Audience Responses on Indonesian Idol Talent Show

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Abstract

Indonesian Idol singing competition has been one of the most popular television programs in Indonesia for more than ten years. Its existence in Indonesia is a phenomenon and it started the trend of talent show in Indonesian television. This research aims to learn how the audiences respond to Indonesian Idol talent show in television and the meaning of the responses as it represents audience attitude toward this program. This research applied Ien Ang’s method of data collection in her work Watching Dallas (1985) to Universitas Airlangga Surabaya students and their parents as the respondents. On September 27, 2014 an announcement was posted in several social media to collect the data. 19 responses were collected and analyzed with the approach also used by Ien Ang, namely ‘symptomatic reading’ approach by Louis Althusser and coding to help classify the data. The result shows that most of the audience gave negative responses to Indonesian Idol. The analysis shows that high commercialization is the cause of audience resistance. From the result and analysis it is concluded that Indonesian Idol has become a product of culture industry where capitalism operates: the society become the passive audience and media owners become the ones taking control of the society.

Keywords: audience study, culture industry, Indonesian Idol, symptomatic reading

Introduction

Indonesian people like to watch television. When people turn their television on, there are plenty of programs to watch and they choose their favorite one or the programs that they need to watch. Still from Nielsen Television Measurement, in 2012 the two most-watched television programs in Indonesia are TV serial and talent show (Aria). If we look at the history, talent show program is considered as new kind of popular television program in Indonesia. The first talent shows broadcasted in Indonesian television are Popstars and Audisi Pelawak TPI (API) in 2003. As the new kind of television program in Indonesia, talent shows have significant developments in terms of viewers. It can be seen in the emergence of Akademi Fantasi Indosiar (AFI) in the late 2003 which was successful in gaining much attention from the viewers. People who first only had TV serials as entertainment were then given a new option: talent show. Some popular talent shows in Indonesia are AFI, KDI (Kontes Dangdut Indonesia), X Factor Indonesia, Master Chef Indonesia and Indonesian Idol which are broadcasted by leading television channels in Indonesia.

Among the talent shows, singing competition has been a phenomenon in Indonesia with its atmosphere of competition, audition, skill-showing, the music show, and also the euphoria of all those aspects. Looking at the output, i.e. the successful singers produced by a talent show, Indonesian Idol has produced most of those successful singers and some of them even work in other field in TV entertainment. This information shows that Indonesian Idol has given important contribution to Indonesian entertainment industry.

The trend of talent show in Indonesia

Indonesian Idol is a singing competition broadcasted by RCTI, an adaptation of Pop Idol originally created by Simon Fuller and produced by Fremantle Media. Since its first season in 2004, Indonesian Idol singing competition has been successful in gaining most people’s attention. This singing competition has finished eight seasons in ten years (2004-2014). Indonesian Idol itself has been a phenomenon in each season. The popularity is high and people always wait for the next show every week. Indonesian Idol’s
popularity gives fundamental contribution to the phenomenon of talent shows in Indonesian television. After Indonesian Idol there were plenty of other talent shows emerging in various television channels such as Kontes Dangdut TPI (dangdut competition), MasterChef Indonesia (cooking competition), The Master (magic show competition), and several other singing competitions. Audiences’ views and opinions about the phenomenon of talent show, especially singing competition are needed in order to see this phenomenon from the point of view that has not been given much attention. If we only see it from television, we will only have one point of view, but if we look through the audience’s experiences we will have more various views since every individual has their own opinions and experiences. Through the various points of view we can see this phenomenon in a more comprehensive way. That is the grand purpose of this paper and that is why the writer chooses Indonesian Idol to reach the goal.

Audiences’ opinion of Indonesian Idol talent show then can be the answer to the grand purpose. Therefore, the researcher here intends to examine how people respond to Indonesian Idol talent show on television and the meaning of those responses. This study concerns on how people see Indonesian Idol as a popular television program in Indonesia, how they like or dislike or both and why, and tries to find the meaning of such responses related to Indonesian culture.

