The Television/Audience Complexities: More than Encoding/Decoding

Muzayin Nazaruddin

Dosen Program Studi Ilmu Komunikasi
Universitas Islam Indonesia (UII), Yogyakarta

Review: Hall, Stuart. 2001. "Encoding/Decoding". In Durham, Meenakshi Gigi and Douglass M. Kellner (eds.). *Media and Cultural Studies: Keyworks.* **Melden and Oxford: Blackwell.**

Hall opened the article with a critique to the classical tradition of mass communication research that looked at the communication process in a linear fashion, with a model of sender/message/receiver. This classical tradition was over concentrated on the message exchange level; excessively behavioristic, in the sense of looking at communication event as solely a stimulus and response phenomenon; and forgets the complexity of the structures that exist in the communication process itself. Hall then suggested a new understanding of the communication phenomenon, especially at the level of mass communication, which is later known as the 'encoding/decoding perspective', in accordance with the title of Hall's article itself.

Encoding/Decoding as New Perspective

Hall has basically followed Marx's idea that every commodity is going through the process of production, circulation, consumption, and reproduction. That is, in a communication event, 'message and meaning' is a commodity, which is produced, distributed, consumed and reproduced. These stages are the moments of communication circulation itself, which each moment has its complex structure and its own modality, but also related to one another to form a circuit as a whole, as 'a complex structure in dominance' (p. 166).

Hall distinguished two moments of communication circuit: encoding and decoding. Encoding occurs when the sender, in this case is television industry, processes event or reality, as the raw material, to be a television program. Hall asserted that reality or event might not be directly displayed as television show. An event should be packed with visual and aural format of television and should be framed as a story with a certain meaning. In other words, reality or event must go through a set of production processes involving certain codes. This encoding process then produces a television show as a 'meaningful discourse' (p.168).