by expanding media category to digital media, such as computers, cellular phones, and internet, not only the hardware but also the software.

Analyzing various definitions of media literacy, Rosenbaum et al., (2007) and Martens (2010) found that there is an agreement that media literacy at least has two basic components: knowledge and skills. On the subject of the knowledge and skills, Rosenbaum et al., (2008) explores all aspects in the relations between producers, the media, and the audience. Martens (2010) categorizes the subjects into four components of (mass) media: media industries, media messages, media audiences, and media effects. Both categorizations include key elements such as (a) media is constructed, (b) different people can experience the same media message differently, (c) media effects on people, etcetera. Promoting media literacy is seen as an effort to protect and to empower the audience at the same time. Hence, media literacy programs often aim to promote (a) democracy, participation, and active citizenship; (b) knowledge economy,
competitiveness, and choice; as well as (c) lifelong learning, cultural expression and personal fulfillment (Livingstone, 2007).

**Methods**

From publications on internet, we managed to map 88 programs or activities related to media literacy from 1991 to 2011, mostly conducted in Java, the most populated island of Indonesia. To get in-depth data on media literacy, five focus group discussions (FGD) have been conducted: in Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta, Semarang, and Surabaya, all capital cities in Java island with high media penetration. There were 59 participants in the FGDs, all were media literacy activists from different backgrounds: academician, NGO, government, and foundation. The data gathering took place in March 2011.

The guideline for the FGDs consist these questions: (a) how does the institution define media literacy? (b) What are the contents or elements of media literacy in its programs? (c) What are the strategies employed by the institution and (d) who is the strategic beneficiaries for the media literacy programs? (e) What are the obstacles or challenges faced by the programs?

The data gathered from this survey and FGDs were analyzed and discussed in the National Workshop on Media Literacy in May 2011. There were 33 participants from 26 institutions that have conducted media literacy programs between 2002 and 2011.

**Result**

*Media literacy: concerns, definition and contents*
The way actors of media literacy programs understand media literacy is influenced by how they perceive the media and people relationship in Indonesia. Most of them read similar references, accessing the international publications from internet or books, and agree that all those references should be adapted to Indonesian context.

Some participants see the rapid development of media as the problem because it was not in sequence but in a leaping pace, leaving a gap in the process. Take television for example, before 1991 Indonesians were only able to watch broadcast from one state-owned TV station, which had no advertisements at all and was totally controlled by the government. Within two years, from 1991 to 1992, Indonesians were suddenly able to watch programs from five commercial TV stations, full with advertisements and imported programs. One of the participants gives this illustration:

In United States we can see the changing of culture from its television programs. In the serial *I Love Lucy* [1957-1960] the husband only says ‘Hi Mom’ when he returns home, without hugging or kissing. In the *Cosby Shows* [1970s] the husband hugs and kisses the wife at home. After that period, kissing scenes can be found in most –if not all– television programs. This overtime transition did not happen in Indonesia, where the television programs change from no kiss no touch to *Baywatch* overnight.

Until recently Indonesian parents consider all cartoons as children’s programs, regardless the content of the cartoons. Similarly, the TV stations easily categorize all cartoons as children’s program, giving symbol “A” (*Anak* or children) when they are broadcast.
Indonesians were suddenly exposed by newer media without preparing themselves for that. Another participant shares her experience when she went to a rural area in Central Java. In that area, people never see or use computer, especially the older ones, but they suddenly found that their younger generation have a high access of Facebook or Twitter through their mobile phones. Other participants confirm that they also found similar situation in many rural area they have visited. One participant points out that there is a digital divide between younger and older generations, even in Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia. Parents give mobile phones to their children, thinking that it will help them communicate with their children, only to find out that their children use it mostly to play electronic games.

Those concerns influence the way of defining the concept of media literacy to each institution. Some adapt the definition from international references, such as:

Media literacy is perspectives of individual when he or she interacts with media, shown in the form of behavior toward the media.

Media literacy is the ability to use media, be critical on their content, and produce the media for one’s benefits.

Media literacy is knowledge about media and understanding the media critically.

Other definitions are more practical, such as:

Media literacy means educating people to choose and use media wisely, but not asking them to stop consuming media.

Media literacy is a practice to consume media in smart ways.

Media literacy is a skill that ones have to help them avoid the negative effects of media.
Media literacy means having understanding of media processes and contents. The Ministry of Communication and Information focuses their attention to mass media and communication information technologies, emphasizing on the economic benefit of the technologies. Therefore, the Ministry has “internet masuk desa” program (literally translate as “internet enter villages”), aiming to educate people in the rural areas to use internet for their economic benefits, for example to sell their crops.