This study uses the approach proposed by Ien Ang in examining Dallas television serial in Netherlands. Ang tried to reveal the social and cultural meaning of Dallas and from which ideological context it comes from (11). 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 a theory proposed by Louis Althusser, which is more about unwrapping the wrapped things in a text (13). It 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. 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).

Methodology

This study used the integration of qualitative and quantitative method. Quantitative is used to identify the proportion of audience’s responses through coding method. This approach is used only for the surface of the analysis since it is used only for the first step of analysis. Meanwhile, qualitative approach is used for the deeper analysis, namely to learn audience’s responses and reveal the issues that exist. This study adapted Ien Ang’s approach in her work entitled Watching Dallas (1985). Ang’s approach is the best for this study because of the major similarities such as the text, the object of the study, and also the point of view. Watching Dallas itself has been a very influential work in cultural studies and also a breakthrough of audience research (Hermes 7).

Population and sampling

The number of Indonesian Idol’s audience in season 8 is more than 18,9 million (Nielsen Company). The data populations are the people with the age range of 16-65 years old, because that is the age range decided by Indonesian Idol for those who want to join the audition, and also the adult people given the SU (Semua Umur) category of Indonesian Idol. This study will use similar method with Ang’s but the writer considers that the target sample will be audience in Surabaya, especially Universitas Airlangga students and their parents. It is a potential location to collect data from because not only it is the second largest city in Indonesia where popular culture grows fast, but also the number of people auditioning for Indonesian Idol in Surabaya is considered high. From Surabaya, the writer narrows down the sample into the students of Universitas Airlangga based on the consideration that the age range of college students would represent the range of Indonesian Idol’s age requirement. Another consideration of choosing Universitas Airlangga is that the university is located in the center of Surabaya where most people live with urban style of life in which popular culture is created and developed.
In order to adjust to the advanced technology and people’s current interest, the writer did some adjusting in adapting Ang’s data collection. The writer here published an announcement in popular social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Path, and LINE. The writer asked for the respondents to share their opinions and feelings of Indonesian Idol’s promotional advertisements on television by sending their writing through one of several ways: sending an e-mail, sending a text (SMS), sending message to the writer’s LINE account, and Facebook chat. With such ways, the writer believes that the data collecting will be easier and faster. The analysis is done with len Ang’s approach on examining *Dallas* television serial with the help of coding method.

**Discussion**

There are a total of 19 respondents of this study, who are students of Universitas Airlangga Surabaya. Unfortunately, there are no respondents from the adult category since there are no parents of Unair’s students participated. The data was collected from September 27, 2014 to November 26, 2014 from LINE chat (16 respondents), Facebook private message (2 respondents), and e-mail (1 respondent). The codes were created through the process of categorization and data reading. In qualitative research, a code is usually a word or short phrases that represent the most significant content of a textual data (Saldaña 3).

As the supporting references for the main data, the writer also recapitulates the profile of the respondents in terms of their college major, class, and time of receiving their responses.

<table>
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<th>Major</th>
<th>Class</th>
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<td>November 26, 2014</td>
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<td>2011</td>
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*Table 1: Profile of the Respondents*

The categorization of coding and the data obtained eight codes. The codes are used in the coding process and the results are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CODE</th>
<th>FREQ</th>
<th>CODE</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>BOREDOM</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>EXCITEMENT</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDIFFERENCE</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>GOOD QUALITY</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAD QUALITY</td>
<td>6</td>
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In the coding process, responses from 19 students of Universitas Airlangga Surabaya were broken down into a total of 47 points of opinion, or in this study are called frequencies. Of 47 frequencies, 35 of them are in the negative side, 10 in positive side and the last 2 are in a special code. Each code represents audience responses and also reveals their attitude in viewing television and the aspects or factors that cause such attitude.

### Audience attitude in viewing Indonesian Idol

**BOREDOM**

“The impression … is **boring**. The agenda is just **monotone, no developments**” (Respondent 9)

“**Bored.** In the beginning I was excited but now I am bored” (Respondent 6)

“Each tv channel is making the same trending program. So **it’s boring** to watch the same thing” (Respondent 7)

“**I’m bored** because it was nearly the same time with X-Factor, Dangdut in Indosiar and you know that’s the umpteenth Idol” (Respondent 14)

“… it’s as such, **no difference with other programs** such as x-factor etc…” (Respondent 4)

The excerpt shows that these audiences see Indonesian Idol program and promotional advertisement as boring because they think that the concept of the program has no significant change during the seasons. It means that there is a change in the judgment of the audience during certain period of time, in this case during the range of ten years of Indonesian Idol’s existence in Indonesian television. They change from being excited to being saturated about the identical things that they keep seeing for quite a long time.

