

## ***New Media, Visual Consumption, and Scopophilia: The Use of YouTube by Male as Means of Escapism***

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### ***Abstract***

Uses and gratification theory stated that audiences have media-related needs and they will use media actively and rationally to satisfy those needs. Does this also apply to new media? According to Ruggiero (2000) new media has some characteristic that is interactivity, demassification, and asynchronicity. Lister et al. (2003) also found some characteristics of new media which are digital, interactive, hyper-textual, virtual, networked, and simulated. Therefore, conceptually, the ability of audiences to use new media to satisfy their needs will be greater because they can choose more freely what to do with new media in accordance with their needs. One of the audience's motivations in media use is to escape from routine activities. Eye is the most used sense in new media consumption and Freud (1910) says that seeing activity will produce visual pleasure (scopophilia). However, Mulvey (1989) says that visuality is gendered so whenever a male use their eyes to see female body, they will do what is called by Mulvey as 'male gaze' which is seeing activity that put female as sexual object of male visuality. YouTube is a site that presents so many video contents that can be selected by the audiences to watch. This paper examines how 'male gaze' is performed as visual consumption on YouTube as means of escapism.

***Keyword:*** *uses and gratification, new media, visual consumption, scopophilia, male gaze, escapism*

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## Visual Consumption and New Media

There's no doubt that today we are living in a visual culture. Television, film, magazine, newspapers, internet, billboards, t-shirts and many others media is full of images so we can't escape from being exposed to hundreds of images every day. So, there's no way that we can't consume visual image today.

However, what is so important about consuming image? Schroeder (2002: 5-6) argues that an image serves as a stimulus, a text, or a representation that drives cognition, interpretation, and preference. But, images can only be interpreted within a culture. Because culture is dynamic and always changing, then so does the interpretive meanings of images is dynamic, always changing, never complete or closed, but always contested and debated.

Patrick and Kelly Fuery (2003: xi-xii) explained that visual culture has an elements which is images, culture, and spectators. Image can have power and can affect us. Why is that? In fact, it is our own self that create an interpretation of the images. This interpretation allows us to be influenced by the images. In the process of interpreting images, we are highly dependent on culture. Without culture, there are no possible interpretations of the images. The relation of images and culture are not one way but two way because images are created and interpreted based on the knowledge that we get from culture. Vice versa, this experience of creating and interpreting images also reshapes or maintains the culture. Finally, images are not always images. Images only become images when consumed by someone or being visible. This is the birth process of spectators. Becoming a spectator is the only way for us to become part of visual culture.

If becoming a spectator is the only way to become part of visual culture, then the question is how does people consume visual images? What are the characteristics of their spectatorship? Are the spectators passively consumed whatever image they are exposed to

or actively search for images according to their needs?

Becoming a spectator means to become an audience. So, the questions above can be understood as questions about the nature of audience. If we see the history of mass communication and media studies, we'll know that the relation between media and its audience has been important topic since the beginning of mass communication and media studies (Machor and Goldstein, 2001: 205). However, this topic is a very debatable topic. The main question in those debates is: is media really having power to affect audiences or, otherwise, audiences have power to be free from media influence? Because of this question, the theorist of mass communication and media studies is split into two factions. The first faction says that media is powerful and audiences are weak. The most prominent figure in this faction is critical theorist Theodor Adorno. The second faction says that media is not so powerful and audiences have power to create their own meaning of media texts that could be different from the intended meaning of the producer of those media texts. The most prominent figure of this faction is John Fiske (Gaunlett, 2002: 19).

However, audience must be considered as a key concept of media studies and therefore we need theories to conceptualize them. The main theories of audience research have been: effects model, uses and gratifications theory, encoding/decoding model, and ethnography (Lacey, 2002: 144). What about now, which theory is best to use in studying audience in the era of new media?

Baran and Davis (2012:249-251) said that the ongoing development and diffusion of new internet applications is resulting the revival of interest in uses and gratification theory. This interest in uses and gratification theory is based on argument inferred from Thomas Ruggiero (2000) identification of computer-mediated mass communication that offer a vast continuum of communication behaviors for uses and gratification researchers to examine.

Those are interactivity, demassification, and asynchroniety.

