

Television democratization and the political awareness of voters in Indonesia

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Abstract

This study explores how the democratization of media in Indonesia enhanced the role of television stations in raising voters' political awareness about the 2014 legislative election. For this qualitative study, we interviewed two media experts and the chief editors of six television stations. We find that there are three general factors negatively affect TV's role as a free public sphere, namely, production constraints, owners' political interests, and commercial aspects of the television industry. Concentration of ownership and commercialization have increased television's orientation toward profit, minimizing its educative role, and minimizing its neutrality. However, television still increased voters' awareness regarding the election technicalities but failed to reflect the visions of the competing candidates. The establishment of innovative community television could be an alternative for commercial TV in Indonesia. However, the performance of community TVs in Indonesia is hindered by the restricted access to frequency spectrum and low financial capabilities.

Keywords: TV Democratization, Commercialization, Concentration of Ownership, Political Awareness

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Introduction

The Indonesian TV industry benefited from the rapid transition toward a form of electoral democracy in Indonesia after the ouster of former President Soeharto in 1998. Now, Indonesia's political system is characterized by free and fair elections, and the strict laws and regulations that inhibited mass media's freedom were abolished or rewritten (Romano, 2002). Indonesian TV and other mass media are important players in political education, and these have contributed significantly in mobilizing and encouraging voters to participate in the previous legislative and presidential elections (Suwardi, 2001; Siregar, 2014).

Television broadcasts and newspapers stories are arguably the most important sources of information about the conduct of governments and politicians. We can claim that the media's central role in determining what information is delivered to the public justifies the recent increased attention to how the media shapes public knowledge, attitudes, and behavior (George & Waldfogel, 2006).

Studies relating to the use of television and other media outlets to political awareness and civic engagement find positive results. Josh Pasek et al. (2006) have looked at a wide range of media to determine their unique relations to civic engagement and awareness of national politics among adolescents and young adults. They find that media use, whether information or entertainment oriented, facilitates civic engagement, whereas news media outlets are especially effective in promoting political knowledge and awareness.

Yanuar Nugroho et al. (2012) emphasized that due to television's domination of media consumption in Indonesia, political communications and election campaigns have become more dependent on television. Over 90 percent of Indonesians (over 10 years old) say that watching television is one of their main social and cultural activities (Nugroho et al., 2012).

Based on the preceding explanation, we focus in this study on exploring how the democratization and freedom of Indonesian media have enhanced television's role in increasing voters' awareness about the legislative election in 2014. We argue that television and other mass media in a stable democracy are the principal institutions from which the public can better understand their society. Furthermore, we argue that the broadcasting media system should be independent and free from the control of the government or private monopolies and should serve the public interests.

Since 2004, two types of general elections have been conducted in Indonesia. The first set is the legislative election to select members of the House of Representatives (DPR) at the central and regional levels. The

second set is the presidential elections to elect the president and the vice president of the Republic. The legislative and presidential elections used to be conducted separately in April and July every five years. In 2019, for the first time, legislative and presidential elections were held simultaneously based on Indonesia's Constitutional Court ruling in order to reduce expenses and extended political tensions that come from a longer political season (International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2019).

Although there were subsequent legislative and presidential elections in 2019, we focus this study on exploring how the democratization and freedom of Indonesian media enhanced the role of television in increasing voters' awareness about the legislative election in 2014. We believe that it is still relevant to focus on television's role in the 2014 legislative election because, as explained by Souisa (2019), some studies have indicated that television environment ahead of the 2019 election didn't change significantly compared to the 2014 election. Souisa believed that one of the most significant political changes to occur in 2019 has been Golkar Party's decision to back Joko Widodo who contested the presidential elections against Prabowo Subianto. As a result, reporting on TvOne channel has not had the same pro-Prabowo tone as in 2014 when the Golkar Party supported him (Souisa, 2019).

To explore how the democratization of Indonesian media has enhanced television's role in increasing voters' awareness, we begin with a brief explanation of three important general concepts, namely, media freedom and democratization, regulation of TV in Indonesia, and the public sphere.

We argue that that freedom of expression and freedom of the television and other media are essential for democracy. Without these basic freedoms, totalitarian and other undemocratic societies cannot become democratic. According to Patrick McConnell and Lee Becker (2002), access to information is essential to the health of democracy for several reasons. First, this access ensures that citizens make responsible, informed choices rather than act out of ignorance or misinformation. Second, the information ensures that elected representatives uphold their oaths of office and carry out the wishes of those who elected them. Finally, independent media contributes to transparent elections by giving candidates access and by reporting on the relevant issues in a timely and objective manner (McConnell & Becker, 2002).

However, Patrick McConnell and Lee Becker (2002) believed that such a view is open to questions. They questioned that it might not be true that media freedom and other communication freedoms follow and are the consequences of democratic reform, rather than the cause of these

reforms? There is a debate on whether media freedom should be viewed as an indicator of democratic reform or an *independent determinant of it* (McConnell & Becker, 2002).

For Danis McQuail (2000), the normative model of a free media is one in which there is freedom from any government regulation and control that would suggest censorship or limits on the freedom to disseminate information, news, and opinion. He added that media should have economic and political independence, access to channels for a plurality of voices, and provide a benefit to the audience (McQuail, 2000).

Accordingly, free and independent media exist within a structure which is effectively demonopolized of the control of any concentrated social groups or forces and in which access is both equally and effectively guaranteed (Rozumilowicz, 2002).

In this study, we go with the suggestion of Beate Rozumilowicz (2002) that a media structure that is free of “interference from government, business, or dominant social groups is better able to maintain and support the competitive and participative elements of democracy” (p. 13).

Rozumilowicz (2002) sees the ideal media environment as one in which there are two media sectors—a market-led media sector and a nonmarket sector. Rozumilowicz underlines that within the market sector, advertisers are free to present their goods to target audiences, programmers can use fees provided by these advertisers to draw in audiences, and audiences are informed and entertained to the extent that the market allows. The nonmarket sector provides balance by ensuring that the needs of non-dominant groups are met (Rozumilowicz, 2002).

To understand the freedom and democratization of the television industry in Indonesia, we need to highlight the regulatory environment on which this industry is practicing its daily business. Historically, the democratic transformation that took place in Indonesia in May 1998 was a major turning point in ensuring citizens’ rights to media (Nugroho et al., 2012).

We believe that the Law of the Republic of Indonesia on Press No. 40 of the year 1999 and the Law of the Republic of Indonesia on Broadcasting, No. 32 of the year 2002, locally known as Press Law and Broadcasting law, constitute the main media regulatory framework in the post reformation period. The Broadcasting Law (2002) formulates the role and responsibilities of the state regarding broadcasting matters. In order to avoid an authoritarian approach, the Law divides the power in regulating and controlling the broadcasting—TV and radio—between the state and public, with the latter being authorized to a new independent body, namely

Komisi Penyiaran Indonesia (KPI) or Indonesian Broadcasting Commission (Widyatama & Zsolt, in press).