Indeed, the way institutions or organizations perceive media literacy concept and the local media situation influences the contents of their programs. For example, in the rural areas television is still the dominant media, particularly among children and adult. Promoting media literacy to these children and adult should focus more on television (e.g., television effect, advertising, choosing the safe programs for children). But among the young people, teenagers and early adult, media literacy should focus more on social media usage and electronic games because they can easily access the social media through their mobile phones or go to electronic games café where they can play the games for only 30 cent USD per hour. The content of the programs should include the risk and opportunity to use social media and internet and how to choose electronic games according to their age. In a lot of cases media literacy activists found that parents are really concern about television effects toward their children but at the same time they are also a heavy user of television, especially for low and middle class parents. The media activists should offer benefits for the parents to change their media habit, which in turn will change their children’s media habit, starting from small things such as not having television set in the bedrooms.
The background of media literacy activists also influences the content of their programs. Plenty of activists with communications or social science (academician) background focus on media effect and media process; those from art and cinema background focus on media production, especially film; and those from nonsocial science (e.g., engineering, information technology) focus on using internet or computer skills. Just like the old saying that the birds of the same feathers flock together, the media literacy activists tend to work together with those with similar background and similar concerns. In the effort to define media literacy, there were heated debates in some FGDs that some participants disagree to give definition of media literacy for fear it would limit the scope on media literacy. But for others, the definition of media literacy will help to differentiate media literacy activities with other activities. For example, an organization is analyzing media contents and sends the report to the media or to the policy makers, can it be considered as media literacy programs or more likely as media watch programs? Another example is the work of some scholars on investigating the media use of children then publishing the report in the academic journal; can it be considered as media literacy programs or more likely as media study programs?

In the National Workshop of Media Literacy 2011 there was a consensus that definition of media literacy should cover all concerns above but can be easily understood by common people. The tentative definition of media literacy would be: the ability to use media critically (in Indonesian: *kemampuan memanfaatkan media secara kritis*). The definition includes the knowledge about media, ability to select and search media contents as well as to create the content of media for one’s benefits. It is still tentative to give opportunity for other media activists in Indonesia to challenge it.
The workshop’s participants agree that there are three elements in the media literacy programs: (a) the audience is mostly in the vulnerable position compared to the media, (b) there is a process to strengthen the audience in their relations with the media, so that (c) the audience will be critical toward the media. These three elements can be used to differentiate media literacy programs from other non-media literacy programs. The workshop’s participants also reached another consensus: media literacy is not the same with media studies and media watch, although it is possible to combine the media literacy activities with media studies or media watch activities in the media literacy programs. For example, children are asked to analyze some television advertisements so they can understand the persuasion intention in the advertisements.

**Media literacy actors, beneficiaries, strategies, and challenges**

Activists of media literacy or media literacy actors can be categorized into several type of groups. The first group contains Non Government Organizations (NGOs) and foundations, for example Masyarakat Peduli Media (MPM-Society Care Media), Rumah Sinema, Bandung School of Communication Studies (BaSCom), the Habibie Center, Lembaga Studi Pers & Informasi (LeSPI-Pers & Information Studies Institution), Yayasan Jurnal Perempuan (YJP-Women Journal Foundation), etcetera. The second group is schools, such as Lentera Insan Child Development and Education Center (CDEC) in West Java, Rumah Belajar Semi Palar (Semi Palar House of Study), Early Childhood Care & Development Resource Center (ECCD-RC), etcetera. In most of media literacy programs, the schools only involved as the participant of media literacy programs, not the ones who conduct the programs. In some cases, the schools start as
the target group of media literacy program. When they realize the benefits of the program, the teachers become the activist of the program, as happened in some state schools in Malang, East Java.