Interactivity is important because this concept is strengthens the core notion of audience as active user. Demassification is important because this concept put the audience in a position out of the concept of 'mass' as it emphasized audiences as individuals with their own individuals need. Asynchroniety is important because this concept tell us about how people use new media in different time but still interact at their convenience. In other words, asynchroniety is about the ability of new media for time-space distanciation.

Lister et al. (2003: 13) also found some characteristics of new media that's not so different with what Rugeiro has found. Those characteristics are digital, interactive, hyper-textual, virtual, networked, and simulated. Therefore, conceptually, the ability of audiences to use new media to satisfy their needs will be greater because they can choose more freely what to do with new media in accordance with their needs.

So, what does uses and gratification theory says about audience? Uses and gratification theory actually was a response to unflattering view of typical audience members such as in mass society concept (audience as victims of the powerful forces of the mass media) and limited effect perspective (audience is different in personal characteristics and in social group membership so the effect of media is different and limited). This theory was formalized by theorist Elihu Katz, Jay G. Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch. They presented a systematic and comprehensive view of audience as active people seek out specific media and specific content to generate specific gratifications. This view is based on argument that audience is able to examine and evaluate various types of media to accomplish communication goals (West and Turner, 2010: 393).

However, uses and gratification theory is developed through stages. Herta Herzog (1944)

began the first stage of uses and gratification research. She wanted to know and classify the reasons people engage in different forms of media behavior. Herzog then interviewed dozens of soap opera fans and identified three major types of gratification which is emotional release, engage in wishful thinking, and learn from experiences the soap opera tell. The second stage of uses and gratification research is begun when researchers created typologies representing all the reasons people had for media use. McQuail, Blumler, and Brown (1972) found that media use could be categorized with only four basic divisions: diversion, personal relationships, personal identity, and surveillance. Katz, Gurevitch, and Hadassah Haas (1973) found that media use could be categorized with only two basic divisions: connection with others and separation with others. Rubin (1981) found that media use could be categorized in categories such as: passing time, companionship, excitement, escape, enjoyment, social interaction, relaxation, obtaining information, and learning about a specific content. The third and most recent stage, uses and gratifications researchers are trying to make the theory more explanative and predictive. They are also interested in linking specific reasons for media use with variables such as needs, goals, benefits, the consequences of media use, and individual factors. Rubin and Step (2000) conducted a study that examined the relationship of motivation, interpersonal attraction, and parasocial interaction to listening to public affairs talk radio. They found that a motivation for exciting entertainment and information acquisition interacted with perceptions of the parasocial relationship to explain why listeners tuned in to talk radio and why they found a host credible (West and Turner, 2010: 395-396).

Back to the question about how people consume visual images, we could assume that audience as individuals will have their own needs of visual images and they will use the new media to gratify those needs. Why new media? Because new media give them ability to freely search and choose what kind of

images they want to see to gratify their needs. One site that specifically presents video as moving images to audience is *YouTube*. This site is founded in February 2005 and now has become a very popular site. The evidence of the popularity of *YouTube* is number of people who access the site either to watch or upload videos. This popularity is because YouTube contains millions of videos such as music video clips, movies, trailers, commercials, home video documentations, video journalism, and tutorials video on variety of fields. In Indonesia, celebrities such as Norman Kamaru or Shinta-Jojo get their popularity because of their video in *YouTube*.

### **Gendered Visual Consumption: Scopophilia and Male Gaze**

As mentioned before, in the age of visual culture, we are surrounded by different sorts of visual technologies and the images they produce. But, the most important thing is that all the images produced and showed is never be transparent window on to the world. This image is interpreting the world. They display it in very particular ways. Thus a distinction is sometimes made between vision and visuality. Vision is what the human eye is physiologically capable of seeing. Visuality, on the other hand, refers to way in which vision is constructed in various ways. Another phrase with very similar connotations to visuality is a scopic regime. Both terms refer to the ways in which both what is seen and how it is seen are culturally constructed (Rose, 2002: 6).

One of the most important works in visuality is psychoanalysis. Sigmund Freud suggested that *scopophilia* (pleasure in looking) was one of the basic drives with which all (sighted) children are born. Furthermore, Freud argues that certain moments of seeing and particular visualization are central to how subjectivities and sexualities are formed (Rose, 2002: 100).