The change is caused by two things. First, if we see explicitly in the excerpt, audiences mostly blame the concept for their boredom. But if we see this more carefully, this change instead can be caused by themselves and the condition surrounding them. It is because they compare Indonesian Idol with other similar television programs, like Respondent 4 and Respondent 14 say. They compare Indonesian Idol with X-Factor Indonesia and D’Academy (a dangdut singing contest in Indosiar channel) which have almost similar airing time in television with Indonesian Idol, in this case, season 8. What is told by Respondent 4 and 14 here indicates that audiences do comparison with other similar television programs. This behavior is called intertextuality. John Fiske wrote that every text has intertextual aspects which give information of the development of meanings about them, and the audiences have the main role in arranging and maintaining those meanings (qtd. in Tincknell and Raghuram 207). This means that every text gives an opportunity for the audiences to look at other texts similar to the main text to open the opportunity of developing its meanings. In this case, audiences see the other programs as complementary aspect of their judgment to the main program, Indonesian Idol. Besides Indonesian Idol, some of the audience also watch and judge X-Factor and D’Academy and decide that those programs have similar value as Indonesian Idol: boring. They then use their judgment of the intertextual activity as a complementary reasoning of judging Indonesian Idol as boring as well. Intertextuality in these respondents’ reading of Indonesian Idol can also mean that the number of similar television programs they watch itself makes them feel that they are bored.

Second, there is also a change in audiences’ horizon of expectation. As Hans-Robert Jauss asserts, horizon of expectation emerges to the reader when he or she reads a new text in the condition that he or she has earned past reading experience before reading the new text (qtd. in Verma 263). The respondents feel that Indonesian Idol does not fulfill their expectation of how a singing competition should be. Their
experience of watching old seasons of the program formulates their horizon of expectation for the next text they read, in this case the latest seasons of Indonesian Idol. From the discussion we can say that the intertextual activity of the audiences and the monotone concept of the program lead to the judgment that Indonesian Idol is boring.

**INDIFFERENCE**

Respondents under this code say that Indonesian Idol has no special feature. There is nothing in the program that interests the audience. The reason that they give here is various, such as the concept of the program, the adaptation attitude, uncertainty of the contestants’ future, and the connection to the concept of mainstream.

“I’m sick of it. I’m not interested in the ad because there is a lot of TV shows in Indonesia that imitate programs from other countries …” (Respondent 7)

“I think it’s so usual. Because the concept is similar to American Idol” (Respondent 1)

“I don’t feel any special when watching Indonesian Idol’s ads” (Respondent 4)

“It copies American Idol so it’s not creative and predictable” (Respondent 16)

The interesting part is in their reasoning that apparently can reveal their attitude on making assessment or judgment on a television phenomenon like Indonesian Idol. When they say that the concept is not special and not creative, we see that there is an unfulfilled expectation, similar to the expectations which are previously discussed in the first code. A little difference is that under this code, the respondents do not see the historical context of Indonesian Idol to make judgment. They only see the program, the text, as a single unit. This is different with what we discuss in the previous code.

In terms of audience expectations, two respondents say that Indonesian Idol is imitating American Idol and therefore it is not special. It is normal to compare Indonesian Idol with American Idol because they come from the same “factory”. Pop Idol as the original version has been adapted in many countries around the world, with the United States being one of the earliest ones and ended up popularizing the format that the other adapted versions follow the concept of the original one. Respondent 16 here sees this as a lack of creativity. The fact that they compare Indonesian Idol with American Idol leads to a notion that these audiences have high preference in television viewing.