The Broadcasting Law (2002) stresses the television decentralization and emphasizes “democratization,” which means transparency and public accountability in licensing procedures for public service and commercial broadcasting licenses. Based on this Law, television broadcasting activities are performed by TV institutions, private or public institutions, community TV or customized broadcasting institutions (Widyatama & Zsolt, in press; Nugroho et al., 2012).

The Broadcasting Law (2002) has assigned the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission (KPI), as independent body, with setting the Broadcast Code of Conduct and Broadcast Standards, monitoring and giving guidance for broadcast programming, giving sanctions for violations, and issuing and withdrawing broadcast licenses (Broadcasting Law, 2002). The KPI has issued several implementing regulations related to television licensing requirements ownership restrictions, foreign programs, and local content requirements (Widyatama & Zsolt, in press; Nugroho et al., 2012).

Meanwhile, the Broadcast Code of Conduct and Broadcast Standards consists of 94 articles, with a strong emphasize on regulation of broadcasting content regarding obscenity and indecency, taste and decency, hidden recording/shooting, and bad words (Broadcast Code of Conduct and Broadcast Standards, 2012).

Besides the Broadcasting Law No. 32/2002, the government issued other regulations to regulate the infrastructure and content of the television industry such as Regulation No. 49/2005 on Foreign Broadcasting Activities, Regulation No. 50/2005 on Private Broadcasting, and Regulation No. 52/2005 on Subscription Broadcasting (Widyatama & Zsolt, in press).

As part of an effort to maintain television stations neutrality in presidential and legislative elections, the KPI has a supervisory team works in cooperation with the General Elections Commission to monitor news and other types of products including political ads through coordination with TV companies. It has been stipulated that each candidate is only allowed a total of 10 TV spots, each with a maximum duration of 30 seconds for every TV station every day (“KPI limits TV campaign ads,” 2018).

In this study, we put more emphasis on the position of Indonesian television broadcastings as an independent and free public sphere within the key social functions of the media as proposed byJürgen Habermas (1962/1989). This public sphere is mainly open to all citizens and constituted in every conversation in which individual cometogether to form a public. Habermas contrasted the fora of an active, participative bourgeois

public sphere with the commercialized and privatized public spheres of contemporary society, increasingly controlled by mainstream media elites. He argued that the commercialization of the media turned “rational-critical” debate into “cultural consumption” with the public sphere taking on “feudal features” as powerful institutions of both market and state came to dominate. Habermas argued that active citizens had been transformed into passive—of goods, services, politics, and spectacle. The result was a “decayed,” “manipulated,” and “manufactured” form of the public sphere (Habermas, 1962/1989,).

Deliberations in the public sphere now include a wide range of communication acts accommodating marginalized, disenfranchised groups (Young, 2000, 2003; Karppinen et al., 2008). For many theorists, the ideals of alternatives and universal access appear largely compatible with deliberations within a healthy public sphere which is now seen to embody a wide range of communication acts (Young, 2000, 2003; Karppinen et al., 2008, Gaynor & O’Brien, 2017).

Within these conceptualizations of the public sphere, at the heart of debates on the social functions of the media is the notion of “publicity”—citizens’ freedoms to express and publish opinion, and the “right to communicate” (Splichal, 2002).

According to Niamh Gaynor and Anne O’Brien (2017) issues of access and participation lie at the heart of community media or alternative media ethos and practice. Gaynor & O’Brien stressed that the democratic participation in the public sphere in theory, therefore, varies significantly from its commercial and public service broadcasting counterparts where public access to the airwaves is limited to written correspondence (letter, texts, emails, tweets), phone-ins, and invited guest spots.

It becomes apparent then from the above discussion that it is necessary to think about who exactly inhabits this space and who does not, how they do so and how they do not, and above all, how the space might be rendered more open and inclusive in the form envisaged by Habermas and his followers. When thinking about the public sphere in Indonesia, we need to examine the structural issues of access, participation and communication, as well as the agency of civic and state actors in this regard (Gaynor and O’Brien, 2017).

We focus here on finding out whether TV stations in Indonesia constitute a public sphere as proposed by Habermas’s (1962/1989) liberal model of a public sphere which holds a normative claim. Or these idealistic and normative claims do not actually exist in modern democracies that are industrially advanced and commercialized as the case of Indonesia.

As mentioned above, we attempt here to address how the democratization of media in Indonesia enhances the role of television stations in raising voters' political awareness about the 2014 legislative election. To answer this, we deploy Denis McQuail's (1987) Democratic-participant theory, which seeks a truly democratic communication through taking a part of the overcentralized, big, commercial media in favor of a horizontal, rural-based communication model that can be directly controlled by community members. (McQuail, 1987).

Democratic-participant Theory

We use the Democratic-participant theory as a framework to explore the general context or setting in which television perform its function as the fourth estate. This theory emerged in response to the political and economical pressures and the professional hegemony in the media system. It emphasizes the need to redress the deficiencies of the libertarian theory and the social responsibility theory due its perceived failure to achieve the social benefits expected of them (Mojaye & Lamidi, 2015).

Eserinune Mojaye and Ishola Lamidi (2015), emphasized that the goal of democratization of communication is to guarantee easier media access to all potential users and consumers. Mojaye & Lamidi stressed that the motive force of the democratic participant theory lies in its insistence that the mass media have become too socially important to be left in the hands of owners and operators, the fear being that such a monopoly may serve to marginalize a critical part of the populace. The theory argues that citizens have a right to relevant local information, a right to answer back and a right to use the means of communication for interaction and social action in small-scale settings (Mojaye & Lamidi, 2015).

The theory stands for defense against commercialization and monopoly while at the same time being resistant to the bureaucracy of public media institutions. According to Danis McQuail (1987), media messages and content shouldn't be affected by the bureaucratic and political control. This theory encourages the establishment of small scale, multiple, local, and non-institutional media because they link senders with receivers and give favor to interaction's horizontal designs (McQuail, 1987).

The Democratic-participant theory was proposed in recognition of new media developments and of increasing criticism of the dominance of the main mass media by private or public monopolies (McQuail, 1994). The theory also places emphasis on community media as it incorporates varied practical media such as community radio stations, community TV, micro-media in rural setting, newspapers, media for women and ethnic minorities,

etc. Other examples are the trend of social action through social media and underground and alternative media (Bajracharya, 2018; Mojaye & Lamidi, 2015).