The third group contains universities, especially from communications, such as University Indonesia, Universitas Islam Bandung, Universitas Diponegoro, Universitas Padjajaran, Universitas Paramadina, etcetera. Some universities do not have applied media literacy activities, but they promote it by having media literacy as a specialization or a subject in the communications program. The fourth group is the common people who are promoting media literacy within themselves. There are several villages in Java (e.g., Sleman and Solo) that have “study hours” for children when people turn off their television during certain hours on school’s day to give the children time to do their homework. The fifth group refers to other organizations: the government (e.g., Ministry of Information and Communication), Press Council, Indonesia Broadcast Commission, Unicef, Unesco, etcetera. Some of the organizations provide funding for NGOs or foundations to conduct the media literacy activities, some do it themselves. The last group is a mixed of several organizations or institutions. There is only one example so far: the Coalition of No TV Day Campaign, which only has one sequence of activities annually, asking families with children to turn off their television set in a day on the National Children’s Day. The coalition has schools, NGOs, foundations, government bodies, Unicef, universities, or even individual as its members. For most institutions media literacy is not the main vision, more likely as a mean toward their visions. Some organizations combine media literacy with other issues. For example, The Habibie
Center promotes media literacy to encourage inter-group tolerance. Another example is YJP who uses it to raise awareness on violence and sexual abuse in the media.

Children and young people are the ‘favorite’ beneficiaries in plenty of media literacy programs because they are seen as the most vulnerable audience and need to be protected. The children’s and young people’s vulnerability is the common concern that is used to get people’s attention but usually children and young people are not the target groups of the media literacy programs. Only several organizations, such as Rumah Sinema, the Habibie Center, or YJP, target the programs directly to young people, mostly high school students. Because many media literacy actors find that working directly with children and young people is difficult, they aim the programs to parents -especially mothers- and teachers (e.g., YPMA, PP Aisiyah, MPM, etc). Some organizations, such as BaSCom or LeSPI, target their media literacy programs to general adult: street vendors, fisherman community, older people, female community leaders, etcetera. There are pros and cons among participants whether media workers can be seen as the target group of media literacy programs. Those of pros argue that media workers often do not understand about the media (e.g., media is constructed, media influence people) so they should be educated. Indeed, most of media workers in Indonesia, including journalist, are not coming from communication or journalism schools and have limited knowledge about the media process. Those of cons argue that it is the obligation of media workers themselves to improve their professionalism, including upholding the media regulations, in which the policy makers should supervise.

The strategies that usually employed by the media literacy actors are seminars, open lectures, workshops, trainings, and campaigns. Seminar, open lecture, and
campaign are the easiest ways, chosen when the program aims to raise awareness about specific issue in media literacy such watching television wisely or restricting time in using media. Workshop and training are used when the actors want to promote advance media literacy, usually when the programs have teachers as the target groups. The workshop or training is usually conducted in 2-3 days, sometimes followed by supervision for one semester or one year when the teachers apply the material at schools. We only can find one program that try to develop media literacy curricular that can be integrated into the elementary school curricular or treated as extracurricular, conducting by YPMA, supported by Unicef, from 2006 until 2009.

There are several challenges in promoting media literacy in Indonesia. The lack of the government support is one of them. Because the issue is relatively new in Indonesia, the government does not consider it as something that need immediate actions, unlike environmental, drugs, corruption, or poverty issues, especially when there is no international pressure for the issue. The lack of involvement of the government as the policy makers makes media literacy programs cannot be integrated in the existing system such as school or the national campaign. To make it worse, the issue also is not considered as “hot issue” by the funding organization which only allocate limited fund for the issue. As the result, most of the media literacy programs are only “one shot” program; the programs are over when the funding is over.

The dependency on external funding also influences the activities of media literacy programs. A lot of participants admit that they use “by pass” process, conducting media literacy programs without assessing the condition of beneficiaries or target groups, using one recipe for all. One participant point out,
We often feel surprised when we receive critical questions from our program’s participants, thinking that a farmer or housewife in the rural area cannot be that smart. That’s because we have no clue about the level of media literacy of our target groups.

Another participant shares her story,

Once we are asked to conduct training on internet literacy for students of a senior high school in small city of West Java. When we arrived there we found out that the students never use computer at all nor the school has the facilities. The school explained that they asked us to conduct the training to prepare the students if they had to use internet and computer after they were graduated.

That kind of experiences would not happen if the media literacy actors access the media literacy level of the target group before they conduct the training, workshop, or seminar. More often the media literacy programs are not only conducted without any assessment, but also without any baseline data. As the result, it is difficult to evaluate the programs’ effectiveness, let alone to claim that the programs have changed the media literacy level of the target groups.

Discussion

In general there are two difference groups in defining media literacy in Indonesia. One group sees media literacy as a way to protect people from the negative effect of media; that people are really in a vulnerable position in their relations with the media. Activists in this group would highly recommend people to restrict their media consumption; parents would prefer to choose restrictive mediation at home. The other group sees
media literacy as a way to ‘upgrade’ people’s economic state (e.g., farmers can check the crop’s price on internet so they know where to sell it) or for educational purpose (e.g., students can browse information on internet when doing their assignment). The activists in this group would encourage media technology penetration to Indonesian people, such as Internet Enter Villages program or giving computer set to schools.

