Pendidikan Komunikasi Islam di Tengah Konvergensi Media
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Jurnal Komunikasi Islam menyediakan tulisan-tulisan bagi para praktisi dan akademisi untuk mengembangkan teori, penelitian empiris, dan mengenalkan konsep-konsep baru di bidang komunikasi penyiaran Islam dan dakwah dalam perspektif yang luas.


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Uses and Effects of Religious Programs among Yemeni Audiences

Abdulrahman M. Al-Shami

Abstract: The study aims to contribute to the current understanding of how audiences make use of religious programs broadcasted in both religious satellite channels (RSCs) and Arabic satellite channels. 210 respondents were surveyed to address the nature of exposure to RSCs and religious programs, motives, and attitudes toward them. Utilizing uses and effect approach and Hall’s encoding and decoding model of media discourses, this study confirms a high exposure to RSCs among adult television viewers in Yemen. Of religious contents, Islamic lectures particularly represent the most watched program by respondents. It also states that emotional effects represent the prominent effects of religious programs uses followed by normative, and limited behavioral effects.

Keywords: religious programs, uses and effects approach, Hall’s encoding/decoding model, Yemeni audience.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui bagaimana penggunaan program religi yang ditayangkan saluran satelit keagamaan (RSCs) dan saluran satelit Arab. Data dikumpulkan melalui survei dari 210 responden. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan uses and effect serta model Hall perihal encoding dan decoding, studi ini menyatakan bahwa jumlah penonton RSCs di kalangan orang dewasa di Yaman sangat tinggi, dan program ceramah Islam merupakan program yang paling banyak ditonton. Studi ini juga menyatakan bahwa program keagamaan di televisi mempunyai pengaruh yang paling utama pada aspek emosional diikuti oleh dampak normatif dan perilaku.

Kata Kunci: program keagamaan, pendekatan uses and effect, Model Hall’s encoding/decoding, pemirsia TV di Yaman

Introduction

Religious media exist today in a new communication era, characterized by plenty of channels, more media choices, and diverse

Abdulrahman M. Al-Shami (aalshami8@gmail.com) is Associate Professor, College of Mass Communication, Sana’a University, Yemen
speeches as well as round-the-clock broadcasting. A large selection of media is available for audiences today. The technology of direct satellite broadcasting (DBS) has provided an opportunity for launching a number of specialized channels, including religious channels, estimated today to be more than 48, seven of them state-run channels and 41 private (Arab Broadcasting Countries Union 2010: 10), in addition to religious programs regularly broadcast on most Arabic satellite channels (ASCs). Religious satellite channels (RSCs) attempt to provide viewers with a range of religious programs, trying to meet different needs of the audience.

The new magnitude of the religious media today is completely different from what existed in the past, when people used to assemble in front of the state-run television to watch one program and listen to one speech. According to Mahmud (as cited in Ghareeb 1995: 402), religious programs were subjected to specific guidance, restrict for views and perspectives. Therefore, religious media studies, especially audience studies, in different countries, societies, and cultures become essential in the new and rapidly changing communication environment. It aims to explore dimensions as well as investigating the effects. Islamic communication is considered as a social process. And this fact imposes a real need to survey the functions and roles of this type of communication to meet social and individual needs. It also imposes the need to study the audience as members of primary (e.g., family and friends) and secondary groups (e.g., Employees at work and sports team) that contribute to building society's culture as well as identifying its trends (Abdulhameed 1992: 215). The individuals' needs and desires may lead to maximizing or minimizing the effects of a certain message (Mesbah 1991:2).

Thus, Yemen represents a relevant environment for conducting such a study that lies within the zone of broadcasting for a number of the DBS; especially Nile Sat and Arab Sat, that allow people in this Muslim country to receive several religious as well as Arabic channels.

1 For more information, refer to: High Committee for Coordination among Arab Satellite Channels. (2010) Al batth alfadade‘e al arabi- alakhreer alshanawi [Arab satellite broadcasting annual report], published by Arab State Broadcasting Union, Tunisia.