Social class here becomes a distinguishing factor of audience preferences. College students, especially Universitas Airlangga mostly come from middle and upper class due to the averagely expensive cost of study. Audiences from lower class might have different reactions and preferences than audiences from middle and upper class do because they have different educational background and access to various media. The comparing activity between Indonesian Idol and American Idol still belongs to the middle and upper class society because American Idol uses English and people with good ability in this language mostly come from this range of class. This is not to mention that most of the respondents come from English Department, meaning that they are good in English.

Another issue of social class takes place in the opinions of respondent saying that Indonesian Idol is nothing special because it is an adapted program and there are many other adapted television programs in Indonesia and it sickens her. Indonesian Idol is one of many adapted television programs in Indonesia. Just like Respondent 7 says, there are a lot of other adapted programs and they are not only singing competitions. There are also game and variety shows and sinetrons. Knowledge background is another factor that exists here since they might not have enough references and ability to identify whether the program they watch is an adaptation or not. We also know that there are still many people who do not have access to internet. Besides, most of the respondents are studying in English Department, which means that they have sufficient references and information about media television since there is a study of media there. Again, audiences coming from lower class might have different responses and judgment for Indonesian Idol due to educational background and financial power.

Another emerging issue is intertextuality. Respondent 7, 1, and 16 do comparison between Indonesian Idol and other similar television programs. We can say that they watch other programs or objects to
determine Indonesian Idol’s value. This is an important notion because we might find different judgment if they do not do the intertextuality.

ANNOYANCE

“Annoying ads come every end of segment” (Respondent 12)
“... I don’t really like it. Moreover when the ad lasts for 1-2 minutes in the middle of another program” (Respondent 13)
“Actually the ad is annoying…” (Respondent 11)
“…the announcement due is overextended and also the length of commercial break” (Respondent 15)
“I think it is exaggerated. It shows up so many times. Plus too much talking in the show” (Respondent 18)

The excerpt shows that they feel that some specific features of Indonesian Idol irritate them. Respondent 11 and 12 refer to the special advertisement played in the end of every segment of the show before commercial break. They find this annoying and it leads them to give negative sentiment to the program, same way with Respondent 18 who says that the video emerges many times and it irritates her. Respondent 15 says that the commercial break lasts too long while Respondent 13 says that the promotional advertisement lasts almost 1-2 minutes that it ‘disturbs’ the commercial break of another television program. These two audiences are annoyed by the length of something that they feel unimportant. Since the commercial breaks take too long in every turn, it influences their judging of the program. Another respondent also says that the host’s sayings are mostly not important. From the explanation we can learn that even the minor things or features can change or influence an image of a television program. Minor features of Indonesian Idol like the ones being complained by the respondents should not be the focus or essence of the program. However, what we find here is that these minor things become central in audience judgment that it makes the real aspects of Indonesian Idol such as musical quality, entertainment, and sometimes education seem to be shifted.

Being a singing competition, Indonesian Idol should bring up and prioritize art, entertainment and education values for the audiences because that is the main purpose of the program. However, the findings that we have here indicate that those values are not prioritized. Rather, they are “covered up” by long-duration advertisements and platitude sayings which accommodate the commercial purposes of the program. The long duration of commercial breaks here shows that commercial purposes in Indonesian Idol are more prioritized than the other purposes. This attitude makes Indonesian Idol changes its identity as a television program. At this point we can say that the identity of Indonesian Idol has changed from a piece of art and entertainment into a commodity. Indonesian Idol as a product of mass media here is a form of culture that is transformed into a commodity that is “bought” by the audiences.

How is Indonesian Idol turned into a commodity? It can be said that the contestants of Indonesian Idol here are the selling point. In each of the weekly show, Indonesian Idol always emphasizes the “story” of each of its contestants. The clearest evident is the video profile or what television people call as VT. Every week, each of the contestants who is about to take their turn to perform in the stage has a video profile of themselves displayed to the audiences. It is where they act “naturally” doing their daily activities such as practicing, doing sports or just hanging around to relax while telling how they feel about this week’s show. They also often tell the audiences a bit about their past experiences, and sometimes about their unfortunate condition or family and how they struggle to survive. These “sad” and “emotional” stories become the selling point of the program, besides their singing quality. And when we take a look at, say, Pop Idol the original version of this program, we will not find this kind of video profile of the contestants. Pop Idol focused more to the features that are directly related to the show itself as a singing competition which brings art, entertainment and education even though they also had commercial purposes embedded. This is one example of how Indonesian Idol is turned into a commodity by its producers.

Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer see this as ‘culture industry’, where mass media become seriously distracted by the culture that is being reduced into a form of industrial products (qtd. in Gauntlett 23). Indonesian Idol as a product of mass media here is a form of culture that is transformed into a
commodity. Indonesian Idol’s shift of identity apparently affects audience responses. That is why audiences are annoyed by the program. Logically, we can say that audiences can no longer “recognize” Indonesian Idol.

BAD QUALITY

The decrease of quality, the bad contestants, the uncertainty of the contestant’s future, and also the concept of the program here become the reasons of respondents saying that the program is bad.

“… First, the quality of Indonesian Idol is far from the original. Seems like they have to adjust with the market here, which means Indonesian market is not good. It’s clear that in terms of talent quality, it’s still far” (Respondent 1)

“The quality decreases. Besides, there is no certainty for the winner of what they will be…” (Respondent 6)

“I used to watch idol regularly, but not now because the contestant’s quality is not as good as then” (Respondent 11)

“The vote system to decide the winner by sending SMS should be eliminated to make it more interesting and more objective” (Respondent 19)

We see here that there is a changing expectation experienced by the audience, especially for those who talk about the quality decrease of the program, the contestants and the concept. From Respondent 6’s opinion we can see that they expect that the quality of the program should be increasing instead of decreasing. Similar to the explanation in the previous code, audience expectation changes from wanting a ‘good’ program to a ‘better’ one. This means that Indonesian Idol again fails to fulfill audience’s expectations.

The issue of intertextuality is also present here. It is practiced by Respondent 1 who compares Indonesian Idol with American Idol. Respondent 1 in this case sees Indonesian Idol as text which has a close relationship with another text, American Idol so that to determine the meaning of Indonesian Idol she feels necessary to do some comparison with another text. Therefore, audiences acquire meanings not only from one text but also another text. It can also be said that the comparing activity in intertextuality also determines audience’s horizon of expectations.

HIGH COMMERCIALIZATION

Responses under this code suggest that Indonesian Idol concerns more on commercial purposes than the other purposes.

“Indonesian idol is just seeking for profit. Starts from pointless ads before every commercial break until the host’s talking. They also like to waste time. The selection is also error. They only take the ‘selling’ ones” (Respondent 1)

“… Such as Nowela who always performs the last … to make people wait for her so they stick to the program … So that the rating escalates” (Respondent 12)

The concern of those respondents is on the production purposes of Indonesian Idol. These audiences believe that Indonesian Idol tries to fulfill its commercial purposes by using the contestants as commodities. Commodity is an item which can be traded to fulfill human’s desires and needs (Marx 269). Here the respondents see Indonesian Idol’s contestants as commodities because they feel that the contestants are “a setting” from the producers. The selection of contestants with ideal appearance and also the putting of favorite contestants in the last turn of every show are the “setting” made by the producers to turn them into commodities that have “selling” points to the viewers to obtain ratings. The attitude of heavy commercialization certainly makes some audiences feel that Indonesian Idol is a worthless program.

It is blatantly shown in how Respondent 1 gives her opinion and explains the aspects of commercialization in Indonesian Idol. It is clear that she puts much hatred to the program. She also makes an impression that Indonesian Idol has been “fooling” her around, or we can say that Indonesian Idol has been “dishonest” to her. This judgment indicates that audiences do not only expect entertainment from
television programs but also the “genuineness” of them. Besides being entertaining, a television program has to be free or have little commercial purposes. Therefore it can be said that production purpose of a television program here has a significant influence to the process of judgment by the audience.