The term 'subjectivity' refers to viewers characteristics that viewers is make sense of

themselves and their worlds through a whole range of complex and often non rational ways of understanding. Viewers can feel, can dream, can fantasize, and can take pleasure. In other words, subjectivity is some kind of emotional states. In relation to the visual, this means that visual images could have emotional effects to their viewers. But, psychoanalysis emphasized that understanding emotional reactions to visual images requires the recognition that not all of those reactions are working at a wholly conscious level. Some reactions may be coming from the unconscious (Rose, 2002: 103).

What is the unconscious? Why is it matter? The unconscious in psychoanalytic understanding is a product of a process where very young children learn to repress their culturally forbidden drives and instinct because they are to be disciplined by cultural rules and values. Those repressed drives and instinct is now in a hidden and forbidden zone of our personality and that is the part of the unconscious. The unconscious is forbidden zone in two senses. First, it's forbidden because the conscious mind cannot access it. Second, it's forbidden because it is full of outlawed drives and energies and logics. But, even in a state of hidden and forbidden, the unconscious nevertheless has its effects on our conscious selves. Thus because of the unconscious, subjectivity, in psychoanalytic terms, is never fully conscious, coherent or complete. We can never fully know ourselves, according to psychoanalysis, because the unconscious remains beyond self consciousness; and our conscious selves are always likely to be infiltrated by excursions from the unconscious (Rose, 2002: 103).

Mulvey (1989) in her studies of film draws on Freud in proposing the term scopophilia. She is drawing attention to the pleasure of looking. It suggests that the female in the film is both the object of desire and a passive object within the action. The gaze of the male spectator identifies with the desire of the male protagonist in the film and with that protagonist's part in driving the film narrative. The gaze of the female spectator identifies with the women as object within the

film a passive gaze for a passive role. This is a process of objectification where the women are turned into an object of desire (Burton, 2005: 194).

Mulvey argues precisely that visuality is structured in this gendered way. She claims that in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly'. Thus sexual difference is understood relationally: visions of femininity depend on the vision of masculinity, and vice versa (Rose, 2002: 108).

Jenks (1995: 150) says that this process of gazing of women become what he call a gendered imbalance of ocular practice in the public arena where women do not look but they are looked at. Put it simply, women are prey to the harassment of male optical gratification. So, there's possibility that in their activity of exploring videos in *YouTube* male will use this site to gratify their male optical need.

### **Research Question**

Is male use *YouTube* as a means to gaze at the female body? What kind of need is this process of searching and viewing videos based on? Does this activity of using *YouTube* gratify their need? What kind of pleasure that male gained from this gazing activities? What is the effect of this process of visual consumption on women position in society?

### **Research Method**

Research strategy used in this research is ethnography. Ethnography is a research strategy to study the way of life and culture of a particular community and conducted by spending time together doing activities with the community under study in a certain period of time. This is also known as participating observation (Pawito, 2007: 150-152)

The research participant is selected using judgmental sampling methods. The criteria are:

male, opinion leader of the community, internet literate, watch *YouTube* almost daily and seen video that contains content that show women bodies repeatedly and intentionally. This criterion is used to ensure that the participant selected is rich of information. In depth interview is used to collect data from research participant. The verbatim transcript of the interview will be analyzed using open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Neumann, 2003: 442-445). The verbatim transcript of the interview then will be interpreted using psychoanalysis and uses and gratification theory concept such as active audience, needs for media use, and gratification.

Psychoanalysis often takes the form of a therapeutic practice but in visual culture studies, psychoanalytic concepts are used to interpret aspects of visual images and in particular their effects on spectators. Psychoanalysis does not have a strict code of methodological conduct like content analysis, nor does it operate on a 'tool-box' model. Rather, psychoanalytic critics often work with just one or two psychoanalytic concepts, exploring their articulation or rearticulating through a particular image (Rose, 2002: 101).

### **Male Use of YouTube**

The community selected in this study is the male community of FISIPOL UKI Jakarta Futsal Club. This community was chosen because the researcher is an insider of the club so it is easier for researcher to obtain data because familiarity and mutual trust is already established between researcher and members of the community. Researcher has known them for about four years. Specifically for the purposes of this research, researcher spent two weeks to hang out with them.