Theoretical Framework
Audience theory represents the starting point for several media studies. This theory deals with the medium through a functional aspect, which considers individual as a system; an elements of the system could include needs, motives, values, attitudes, interests, desires, tastes, behaviors, and the like (Rubin 1986: 284) and asserts audience choices in identifying motives for using specific media and avoiding others based on several factors. Uses and Effects Theory, as presented by Black and Bryant (1995) as well as encoding and decoding model, as presented by Hall (1973), have been used as the theoretical framework for this study.

Uses approach represents a turning point in the media studies. It grew out of a backlash against the dominant theories of communications that stated the media had powerful effects on the audience. The powerful effects paradigm characterized the audience as passive in the communication process (Etefa 2005: 5). Whereas, the uses perspective shifted from looking at users as passive to active and the focus shifted from what the media do to people to what people do with the media (Williams 2005: 177). This approach depicts the audience as the primary element in understanding the mass communication process and seeks to understand the needs of audiences, how media fulfill such needs, and how people utilize the media content (Etefa 2005: 6). It views people's media consumption patterns as intended actions on the part of the viewers (Salwen et al. 1996: 145). The audience-centered approach examines their motives for media use, what influences these motives and the consequences of these needs, motives and desires (Zebra 2003: 10). Therefore, this approach is one of the best-developed theoretical perspectives for studying audience motives (Etefa 2005: 5).
Katz et al. (1974:20) described the uses and gratifications approach as one concerned with "(1) the social and psychological origins of (2) needs, which generate (3) expectations of (4) the mass media or other sources, which lead to (5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities) resulting in (6) need gratifications and (7) other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones".

Early uses research concentrated on description and measurement of audience uses and motives of the media (Salwen et al. 146). Rubin (1983) formulated two primary types of television viewing behavior; ritualized and instrumental. According to him, ritualized viewing consists of more habitual use of television for diversionary reasons and a greater affinity with the medium itself. Instrumental viewing, on the other hand, reflects a more goal-oriented use of television content to gratify informational needs or motives. Accordingly, users are active participants because they are active communicators who select their channels of communication or specific content depending on their personal goals.

When applied to religious programs, the uses approach assumes that users go to RSCs in general or to such programs in specific motivated by particular needs or desires. It is also generally agreed that those who watch religious programs usually do so for very specific reasons. The overall perception of media consumers as "active" or "purposeful" selectors and recipients of mass communication has gained much support in recent years (Abelman 1987: 199). Most uses and gratifications models include consequences or effects of media use. Uses and effect approach seeks to determine how the needs and motivations people bring to their uses of media intervene in any effects that media may have. Media impact is assessed at individual, family, reference group, community, societal, and cultural levels (Black and Bryant 1995: 51). The uses and gratifications approach to media effects assumed the audience brought their own needs and desires to the process of message reception, which structured the way in which the message is received. Needs and desires structured how messages are received and understood by the audience (Williams 2003: 166, 177).

On the other hand, the development of Hall’s encoding and decoding model of media discourses (as cited in Wren-Lewis), presented in Figure 1, represents an important stage in the conceptualization of televisual communication (1983: 179). Hall’s encoding/decoding model (1980) is based on the assumption that communication process are embedded and occurred in the context of power relation that connect various groups, organizations, institutions, and other bodies, which hold different positions in the social structure. It conceptualizes communication as a way to reproduce or gradually transform established social relations (Schedler et al. 1998: 451). Hall’s model proposed that media producers ‘encoded’ meanings into media texts (Awan 2007: 35). These codes link certain dominant of meaning, which is a property of the text, while excluding others in a certain context. Hence, they carry preferred readings that are structured and hierarchically organized in dominant or preferred meanings (Poonam 1992:228). However, active audiences do not simply perceive messages encoded by the producers, but ‘decode’ meanings from the media in accordance with their own social and cultural context (Awan 2007: 35). The process of encoding is determinate but not determining. It is open-ended and cannot guarantee any correspondence between the encoded and decoded moments. According to Hall, the media texts are polysemic rather than plural. This implies that the connotative readings of the text are not equally available to the readers; rather, it can be read in several ways (Poonam 1992: 228).