As indicated by Thomas Alemoh and Lucy Ishima (2013), the emergence of the community media, new media, and consequently social networking is considered as a practical application of the democratic participant media theory. Alemoh & Ishima believed that this is because unlike the conventional media that are strictly owned, controlled, and regulated by concerned professionals, citizen journalism, social networking offers a platform that tends to neutralize and make nonsense of such thinking. Everyone can be a journalist at any time and in any place (Alemoh & Ishima, 2013).

The theory is in use and practice in Western Europe which can be seen by the cultural and ethnic revival through media. Many countries have started following the theory in mass media such as South East Asia, Ireland, Scandinavian countries, Yugoslavia, Kosovo, Ghana, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Nepal, India, UK, etc. (Baran & Davis 2012; Bajracharya, 2018; Mojaye & Lamidi, 2015).

We noticed that some studies indicated the success of the practical application of the democratic participant media theory in stimulating and empowering citizens for a strong, healthy, and pluralistic political discourse and ultimately informed choices of their political leaders. For example, Mojaye and Lamidi (2015) stated that the theory gives room for more diversified viewpoints including that of the rural voice and provides a richer media culture for media and promote democratic cultural values in Nigeria.

Meanwhile, Niamh Gaynor and Anne O'Brien (2017) emphasize that the presence of community media as a practical manifestation of the democratic-participant theory in Ireland offers the potential for more broad-based participation in deliberation and debate within the public sphere, engaging multiple voices and perspectives and contributing toward progressive social change. However, they find that democratic participation is still not optimized within the Irish community media. They argue that the reasons for this lies in limited policy framework, a focus on technical competencies over content, and the weakness of linkages between community media and their local community groups.

The political changes which occurred in Indonesia since 1989 resulted in introducing democratic systems to replace authoritarian regimes. There is an emerging need for sorting out the legal and institutional basis of a free media. Therefore, we believe that the Democratic-participant Theory, as one of the normative theories of the media, is the most useful framework for

this study because it constitutes starting point for studying the current and future form of television and other mass media in the emerging democracies. Moreover, the Democratic-participant theory and other normative theories represent not only slightly different opinions on the role of the media in a democracy but also reflect the differences in understanding the essence of democracy (Baran & Davis, 2012; Bajracharya, 2018; Mojaye & Lamidi, 2015).

We argue that the importance of this theory comes also from the assumption that the media should make it possible for citizens to gain the knowledge they need, and should contribute to arousing the citizens' interest and participation in politics.

Based on the above arguments, we deployed the Democratic-participant theory to explore whether the Indonesian main television stations constitute a public sphere that is free from the interference/influence of others. We also used the theory to explore the impact of concentration of ownership and commercialization in minimizing TV's role in providing timely, objective, and balanced reporting that assisted the Indonesian television audience to determine their political choices rationally in the 2014 legislative election. Finally, the theory was helpful in exploring the establishment of innovative, small community TV that can be directly controlled by groups, organizations, and local communities as alternative for commercial TV stations.

For this qualitative study, we depended mainly on in-depth interviews to collect the primary data. We conducted semi-structural interviews with eight participants, two prominent media experts and six TV practitioners.

The two media experts are Dr. Harsono Suwardi, Dean of the Faculty of Communication, Sahid University in Jakarta, and Dr. Heri Budianto, Head of Institutional Development and Head of Communication Studies at University of Mercu Buana in Jakarta.

Dr. Suwardi is a prominent expert in communication and mass media. He has been lecturing in many Indonesian universities (e.g., University of Indonesia and Bandung Islamic University). He authored various books such as *The Political Role of the Press in Indonesia*, *Political Communication*, and *The Impact of Radio and Television on Jakarta Metropolitan Culture*.

Dr. Budianto is a well-known political communication and media expert in Indonesia. Due to his critical point of views and authentic public surveys he conducted through the Political Communication Institute, he became a regular guest at TV political talk shows during the Indonesian elections in 2014 and 2019. He is a lecturer at the Master Program in Communication

Sciences, Faculty of Communication, Mercu Buana University, as well as several other universities in Jakarta, Batam, and Ambon.

Meanwhile, the six TV practitioners were chief editors and news managers of Televisi Republik Indonesia (TVRI), Surya Citra Televisi (SCTV), Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia (RCTI), Metro TV, Televisi Transformasi Indonesia (TransTV), and TvOne. These six TV stations are considered as the biggest among the ten national free-to-air television stations in Indonesia (Souisa, 2019; Siregar, 2014).

We selected these six TV practitioners due to their positions as news managers and chief editors in prominent media organizations. We believe that they have the competence, professional knowledge, and expertise to contribute to this study.

Table 1. The Profile of Participants from the Six Television Stations

Name	Position	TV Station	Date of Interview
Mauluddin Anwar	News Manager	SCTV	29-09-2014
Gatot Triyanto	Editor in Chief	TRANS TV	10-10-2014
Syfa	Deputy News Director	TVRI	18-10-2014
Atmadji Sumarkidjo	Deputy Chief Editor	RCTI	01-12-2014
Suryoprato	News Director	Metro TV	12-12-2014
Karnillyas	Chief Editor	TvOne	22-01-2015

Brief profile of the six TV stations

Televisi Republik Indonesia (TVRI). It is the only state-owned and public broadcasting television network and the oldest television entity in Indonesia. It was founded on August 24, 1962 and enjoyed a longstanding monopoly until 1989, when the government allowed private television stations to begin broadcasting. In 2002, TVRI’s status changed into a state founded legal entity that is independent, neutral, and non-commercial, and provides services for the interest of the public and preserve the national unity and Indonesian culture (Lim, 2012; Siregar, 2014).

As stipulated by the Broadcasting Law (2002), TVRI as a public broadcasting institution is funded by broadcasting dues, subsidies from the state budget, and public donations. TVRI had always been hampered by a small budget, and the budget situation became even tighter in 1981 when the administration banned TVRI from broadcasting commercial advertisements. According to Siregar (2014), TVRI received Rp 400 billion in 2014 while the budget it actually needed was Rp 4 trillion.

With the rise of more well-established private TV stations, TVRI is struggling to maintain its popularity and winning over the audience particularly in urban communities. TVRI has had only a small audience share in recent years, and its average was only 1.4 percent (Siregar, 2014).

Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia (RCTI). It was officially inaugurated on August 24, 1989, as Indonesia's first privately owned commercial broadcasting television network. RCTI has 48 relay stations around Indonesia and reaches 190.4 million viewers (80.1 percent of the population of Indonesia) (Lim, 2012; Siregar, 2014). Now, RCTI is 100 percent-owned by PT Media Nusantara Citra (MNC), which is owned and managed by Hary Tanoesoedibjo, one of the ambitious politicians in Indonesia. RCTI is the most watched free-to-air TV and it offers a wide variety of programs from soap operas, box office movies, sporting events, reality shows and music shows, to infotainment. RCTI was the number one TV station in Indonesia commanding a primetime audience share of 19.5 percent (Siregar, 2014).