The existence of two groups is in line with the discourse in the communication science, whether the media audience is passive audience (e.g., cultivation theory, etc) or active audience (e.g., uses and gratification theory, etc). Such dichotomy is not necessary in term of media literacy because over the time the discourse of media literacy in other countries embrace the thinking that the purposes of media literacy are to protect and to empower people (Sakamoto and Suzuki, 2009; Livingstone, 2005; Buckingham, 2005). Therefore media literacy should not only seen as the ability to shield oneself from the negative influence of media but also seen as the ability to get benefits from the media. Taking internet literacy for example, the programs must cover the skills to find information through internet but also the skills to reduce risks in using internet, such as activating the safety feature on social media, realizing that everything we put on internet is stored somewhere. In case of television literacy for parents, the programs can recommend parents to use restrictive mediation in combination with active mediation, depends on the situations and the children’s development stage. In short, media literacy programs should not aim to make people stop using the media but should aim to make people use media consciously.

Another interesting finding in this study is that schools are not the main actors of media literacy programs. This is different with media literacy in United Kingdom,
Defining media literacy in Indonesia

United States, Canada, Australia, or Japan (see Duncan et al., 2002; Burn & Durran, 2007; Suzuki, 2009; Ofcom, 2011). In those countries concerns on media and children relations were started from the schools' teachers or parents, initiating the need of media literacy. The media literacy programs are integrated to the schools curricular, media literacy is considered as life’s skills that should be introduce since very young. In Indonesia media literacy were started from NGOs, foundations, or Kine club - film critique club in communications or art faculties, involving schools after realizing the schools’ and the teachers’ persuasive power among children and parents. Schools that can see how media literacy benefits their students are very eager to become media literacy activists. On the contrary, those who cannot see the benefits are reluctant to apply media literacy curricular, considering it as additional 'burden' for their teachers. So far, the private schools are more responsive to media literacy programs than the state schools because their curricular is more flexible and they can afford to implement the programs.

Strategies such as seminars, open lectures, and campaigns may be the easiest strategies; an organization can have it once and claims that it has done media literacy program. But in the long term that kind of strategies, especially the one shot activity, will harm the media literacy process in Indonesia; wasting energies on ineffective programs and, in turn, reducing the meaning of media literacy. The media literacy actors should plan programs that take the existing condition of people into account, put quality over quantity.

**Recommendation**
Based on the result of this study, there are some recommendations for the development of media literacy programs in the future. First, all the media literacy stakeholders should cooperate together. Media literacy is a multifaceted phenomenon, which should be approached from multiple perspectives. Stubbornly ignore other perspectives will not help the development of media literacy in Indonesia. Those favors of protection motives should acknowledge the positive side of the media and encourage people to learn to use media for their benefits. Those favors of empowerment motives should also acknowledge the negative side of the media - that media are not neutral devices but constructed ones - and people should be prepared to take safety precaution when they use media.

Although it is a good thing that the civil society is the driving engine of media literacy in Indonesia, the government as the policy makers should involve more by regulating the media. The government’s support is also needed to integrate media literacy into existing system such as school curricular or, at least, encourage schools to learn more about media literacy programs. The media literacy activists need to educate the policy makers about media literacy. In all cases, implementation of media literacy at schools needs support from the head masters, the programs work well when the head master are supportive. Approval from the government will help the media literacy activists in convincing the head masters and the teachers about the benefit of the programs.

Another group that should involve more in the media literacy programs is teachers. Usually, teachers are the easiest target to be persuaded about the need of media literacy because they have seen how media could affect their students: coming
late in the morning because the students watch television until late at night, using
curses that they watch on television, not doing their homework because they are
addicted to the electronic games, etcetera. What the teachers need are material to be
used in the class and supervision while they are doing it. The teachers would become a
very strategic partner for media literacy programs because their influential power to the
children and parents.

The last recommendation is to extend the media term to digital media, including
mobile phones, electronic games, and internet. Those media already become part of
children’s lives because most Indonesian children live in a media rich home. Therefore,
it is better to educate the children how to use it properly than to stop them using the
media. The adult people also need digital literacy to build a bridge between the digital
divide generations, so that they can help their children when using the media or help
them selves when they use the media.

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