Figure 1 “Hall’s encoding/decoding model” (cited in Wren-Lewis, 1984: 179)
Hall invokes the language and logic of semiotics, focusing less on the presumed effectiveness of a particular instance of media communication and emphasizing the discursive production of the "media sign" that, according to him, intelligibility is always secured through the deployment of conventional (or hegemonic) codes (Ritzer and Ryan 2011: 185). Hall asserts three hypothetical decoding of televisual discourse: 1) "dominant-hegemonic or preferred reading," where the viewer accepts media signs and decodes the message in terms of the reference code in which it has been encoded and thus follows the text's 'preferred reading'; 2) the "negotiated code", which contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements and in which the viewer does not straightforwardly accept the text's 'preferred reading', rather, he/she accepts part of it while rejecting others and 3) an "oppositional code" in which the viewer strongly resists or rejects the 'preferred reading' (Hall 1980: 128-137). In the oppositional mode, signs and the codes that produce them are viewed as miss-leading distortions of reality (Ritzer and Ryan 2011: 185).

Research Questions
To address the overall objective of the study, which is how Yemeni audiences make use of the religious programs as well as RSCs to produce religious identity, the current study poses the following questions:
RQ1: What is the rate of exposure to ASCs?
RQ2: What are the preferred channels of ASCs?
RQ3: What is the rate of exposure to RSCs?
RQ4: What are the preferred channels of RSCs?
RQ5: What are the preferred religious programs?
RQ6: What is the effect of gender, age, education, and occupation variables on the type of exposure to both ASCs and RSCs?
RQ7: What are the motives for using RSCs and religious programs?
RQ8: What are the effects of using religious programs and RSCs?

This study was implemented on a stratified sample composed of 210 (N=210), selected from the capital Sana'a. Males comprised 53.3 percent of the total respondents and females 46.7 percent (see table 1).

Table 1: Sample Distribution According to Gender (N=210)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Freq</th>
<th>%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>53.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>46.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>100</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The sample was selected from among the population aged 20 to 50 years old and above, representing all strata and socio-economic status (low, medium, and high), as possible. The mean age was 37 years (see table 2). The respondents' education ranged from illiterate to university degree and above (see table 3). Different occupations were reflected in the sample. They were categorized in six groups, including: employees, students, Housewives, workers, private businesses, as well as unemployed persons (see table 4).

Table 2: Sample Distribution According to Age & Gender (N=210)

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<th>Age &amp; Gender</th>
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<td>42.9</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>24.1</td>
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<td>40-49</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20.5</td>
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<td>50 &amp;&gt;</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>100</td>
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Table 3: Sample Distribution According to Education & Gender (N=210)