Surya Citra Televisi (SCTV). It is one of the popular channels in Indonesia, and it is famous for screening many soap operas; however, SCTV has well positioned news and current affairs programs such as *Liputan 6* (News 6), *Buser*, and *Sigi 30 Menit*. It runs a close second to *RCTI* and control 15.9 percent of Indonesia's TV audience (Lim, 2012; Siregar, 2014).

Metro TV. It was established on October 25, 1999. It is a subsidiary of the Media Group, owned by Surya Paloh, the founder of the National Democrat Party and mogul of local media industry. Metro TV has a different concept than the other TV stations in Indonesia, and it was the only news channel in Indonesia until 2008, when Lativi was rebranded as TVOne by dropping all soap operas and focusing on news and sports programs. Metro TV was positioned at the last rank in the market share as it has only 1.8 percent of Indonesia's TV audience (Siregar, 2014).

Televisi Transformasi Indonesia (TransTV). It is a private television station and was inaugurated on December 15, 2001. It is owned by Trans Crop, which is one of the companies of Chairul Tanjung Corp. TransTV is an entertainment channel and is one of the dominant commercial TVs with 10.4 percent share of Indonesia's TV audience (Siregar, 2014).

TvOne. It is the second news television in Indonesia. It used to be known as Lativi but changed its name after an ownership swap in February 2008. TvOne is owned by Visi Media Asia, one of Bakrie & Brothers Group which is owned by Aburizal Bakrie, the former Chairman of Golkarparty. TvOne broadcasts a mixture of news and sports. The network is now more targeted toward middle and upper socioeconomic groups and has just 4.9 percent of Indonesia's TV audience (Siregar, 2014).

According to Hellena Souisa (2019), some studies and surveys indicate that the television environment ahead of the 2019 election didn't change significantly compared to the 2014 election. For example, Souisa indicated that one of the most significant political changes to occur in 2019 has been Golkar Party's decision to back Joko Widodo who contested the presidential elections against Prabowo Subianto. As a result, reporting on TvOne has not had the same pro-Prabowo tone as it did in 2014 (Souisa, 2019).

Results and Discussions

Indonesian Television as an Independent and Free Public Sphere

The democratic transformation that has been taking place in Indonesia since May 1998 has created a conducive atmosphere that assisted the media to perform its function as the fourth estate. TV is an essential institution and has a significant influence on the social, political, and economic life of the people in Indonesia. According to Suwardi (personal communication, November 24, 2014), one of the media experts in Indonesia, television has been playing an important role in the democratization and political reform in Indonesia. But at the same time, it has benefited from this reform (e.g., TV outlets do not face restrictions as was the case during the authoritarian regime of former President Soeharto).

The Press Law No. 40/1999 and the Broadcasting Law No. 32/2002 were enacted to ensure that the press, TV, and radio provide a free and independent public sphere for citizens to practice the freedom of expression and speech (H. Suwardi, personal communication, November 24, 2014). However, according to Anwar Arifin (2011), there is deep concern that the Broadcasting Law No. 32/2002 is centralized more on how to expand and protect the freedom without necessarily focusing on how to strictly regulate broadcasting outlets to balance between their freedom and their social responsibility.

Arifin (2011) concluded that this situation has transformed media freedom into negative freedom or excessive freedom (uncontrolled). Arifin argued that this has happened because of two factors: the first factor is that the Press and Broadcasting laws were drafted and ratified during the democratic euphoria after the fall of the Soeharto regime in 1998 whereas the democratic freedom was the core concern of that period. The second one is that the political culture in Indonesia has changed from collective culture to individualistic one that is characterized by open and transparent political communication system (Arifin, 2011).

Therefore, we assume that the main challenge for TV practitioners is how to regulate themselves to move into the corridor of positive freedom.

But, the participants in this study agreed that TV freedom shouldn't be regulated by laws and regulations only, but it should adhere to the journalistic ethics as well as the cultural, political, and social norms of the Indonesian society. For example, Syfak (personal communication, November 18, 2014) of Televisi Republik Indonesia (TVRI), grumbled about the misuse of excessive freedom of TV stations which in many cases, goes against the values and norms of Indonesian people.

In order to practice its social responsibility, Mauluddin Anwar (personal communication, September 29, 2014) of SCTV, argued that the television institutions should adopt to self-regulation by applying professional codes and guidelines that are produced either by journalist associations such as the Indonesian Television Journalists Association or the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission (KPI), which is the Broadcast Code of Conduct and Broadcast Standards.

However, some other TV practitioners such as Suryopratomo (personal communication, December 12, 2014) of Metro TV and Atmadji Sumarkidjo (personal communication, September 29, 2014) of RCTI TV claimed that this negative perception about the excessive freedom has not underestimated the TV stations' role as an important contributor to the country's transition to a consolidated democracy. Besides playing its check and balance function, these TV practitioners claimed that their stations provide a public sphere that allows individuals to express their opinions and enrich their lives. They claimed that television stations, both public and private, have allocated reasonable slots to cover the current public issues and discuss it by experts, academics, officials, and commentators. Suryopratomo and Karni Ilyas stated that their television stations agree that the opinions and views of the public are crucial for presenting a complete picture of current public issues (Suryopratomo, personal communication, December 12, 2014; K. Ilyas, personal communication, January 22, 2015). They claimed that their television stations always interview individuals and common people about their views on public affairs. For example, Suryopratomo (personal communication, December 12, 2014) said that his station has a daily interactive program called *Suara Anda* (Your Voice). He explained that this program is designed to receive telephone calls, SMS, emails, Facebook posts, and/or tweets from the audience regarding their opinions on the most important issues and news of the day.

Nevertheless, as stated by Douglas Kellner (1990), "the democratic principles of broadcasting contradict with the broadcast practices that have limited the spectrum of opinion" (p. 93). Some media experts agree with Kellner's account (H. Suwardi, personal communication, November

24, 2014, H. Budianto personal communication, December 2, 2014). They complained that there are limitations and restrictions imposed by Indonesian television outlets on individual's participation. Budianto (personal communication, December 2, 2014) explained that:

Yes, of course, there must be space for the public in broadcasting outlets, but the television interests become quite complex and intermixed. TV provides spaces and slots for those who can fight for its interests. The constructivist paradigm on media is correctly applied here. TV chooses the source of information and the angle from which the event is presented. These choices are determined based on the ideological, political, and economic interest.