Another important issue we find here is social class, which has a significant role in determining their preferences for a good television program. Respondents under this code have enough carefulness in viewing Indonesian Idol because they give specific explanation about the implied things in the program. The ability to do this kind of thing is not possessed by everyone. It has a close relationship with which class an audience belongs to. The diction used by Respondent 1 “selling” and the word “rating” used by Respondent 12 more or less show that they have enough educational background and references to do such judgment. Moreover, the two respondents under this code are both studying in English Department where the lessons of media, language, and culture are taught. Their insight of how culture especially media works influences their judgment for Indonesian Idol. So if, say, this study is participated by lower class society, the responses could be different because their references could be different. People from lower class might say that Indonesian Idol is good because they may not notice the commercial purposes of the program. Social class therefore can influence or determine audience judgment of Indonesian Idol.

**EXCITEMENT** and GOOD QUALITY

Here we can see two similar codes but with different reasoning from the audience.

“And when I watch the ad, I am excited and can’t wait to see this competition starts again” (Respondent 2)

“… it’s always exciting when watching the ads. Maybe it’s the effect of the song…” (Respondent 3)

“I will say that I am excited and also curious to see the auditions and also the contestants who pass them” (Respondent 8)

“… I am excited again when it is final show because I am curious of who will be the winner” (Respondent 10)

“The first time I watch Idol ads I wonder how the voice characteristics of the finalists will be … Who will be the judges?” (Respondent 15)

“At the beginning I liked it … because I think it’s gonna make a huge stardom” (Respondent 16)

“It’s simply entertaining… because I don’t really care on who will be the winner… The important thing is to watch the shows …” (Respondent 17)

“It is quite impressive, it can be seen from the competent judges” (Respondent 19)

“I like watching Indonesian Idol … There are many types of unique and interesting voice…” (Respondent 2)

“The program is not bad, because it’s not as pleonastic and too dramatic as ‘Penghuni Terakhir’” (Respondent 15)

Some respondents are excited because the program evokes curiosity for them and they take it as an excitement. It can be seen in Respondent 8 and Respondent 10. Some others say that Indonesian Idol is exciting from its musical aspect. Respondent 17 says that the exciting factor of Indonesian Idol is the concert or the music show. Meanwhile Respondent 3 says that his excitement may come from the song. The two opinions show that Indonesian Idol is interesting from the musical aspects. Another factor of excitement is shown by Respondent 16 who says that Indonesian Idol can bring the contestants a huge stardom and popularity. We can say that this opinion shows that the aura or atmosphere of Indonesian Idol as a singing competition is also a source of excitement for the audience. To this point we see that audiences’ excitement is an indication of the fulfillment of expectations from the audience. Meanwhile from the GOOD QUALITY code, audiences like the output of the program. Next, the clear notion that we find here is intertextuality, which is practiced by Respondent 15 by comparing Indonesian Idol with another reality show “Penghuni Terakhir”.

Nevertheless, we cannot conclude that the 8 frequencies of the EXCITEMENT code represent full excitement of the audiences. Of the total of 8 respondents, 4 of them also give negative judgment
alongside with their excitement. So, these four respondents do not take Indonesian Idol as fully exciting and therefore interesting, but they still have some unfulfilled expectations left in their mind. We can also see carefully that each of the four respondents who have contradictory opinions is more vocal in expressing their dislike for Indonesian Idol. Some unfulfilled expectations here become the highlight.

**CONTENT DEPENDABLE**

This is a code generated for a special finding in the coding process because it does not belong to negative nor positive category. It represents conditional or situational judgment of one respondent, as seen in the following.

“Whether I am bored or not it depends on the marketing strategies. What I mean is that the show is presented variously such as duets” (Respondent 13)

“The competition is more interesting through the contestants’ point of view. So when the contestants have bad voices, I do not watch. But when the contestants sing well, I like it” (Respondent 13)

We can see that this respondent makes her judgment conditionally throughout the eight seasons of Indonesian Idol. She values Indonesian Idol based on two aspects: ‘packaging’ of the show and contestants’ voice. What is meant by ‘packaging’ here is how Indonesian Idol makes a concept for the show every week to make the program interesting such as arranging duets, trio, or group performance of the contestants. The other aspect is contestants’ voice, which refers to her personal preference of a ‘good’ voice. What makes this particular opinion different from the other opinions? The difference lies in how this audience sees Indonesian Idol as a television program, a text, more specifically as an entertainment program. In this case this audience does not see Indonesian Idol as a single body of text which can be read only once to be able to make a judgment, just like other respondents do. Instead, she sees Indonesian Idol as a text that might change or has the possibility to change throughout the seasons. The result is, for her, Indonesian Idol is a changing text; it can be good this season but it could be different next season. She does this while the other 18 respondents are likely to make “once and for all” judgment for Indonesian Idol when they watch the program for the first time.