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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Doxa, 267, 273, 274, 275, 276, 279, 280, 283, 284, 285, 286</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abrar, Ana Nadhya, 289</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Jazeera, 199, 340</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Shami, Abdulrahman M., 177</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analisis wacana, 265, 271, 272, 273, 274, 275</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anwari, 299</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASCs (Arabic satellite channels), 178, 182, 184, 191, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 205, 215</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience theory, 179</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBC–Arabic, 199</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral Effects, 187, 189, 208, 210, 212, 213, 214</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BNPT (Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme), 341, 342</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizen journalism, 324, 334, 345</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DBS (Direct Satellite broadcasting), 178, 220</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decoding, 177, 179, 181, 182, 219, 220, 222, 254, 288</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinurriyah, Itsna Syahadatud, 265</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depth news, 310</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desentralisasi, 342</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encoding, 177, 179, 181, 219, 220, 222</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure rate, 191, 192, 193, 194, 197, 199, 200, 201, 202</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure intensity, 195, 196, 197</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment channels, 198</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional effects, 177, 188, 209, 210, 212, 216</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Etnografi berbahasa, 365</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Etnografi Komunikasi, 364, 365, 366, 367, 368</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engkus Kuswarrono, 364, 365, 368</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eufimisasi, 265, 275, 277, 278, 279, 280, 281, 282, 283, 286</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Etos kerja, 306</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female modesty, 267, 282</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminisme Islam, 247, 255</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film religi, 247, 248, 252, 258</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film KCB, 247, 252, 255, 256, 258, 259, 261, 262</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional aspect, 179, 216</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habermas, 226, 235, 243, 244</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Habitus, 267, 269, 270, 285, 286
Hakim, Lukman, 247
Harian Surya, 224, 225
Harian Bwara, 223
Hard news, 310
Heterodoxa, 274, 278, 279, 283, 284
Hypodermic needle theory, 310

K
Kuncoro, Wahyu, 223
Konvergensi media, 289, 291

M
Mad'ū, 346, 355, 356, 357, 358, 360, 362
Male-gaze, 248
Masyarakat phallocentric, 249
Masyarakat tutur, 365, 366, 367
Metode dakwah, 355, 356, 357, 358, 359
Model dakwah, 355, 356, 357, 358, 359
Media cetak, 223, 234, 270, 275, 292, 321
Mucikari, 348, 349, 350, 351, 352, 353, 354, 355, 361, 362
Mulvey, 249, 264
MUI (Majelis Ulama Indonesia), 331, 341, 342, 345, 360

N
Normative effects, 187, 209, 211
Nilai Keagamaan, 300, 303

O
Opini publik, 225, 230, 231, 235, 239, 240
Otoritas Keagamaan, 318, 319, 320, 321, 325, 326, 327, 328, 329, 331, 333, 335, 336, 337, 339, 341, 342, 343
Orientasi teknis, 289, 291
Orientasi akademis, 290, 291, 297
Orthodoxa, 268, 274, 278, 279, 280, 283, 284

P
Pendekatan dakwah, 346, 348, 349, 351, 353, 355, 356, 357, 359, 360, 362
Pendidikan komunikasi, 289, 297
Pertarungan simbolik, 265, 267, 270, 271, 272, 275, 277, 278, 283, 285, 286, 288
Politik media, 228, 246

R
Radio komunitas, 299, 311, 312, 313, 316, 317
Remediasi Realitas Empirik, 293
Remediasi Realitas virtual, 293
Religious media, 177, 178, 213, 216
Ritualized uses, 185, 186, 206, 207, 208
RSCs (Religious Satellite Channels), 177, 178, 180, 182, 184, 185, 187, 189, 190, 199, 200, 201, 202, 203, 205, 206, 207, 208, 212, 213, 214, 215

S
Sana’a University, 177
Semiotik, 247, 252, 253, 254
Sense of humor, 359
Sensorisasi, 265, 275, 285, 286, 287
Suaeh, Muhammad Khoiron, 346, 360
Sunarto, 346
Surabaya Post, 223, 224, 225, 234, 235, 237, 238, 240, 241, 242
Strategi dakwah, 317, 355, 357, 358

T
Taufik, Fatkhurohman, 364
Teknik dakwah, 355, 358
TKSK (Tenaga Kesejahteraan Sosial Kecamatan), 360, 361
Tradisionalisme, 247, 302, 303
Trajektori, 269

U
Universitas Gadjah Mada, 289
Universitas Hasyim Asy’ari, 299
UIN Sunan Ampel, 177, 223, 247, 265, 289, 299, 318, 346, 364
Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, 318
Universitas Dr Soetomo, 364
Uses and effects theory, 179
Uses and gratifications model, 180

W
Wacana seksualitas, 258, 259
Wawasan kebangsaan, 308, 309