Besides the limitations of ideological, political, and economic interest of TV stations, the spectrum of opinion is also limited by the TV's technical and production constraints. According to Budianto (personal communication, December 2, 2014), the production of TV programs is subject to a set of professional and technical competence and high-budget production values. These technical and production constraints are the pressures of time, the budgetary limitations, airtime slots, and deadlines. What news stories are selected, how each of them is edited, and how they are arranged in a particular order (of importance) are just some of the ways in which the ideology of media professionalism is constructed (Hall, 1980).

We note, accordingly, that freedom of media in Indonesia is still at the stage of "freedom from" and has not reached the stage of "freedom for." The control is shifted from the absolute powers of the government as the case during Soeharto's totalitarian regime, to the control and hegemony of economic and ideological interests of TV's owners. This freedom is not a freedom for enhancing the TV role to create a healthy democracy and educated and prosperous communities (Suryopratomo, personal communication, December 12, 2014).

Thus, we can argue that, TV stations in Indonesia are facing a dilemma. From one side, the stations are struggling to accommodate the political and/or economic interests of the owners. On the other side, they are trying to abide to the journalistic idealism. Recently, owners' interests become prominently dominant while journalistic idealism is fading particularly during the legislative of 2014 (H. Budianto, personal communication, December 2, 2014). This situation has negatively affected the independence of these television stations due to the interference they face from their owners. Ilyas (personal communication, January 22, 2015) admitted that all

television stations faced strong interference from their owners particularly during the 2014 legislative. He said that:

Whoever owns or controls the majority shares of a media outlet including television stations, will interfere in the newsroom. You will not find negative news about Jakob Oetama in *Kompas* newspaper, and you will never find a single bad story about Surya Paloh in Media Indonesia group. Do you expect that someone who established a place like this station which its market value about Rp 10 trillion (referring to TvOne station) would allow other people to use it for insulting or discrediting him? I work as a journalist for 42 years; I can say that there is no 100 percent independent media.

Accordingly, we could conclude that television stations did not perfectly play their role as an independent and free public sphere that should be theoretically responsible of providing the Indonesian public with objective and balanced coverage to assist them in making informed decisions on important political issues during the 2014 legislative election.

Based on the above discussion, we can identify three general factors that negatively affected the role of television as independent and free public sphere. These factors are technical and production constraints, the owners' political interests/agendas, and the commercial aspect of television broadcasting industry. Figure 1 explains these three factors.

The Concentration of Ownership and Commercialization as Challenges for Television Stations' Objectivity during the 2014 Legislative Election

The concentration of ownership. The concentration of ownership among broadcast media in Indonesia is organized by Broadcasting Law No. 32/2002. Article (18) of this law has limited the concentration of ownership and domination of Private Broadcasting Institution by one person or legal entity in one broadcasting area or several broadcasting areas. It also has limited cross-ownership between Private Broadcasting Institution that operates radio broadcasting services and Private Broadcasting Institution that operates television broadcasting services, between Private Broadcasting Institution and printed media company, between Private Broadcasting Institution and another Private Broadcasting Institution of different type of media, directly or indirectly (Broadcasting Law, 2002).

However, we observe clearly that the last ten years witnessed a concentration of ownership within the television stations in Indonesia due

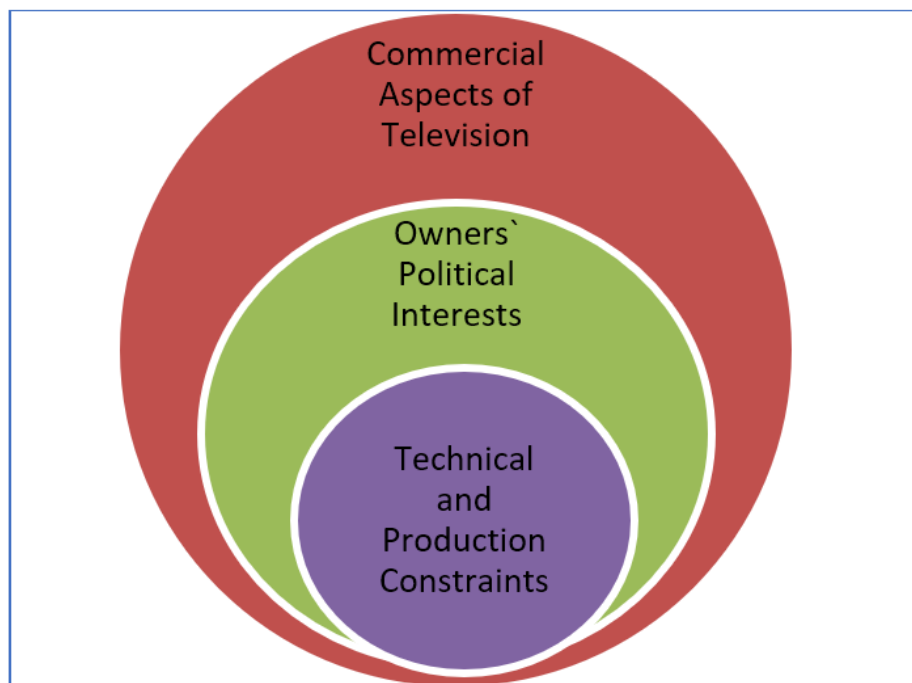


Figure 1. Factors affecting the role of TV as independent and free public sphere

to government failure to enforce the existing regulations that control and regulate the television ownership. Budianto (personal communication, December 2, 2014) claimed that this failure is a result of collusion between corrupt government officials and television companies to protect the interests of the dominant elites.

According to Amir Siregar (2014) there are six groups own all ten private national television networks in Indonesia. Siregar explained that among these groups, MNC Group had the highest share (36.7 %) and the EMTEK came second with 31.5 %, followed by Trans Corp (18.5 %) and the partnership of Bakrie and MM Group (8.7 %). Meanwhile, TVRI, the public broadcasting service, had the smallest share with only 1.4 percent of the total television market share (Siregar, 2014, p. 238).

Budianto (personal communication, December 2, 2014) believed that there is an increasingly common perception that the interests of the owners of these TV outlets have endangered citizens' rights to media because they use their stations as a political campaign tool. He stated that this is particularly the case with a number of TV owners who are closely connected to politics. On the other hand, TV stations have become profit-led and constitute a profitable business that can be shaped by the owner's interests (Nugroho et al., 2012).

Now, there is the tendency of politically connected businessmen to dominate television stations such as Hary Tanoesoedibjo, the owner of MNC group and founder of Perindo Party; Surya Paloh, the owner of Media Group (Media Indonesia newspaper and Metro TV) and founder of Nasdem Party; and Aburizal Bakrie the owner of Viva Group (TvOne and ANTV) and the former Chairperson of Golkar Party (citation). For Sumarkidjo (personal communication, December 1, 2014), deputy chief editor of RCTI TV, this tendency has become a constant source of worry for many people in Indonesia because it constitutes a challenge to television's responsibility to inform and educate.