Different attitude leads to different responses. This is what happens in this code, where there is a respondent who has different attitude in viewing Indonesian Idol than the other respondents, and it is shown in her “odd” response. However, this is an embodiment of the various responses from the audiences of Indonesian Idol. And not limited to that program, the same condition of audience attitude might occur in the reception of other television programs.

**Indonesian Idol: a product of industrialized culture**

Audience responses about Indonesian Idol reveal their attitude in viewing Indonesian Idol. The discussion has found two major issues in audience attitude: intertextuality and horizon of expectation. These major issues are related one another with intertextuality being the root. Intertextuality is the process by which most of the audiences make a judgment for Indonesian Idol as a television program. Referring to John Fiske, intertextuality is that every text has intertextual aspects which give information of the development of meanings about them, and the audiences have the main role in arranging and maintaining those meanings (qtd. in Tincknell and Raghuram 207). From the results we find out that audiences do intertextual activity by comparing Indonesian Idol with other similar television programs, i.e. other talent or reality shows. By doing this activity, audiences unconsciously generate a horizon of expectations in their mind. They start making standards for a good singing competition and apply them when they watch Indonesian Idol. The responses show that audience expectations are more or less: an innovative and creative concept of competition throughout the seasons, no repetitive concept, creative packaging of the show, no redundant advertisement, features and talking that disturb the show, and no long commercial breaks. However, when audiences apply these standards, apparently the results show that Indonesian Idol has failed to fulfill those expectations. The dominant voice of negative responses here indicates that there is a condition of unfulfilled expectations in audience’s mind. In simple words we can say that audiences are disappointed by Indonesian Idol.
The high level of disappointment from the audience tells us about what the audiences see in Indonesian Idol. Once again, take a look at the unfulfilled expectations of the audience that have been mentioned previously. The central disappointment to pay attention to is the resistance to the redundant advertisements, features, and talking in the show and also to the long-duration commercial breaks. This resistance is expressed when the audiences say that the advertisement is annoying, the commercial break is disturbingly long, and the host talking is too much. In this we can see that the audiences see Indonesian Idol as ‘an excessive television program full of ads’. They do not see Indonesian Idol as an entertaining singing competition program anymore. Therefore, we can see this situation as a shifting of identity. Indonesian Idol has changed its identity as a singing competition on television.

The true identity of Indonesian Idol is a singing competition on television which offers entertainment, education, and sometimes the tension of competition to all audiences. Is it actually changed? We cannot completely agree. What happens is that Indonesian Idol’s true identity has been ‘covered’ by another thing that tends to be more prominent to the audience, namely the commercial purposes. It is reasonable to say so given the audience resistance towards Indonesian Idol, especially for its redundant advertisements, features, and talking in the show and also to the long-duration commercial breaks. These negative aspects are the ones that ‘cover’ the true image of Indonesian Idol as a television program.

The shifting identity of Indonesian Idol is the result of commercial purposes embedded in the program. The real image of Indonesian Idol here becomes a bias due to the intervention of commercial purposes. Those who produce Indonesian Idol program pursue as much profit as possible by giving more and more spaces for the sponsors to promote their products. Sponsors are given even more spaces in the commercial break by extending the duration. Guritno et al say in season one, each commercial break is filled with spacious eight advertisement spots (qtd. in Heryanto 115). Penelope Coutas then adds that the number increased in season two when there are 17 advertisement spots in each commercial break (Ibid). During season one and two alone, the space for advertisement was even much ‘wider’. It is a clear indication that commercial purposes are considered more important in the production of Indonesian Idol.