Meanwhile, some TV practitioners have defended the concentration of ownership in commercial TV stations. Gatot Triyanto (personal communication, October 10, 2014) of SCTV and Anwar (personal communication, September 29, 2014) of TransTV claimed that concentration of ownership has no negative effects on commercial television. They claimed that the owners of commercial TVs are profit-oriented, and they generally give journalists the freedom to produce good quality programs which raise the rating and audience share of their stations. They argued that the concentration of ownership has positively supported the economic and technical aspects of media, and makes the management of television stations more efficient. Triyanto (personal communication, October 10, 2014) claimed that:

To evaluate the concentration of TV ownership, let's look at it in terms of economic and technical aspects. By purchasing many media outlets, it will be efficient economically and technically for owners. For example, our owner has *TransTV*, *TRANS7*, and *detik.com* portal, so it is enough to have one HRD to handle the employees, and the three outlets can share our reporters' coverages.

However, we believe that concentration of ownership is a big challenge to freedom of television in Indonesia, and it has indeed minimized the TV's function as a diversified public sphere. Syfak (personal communication, November 18, 2014) of TVRI argued that as long as these television stations use the public spectrum frequency, they should be responsible toward the public and should adhere to the principles of "diversity of content," neutrality, and independence particularly during legislative election .

Accordingly, we deem the television stations as non-autonomous and free to provide timely, objective, and balanced reporting that assisted the audience to determine their political choices rationally in the legislative

election in 2014. This point of view was supported by Ilyas (personal communication, January 22, 2015) was the only chief editor of a private television station who openly admitted the absence of TV stations impartiality and objectivity in covering the election. He claimed that the 2014 legislative and presidential elections were the worst elections in Indonesia history in terms of media objectivity and independence. He said that:

The legislative and presidential elections in 2014 were bad examples of how conglomeration and concentration of media ownership had influenced the attitude of media toward candidates based on the political orientations of their owners. I believe that the last election was the worse in the history of Indonesia from a press perspective. Indonesian TVs never divided like this before. Five of the ten national television had clearly supported Jokowi, while the remaining five stations had backed Prabowo.

This situation contradicts Article 92 (1) of Law of the Republic of Indonesia on the Election of Members of the House of Representatives, Regional Representatives Council, and House of Representatives District, No. 8 (2012), which states that mass media must provide fair and balanced space and time for election coverage. The current laws assign the Ministry of Communication and Information, the Press Council, Indonesian Broadcasting Commission, and the General Elections Commission to assure the neutrality of broadcasting media in serving the public interest during elections. Nevertheless, some media experts accused these agencies of being either slow or ineffective to address the creeping political influence in television stations during the election (H. Suwardi, personal communication, November 24, 2014; H. Budianto, personal communication, December 2, 2014).

Commercialization. It can be said that commercialization constitutes another challenge for television in Indonesia. The television industry has transformed into a huge one that focuses on profit and has abandoned its idealistic functions of informing and educating the public. Suwardi and Budianto, as media experts, stressed that in order to attract advertising revenue, most commercial television stations programming comprises of entertainment programs such as soap operas, supernatural reality shows, celebrity's gossip, music, and sports (H. Suwardi, personal communication , November 24, 2014; H. Budianto, personal communication, December 2, 2014).

Suwardi (personal communication, November 24, 2014) stated that TV commercialization and industrialization are not new phenomena in Indonesia, however, they recently have become excessive and they force the idealistic values of democracy to become subordinate to those of capitalism in the current system of commercial broadcasting. We understand that TV has become big business or industry, but it should be a positive industry that should be run based on ideologies and ethics that are beneficial to the people. As long as they use the public frequency spectrum, TV outlets are obliged to disseminate knowledge and information, as well as to increase the audience involvement in civic/public affairs (Siregar, 2014).

Anwar (personal communication, September 29, 2014) of SCTV and Gatot Tryanto (personal communication, October 10, 2014) of TransTV, which are the major commercial television stations in Indonesia, have defended their stations' commercial orientation. They said that television stations, like other commercial businesses, should work hard to gain profit so as to maintain the sustainability of its business and assure the welfare of its owners and employees. To realize these goals, they stressed that TV channels have to attract advertisers by producing good programs that are wanted by the audience. G. Triyanto underlined that:

We serve our audience, and we give them what they want not what we want. For example, we always conduct surveys on what audiences want, and we find that Indonesian audiences like entertainment programs and drama and soap opera that are rich with dreams and fantasies.

This means that, as also highlighted by Budianto (personal communication, December 2, 2014), television stations are in a critical position because they are required to be consistent in playing their educative role, but at the same time they have to compete economically with each other to survive. He claimed that this competition has led to the production of low-quality programs that don't serve the public interest. He also accused private television stations of being less creative as they were all competing in reproducing the same high-rated programs and soap opera by changing its names and setting only. According to Budianto, this means the viewers were left with no many diversified contents. For instance, the audience at the national level is left with no other alternatives than watching soap operas that are synchronously aired at the prime-time by private stations such as SCTV, RCTI, and TransTV.

This claim strengthens what has been underlined by Elvinaro Ardianto et al. (2012) as they emphasized that the current trend in Indonesia

television industry is the tendency to depend on copycatting, imitating, or following the lead of successful programs that were produced by other television stations. Examples of copycat television's programs are *Hidaya* (aired by TransTV), *Jalan Illahi* (Trans7), *Pintu Hidayah* (RCTI) which are an imitation of programs that aired by other stations, namely, *Rahasia Illahi* (TPI) and *Rejeki Nomplok* (TransTV) (Ardianto et al., 2012).

We argue that concentration of ownership and commercialization of television in Indonesia have increased television's orientation toward gaining profit and high ratings, thereby minimizing its educative role, minimizing its neutrality and impartiality, and increasing its function as a tool for fighting political opponents during the last legislative elections. Figure 2 explains the consequences of concentration of ownership and commercialization of television in Indonesia.

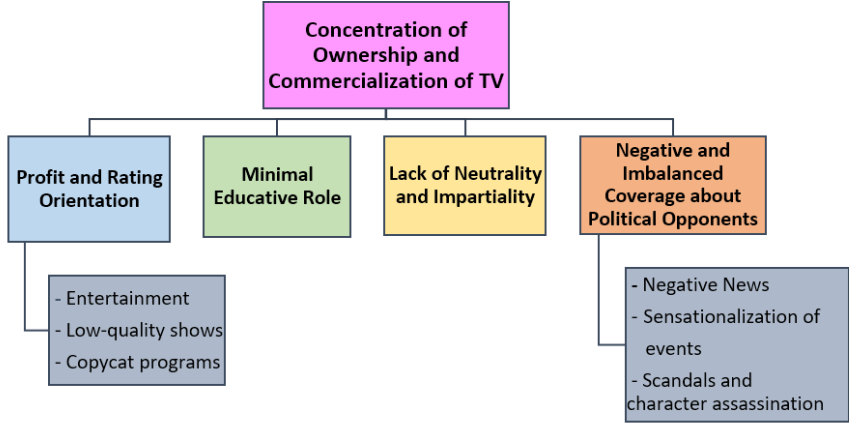


Figure 2. Consequences of concentration of ownership and commercialization of TV in Indonesia.

We might assume that television stations orientation to maximize their profits by airing entertainment programs is audience-driven. Nielsen surveys from April to May 201 showed that the most preferred television programs in Indonesia were soap operas, reality shows, or music awards and competitions such as *Tukang Bubur Naik Haji* (RCTI), *X-Factor* (RCTI), *On the Spot* (Trans7), *Raden Kian Santang* (MNC TV), *SCTV Music Awards* (SCTV), *Opera Van Java* (Trans7), and *Cinta 7 Susun* (RCTI) (Siregar, 2014).

Suryoprato (personal communication, December 12, 2014) of Metro TV challenged the above argument. He believed that there is misreading that illusive soap operas or deviated programs are the main generators

of high ratings and advertisements. He argued that good content and educative programs also generate high ratings such as *Kick Andy Show* at Metro television, *Bajaj Bajuri* series at TransTV and SCTV, and *Keluarga Cemara* soap opera at RCTI and TV7. In this regard, he raised an idealistic perspective, which acknowledges the commercial and industrial aspects of TV corporations. But, according to him, the difference between the television industry and other pure commercial industries is that gaining profit should not be an ultimate goal by itself. It should be a consequence of performing the broadcasting media's function of educating and enlightening the public.

Based on this assumption, we could claim that the TV industry would be a profitable business if TV outlets adhered to the principles of idealism, professionalism, and credibility. Applying these three principles will make the media more influential on the public, governments, political parties, civil society organizations, and business sector. This in its turn would attract more advertisements and increase the profit of respective TV outlets.

Allocation of Special TV Programs to Raise the Political Awareness of Voters

We note that Broadcasting Law No. 32/2002 requires that the content of broadcasts contains information, education, entertainment, and benefit to the formation of intellectual, character, morals, and advancement. Broadcasts must also promote the nation's strength, maintain unity and oneness, and apply Indonesian religious and cultural values. However, TV networks and stations are not required to allot specific airtime slots to broadcast news and public affairs content (Broadcasting Law, 2002).

Several national television stations in Indonesia devote significant space for news and public affairs and deliver well-packaged and up-to-date news programs. According to Suwardi (personal communication, November 24, 2014), Anwar (personal communication, September 29, 2014), and Triyanto (personal communication, October 10, 2014), the time slot of news and public affairs depends on whether the TV station is a news channel or entertainment one. For example, TvOne and Metro TV—as news channels—allocate 70 percent of their airtime for news, politics, and public affairs (Suryoprato, personal communication, December 12, 2014; K. Ilyas, personal communication, January 22, 2015). Meanwhile, entertainment channels such as SCTV, RCTI, and TRANS TV allot only 30 percent of their airtime to news and public affairs (M. Anwar, personal interview, September 29, 2014; Triyanto, personal communication, October 10, 2014; A. Sumarkidjo, personal communication, December 1, 2014).

However, Budianto (personal communication, December 2, 2014) explained that the TV news programs are tailored with an inclination to sensationalize events rather than providing accurate information, and focus mainly on personal issues of public figures. Meanwhile, Merlyna Lim (2012) stated that the narratives of the poor, the marginalized, and the lower class are often ignored. When these groups appear on the screen, they are treated merely as objects (Lim, 2012).

At the same time, the tendency to sensationalize news to appeal to a broader audience has failed in increasing the ratings of news programs which had tailed the list of popular programs published by Nielsen survey (Siregar, 2014).

This means that Indonesian TVs follow the market orientation and commercialization of Western and American media. By borrowing Nolan Bowie (2003) arguments, we can say that Indonesian TV stations become pure entertainment machines where even the news lost its edge because news, too, had to produce a profit cut. To meet its news demand, news evolved “infotainment” (Bowie, 2003). Thus, we could claim that political campaigns were covered superficially as horse races or as personality contests, rather than as debates over clearly defined issues and values that represented a choice to the viewing electorate.

According to Budianto (personal communication, December 2, 2014), the commercial and political interests of TV became more dominant than journalistic idealism which faded or became vague. He stated that this situation has minimized the TV’s function as an education tool in general and political education in particular because its main concern was gaining profit and/or achieving the interest of economic and political elite.

We obviously observed this situation during the legislative election in April 2014. The television stations were criticized for not allocating special space and time to raise the publics’ political awareness on substantial issues related to the legislative election. However, Suwardi (personal communication, November 24, 2014) stressed that this does not mean that TV stations hadn’t contributed totally on the political education and awareness raising process. He considers the dissemination of information and the coverage of events related to the election constitute a part of the political education process.

Meanwhile, TV practitioners from TVRI, SCTV, RCTI, and Metro TV stressed that their television stations had allocated slots and time for raising the political awareness of voters (Syfak, personal communication, November 18, 2014; M. Anwar, personal communication, September 29, 2014; A. Sumarkidjo, personal communication, December 1, 2014; Suryoprato, 2014).

personal communication, December 12, 2014). By examining the TV's programming schedules, we found that TVRI, as public broadcasting service, was the most consistent producer of daily programs designed for increasing the public awareness and participation in 2014 election. Syfak (personal communication, November 18, 2014) of TVRI explained that TVRI had special segment titled "election segment" which featured more than 20 programs dedicated for the legislative election.

Example of these programs are *CerdasMemilih* (Voting Smartly), *Profile Parpol Peserta Pemilu* (Profile of contesting political parties), *Dialog Sosialisasi Pemilu* (Election Socialization Dialogue), *Janji Partai Politik* (Parties' promises), *Caleg Bicara* (Candidates Talk), *Suara Rakyat Pemilu* (Voters' voices), *Rakyat Memilih* (People's Choice), *Realita Politik* (Political Reality), *Berita Indonesia Terkini* (Indonesia Latest News), *Nyoblos Yuk / Golput No* (Vote Yes, Abstain No), and *Parodi Politik* (Political Parody).

We also observed that Metro TV also produced special programs for raising the voters' political awareness such as *Dialog Kita* (Our Dialogue), *Debat Antara Pemilih Pemula* (First-time Voters Debate), and *Citizen Journalism*. Meanwhile, as mentioned by Ilyas (personal communication, January 22, 2015), TvOne believes that all its programs were part of political education or political awareness raising because it was self-appointed as "the election channel." On the other hand Triyanto (personal communication, October 10, 2014), the editor in chief of TransTV underlined that TransTV, as an entertainment channel, has no political programs except news bulletins.