The notion is even stronger when there are some video promotions of Indonesian Idol sponsors starred by the contestants in every segment ending of the show. Those videos are for commercial purposes only because they directly promote the products. Actually, it is normal and logical that Indonesian Idol, being a widely known and popular television program has a plenty of sponsors to support their existence and continuity in television. We all also know that a television program can never survive if it is not supported by sponsors. But the popularity of Indonesian Idol has the impact on its highly commercialized contents. In another occasion, Penelope Coutas in her article asserts that the commercial success of Indonesian Idol is because of its imported format (Ibid). So what is the real cause of the highly commercialized contents of Indonesian Idol? If we refer to the results of this study we can say that Indonesian Idol producers’ profit-oriented mind itself that have established the identity of the program, as it is stated by Kitley in 2004 (Ibid). However, it is still possible that the program’s popularity is the root of identity shifting.

The high level of commercialization clearly transforms Indonesian Idol from a piece of art to a commodity. Indonesian Idol as a talent scouting program is supposed to be a piece of art and pure competition in television that entertains and gives benefits to the audience. However, commercial purposes intervene and even dominate over the artistic and educational purposes so that the components of Indonesian Idol such as contestants, host, judges, and the concept itself become parts of Indonesian Idol ‘package’ to be ‘sold’ to the audiences. This problem has also been brought into the surface by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer who call this as ‘culture industry’, that the mass media has a typical characteristic: a well-polished machine that products entertainment products in the purpose of making profit (qtd. in Gauntlett 23). In other words they say that mass culture is a ‘factory’ with its entertainment products being the commodities to be consumed by the audience. Here, television as mass culture has programs with typical nature: commodity. Thus, television program such as Indonesian Idol which should be just a talent quest and also piece of art has become a commodity.

When we have come to the notion that popular television program such as Indonesian Idol is a commodity, it is quite normal in this case to say that capitalism is operating within media in Indonesia,
Audience Responses on Indonesian Idol Talent Show

especially television industry. As explained previously, television as mass media in Indonesia is ‘culture industry’. Culture industry products, for Adorno and Horkeimer, have hidden motives to ‘repress imagination and render ‘the masses’ socially and politically inactive’ (qtd. in Laughey 123). In other words, the products of culture industry have the nature that eliminates imagination and transforms the society into a powerless side both in terms of social class and political power.

Indonesian society as audience here has been made powerless by television programs as it is seen in their powerlessness when watching Indonesian Idol. Their dislike shows it. And even if they resist Indonesian Idol, they tend to have no choice and they still have no power to ‘rebel’ to this condition. Therefore, the media producers and owners keep being powerful and keep controlling the society with their culture industry as the ‘tool’. The next thing we know that audiences as consumers become ‘the workers and the employees… and lower middle class’. Capitalist production physically and mentally restricts them that they become ‘helpless victims to what is offered [sic] to them’ (Ibid). Society becomes the middle and lower class while the media producers and owners become the upper class or the ruling class. If in the analysis it is said that most of the respondents come from middle and upper class, it is in the context of economic and educational power and they are not media owners or producers. In culture industry, they belong to the powerless side, namely middle and lower class.

Culture industry with its products that control the society more or less reveals the ideology that operates within the society: that they, the society are powerless even though they show resistance to the product of culture industry such as Indonesian Idol. They feel that they can just choose another program to watch but given the commercialization attitude of media owners, there is a big possibility that all of television products are just no difference with Indonesian Idol. So, they are still unconsciously powerless as long as they take television programs for granted. Meanwhile, media owners and producers are still powerful by controlling the society for more capital.

Conclusion

Detailed discussion of the results reveals two related major issues: intertextuality and horizon of expectation. Intertextuality occurs when the audiences make judgment for Indonesian Idol by doing some comparison to other similar television programs. This activity leads to the creation of audience’s horizon of expectation in which they make expectations after watching other programs and apply them when they watch Indonesian Idol.

Indonesian Idol has failed in fulfilling audience expectations due to the highly commercialized elements of the program. The opposition toward the high commercialization attitude of Indonesian Idol indicates that they are living in the middle of culture industry. The purpose of this situation is clear: to make more capital or money for the ruling class of media owners and producers. Therefore, audiences here are under the control of the ruling class that they become the passive audience. The sad thing is, they are not aware of this condition. Media owners and producers keep being the one taking control of this situation and the society as audiences keep being the passive side.

Works Cited