However, some media experts such as Suwardi (personal communication, November 24, 2014) and Budianto (personal communication, December 24, 2014) underlined that all these programs were not educative but informative in their nature. They stated that these programs focused mainly on disseminating administrative and technical information on how to vote. They stressed that television stations did not present deep and rich coverage about the candidates programs that could assist the voters to rationally choose their preferred candidates. (.

It could be claimed that the main source to obtain comprehensive information about the candidates was the official website of Indonesian General Elections Commission (KPU), but the majority of the Indonesian voters have no access to the Internet especially in rural areas. Therefore, we argue that in the 2014 legislative election, the majority of Indonesian voters had elected people they do not know. This was due to the fact that the television stations, political parties, and the general election commissions

had failed to provide comprehensive and easily accessible information about the candidate's programs and track records.

The Establishment of Innovative and Small Community TVs as an Alternative to Commercial Television Stations

The Democratic-participant theory places emphasis on community media as a practical alternative against the centralized, big, and commercial media. These community media are community radio stations, community TV, micro-media in rural setting, newspapers, media for women and ethnic minorities, etc. (Bajracharya, 2018; Mojaye & Lamidi, 2015).

We agree with the Democratic-participant theory in establishing community TV as an innovative, small media that can be directly controlled by groups, organizations, and local communities (McQuail, 1983). This model is applicable in Indonesia, and it has increasingly appeared as a result of the enactment of the Broadcasting Law (2002), which allows the creation of community media that are free from private interest or bureaucratic control.

The majority of community broadcast media that exist now in Indonesia are radio stations. The number of community television stations is very few due to technical, financial, and professional constraints. Ahmad Budiman (2014) stated that the data of Association of Indonesian Community Televisions in 2014, show that it had 31 members consist of television stations belong to local communities, nongovernmental organizations, schools, universities, research institutions, and individuals who are concerned with the development of community media.

According to Anwar (personal communication, September 29, 2014), the most influential television stations at the local level are not community stations, but local television stations established by local businessmen. He argued that these businessmen are attracted by the lucrative business opportunities of the booming local television industries. He concluded that the implementation of network-based broadcasting system has forced national television corporate to buy shares or majority shares of local television stations to minimize the huge cost of fulfilling the requirement of having network-based broadcasting. But such local stations are not independent and instead are controlled by their headquarters in Jakarta.

We underline that a decentralized community television is appropriate for Indonesia, which is heterogeneous in terms of religious, ethnics, culture, and geographical characteristics. Theoretically, it is deemed an alternative medium that has a social responsibility to the community (audience). Such community TV provides a long-term solution for realizing the democratization of media, diversity of ownership, diversity of content, and

maintaining the local public rights to get timely information on issues that relevant to their daily life needs (Budhi, 2007).

However, we noticed that some television practitioners who participated in this study, are pessimistic about community televisions capability to become an alternative to commercial broadcasting media. For example, Ilyas (personal communication, January 22, 2015) highlighted many serious obstacles hindered the performance of community broadcasting such as restricted access to the frequency spectrum, limited access to a diversity of funding sources, and low expertise and professional capabilities of human resources .

This argument goes with the view of some scholars who have stressed that the Democratic-participant Theory has some weaknesses such as: criticizing the government is not considered to be the productive role of media, local level media might lack professionalism and skills, the small local media might not be able to compete with media giants (Bajracharya, 2018).

To overcome these challenges, the government must have strong political will to implement the existing legal and regulatory provisions in a way that encourage the development of community televisions. Budianto (personal communication, December 2, 2014) emphasized that the Ministry of Communication and Information should support community broadcasts to be able to provide the public with alternative programs that compete with the commercial television stations. He stressed that the government should minimize the restrictions imposed on community televisions to access frequency spectrum by adopting the digitalization system. The government also should allow these television stations to obtain public funding.

These suggestions coincide with the recommendations presented by Steve Buckley et al. (2008) that governments should support such small community TVs to be capable to sustain the strong competition from commercial one. They stressed that community broadcasting should be recognized in policy and law as having distinct characteristics and be guaranteed fair and equitable access to the radio frequency spectrum and other broadcast distribution platforms, including digital platforms.

Conclusion

By considering the given data and previous discussions, we conclude that the control of Indonesia television stations in Indonesia has shifted from the control of absolute powers of government to the control and hegemony of owners. This freedom is not a freedom for enhancing television role in creating healthy democracy and educated and prospering communities.

The function of TV as a tool of political education has been minimized due to the commercialization and concentration of ownership.

We find that Indonesian TV stations are struggling to accommodate the interests of the owners on the one hand, and to accommodate the journalistic idealism on the other. There are three general factors negatively affect TV's role as a free public sphere, namely, production constraints, owners' political interests, and commercial aspects of the television industry. We also conclude that concentration of ownership and commercialization have increased television's orientation toward profit and high ratings. It has also minimized the TV's educative role, minimized its neutrality, and increased its function as a tool for fighting political opponents. To strictly adhere to the principles of idealism, credibility, and professionalism will not reduce the profit of television business. Applying these three principles will make television stations more influential on the public, governments, political parties, civil society organizations, and business sector. This in its turn would attract more advertisements and increase the profit of television outlets.

In spite of their commercial orientation, television stations have succeeded in increasing voters' awareness regarding technical aspects of the election. But at the same time, they have failed to provide comprehensive information about the visions and programs of competing candidates. This is because the main concern of TV stations is gaining profit and/or achieving the goals and interest of the economic and political elite.

Moreover, television stations were not independent and free enough to provide objective and balanced reporting about the 2014 legislative election. Television stations have become a means of supporting the politically and economically dominant groups, as well as a mobilizing tool for political parties that are affiliated with the owners of television stations. .

Therefore, we argue that the establishment of innovative and independent community television could be an alternative for commercial TVs in Indonesia. However, there are many serious obstacles hindering the performance of community TVs. These obstacles are, among others, restricted access to frequency spectrum, access to a diversity of funding sources, and low expertise and professional capabilities of human resources.

To overcome this situation, we recommend that the government and the public support the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission to be more powerful to ensure diversity of content, diversity of ownership, public interest, and journalist ethics. The government should provide community TVs with the needed financial and technical supports.

Additionally, TVRI (as a state-owned public service broadcaster) should be empowered to produce high-quality and attractive programs to perform its role in informing, educating, and entertaining the public through diversified contents and balanced coverage. Since TVRI is partially funded by the state budget, the government needs to financially support TVRI by increasing its budget.

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