The male members of this community are used to gather and hang out at the campus cafeteria. That's why other students call them the cafeteria boys (*anak-anak kantin*) and that distinguish them with other group of students that used to gather and hang out at the roofed



seating area in the university garden (*anak-anak payungan*). They know about this label and sometimes also use it to refer themselves.

They mostly chat about football: their match or international match. Sometimes they also chat about politics or their coursework assignment. Interestingly, while chatting they also silently gazed the female students that are eating in the cafeteria. The female student they gaze is usually not one of their friends and when they find female student that they consider as beautiful, cute, or sexy, then they will tell other members about that female student. So that other members can find that female student easily, they use clock position as directional instruction. After that, they will discuss that female student. They start ask if anyone know her or her friends, from what department she is, then began to give comments on her about her face, hair, skin, the way she dressed, the way she sit, even her breasts and buttocks.

The status of their relationship is varied. Some had a girlfriend, others did not. Those who didn't have a girlfriend are usually ridiculed. Just for a joke and not to insult. They call it '*ceng-cengan*'. The male students who has a girl friend is not actively gaze the female students that are eating in the cafeteria or giving comments about the girls. However, when they took part to comment, other members will tease them by threatening to tell their girl friend about that. The members who didn't have girl friend is more active in gazing and giving comments about the female student. However, as already mentioned, this activity was short and they were so onto return on their discussions about football.

All of the student is internet literate and uses the internet frequently. But after spending time hanging out with this male student's community, the informant selected in this research is 22 years old student called Bryan. Bryan is chosen because he is one of the opinion leaders of this community and actively talking about girls. Most of the members of the

community also admit that Bryan is popular among the girls. Bryan is internet literate. He uses the internet 3-4 times a week and each time lasted between three to four hours. Bryan accesses the internet using internet modem when he is at home and uses Wi-Fi hotspot when he is not at home. Bryan ethnicity is Ambonese and he is the youngest son of his family. He has one older brother who's an alumni member of the futsal club.

When this research is conducted Bryan didn't have a girlfriend. He is in the final semester of his study and was working on bachelor thesis. His main activity is working on his bachelor thesis. Therefore, his greatest need of the media is information and entertainment. He was looking for information about book or other references or data for his bachelor thesis and entertainment to escape from the tension and boredom he felt because of the bachelor thesis project.

Bryan says that he used internet because internet has some advantages as source of information. Internet gives him the freedom to be able to find any information he needs. Bryan admits that he is very satisfied in using internet as source of information. In his own words: 'so far, I always found what I seek on the internet'. Bryan also claimed to use new media to interact with his friends through social media like twitter and Facebook. In addition to seeking information and social interaction, Bryan admits that he also used internet as mean to shop.

Bryan tells that both televisions and new media are entertaining but he prefers new media than television. That's because, according to Bryan, 'I like internet more than television because television programs now are not fun, monotonous, and too similar'. He argues that new media is entertaining because the audience themselves could decide what kind of entertainment they want and search it freely in the new media. But Bryan said that sometimes he still enjoyed the entertainment from television and still watch news program

in television to get recent information about events in the world regularly.

Bryan said that every time he accesses the internet he always access YouTube. That's because Bryan is a fans of football and American musician called Pitbull. He loves to watch video about football such as football player's biography, amazing goals, or football on-field brawls. Bryan loves to hear Pitbull music and watch Pitbull video clips. In his own words: 'indeed, every time I access the internet, I always spend time to access YouTube'. Bryan also said that he always watched Pitbull video clips in each time he access YouTube.

Bryan thinks that Pitbull video clips are very interesting. When asked what is interesting from Pitbull videos, Bryan refers to the female models that appear in the video. In his own words: "the models face is very beautiful and their bodies are very sexy". Furthermore, Bryan explained what the criteria of sexy women are. In his own words: "they have meaty and curvy bodies, especially in the breast and bottom area" and "they have big breasts and butt". Bryan even compares the models that appears in Pitbull video clips and Korean artist that appears in Korean Pop video clips. In his own words: "Asian women are too skinny, nothing to compare with Latin women". But Bryan emphasized that skin color is not an important criterion of a sexy woman. White, black, Asian or Latin is really doesn't matters.

Bryan said that the models that appear in the video are his ideal type of girlfriend. He said that if he manages to have girlfriend with body similar to those models he will be very happy and take sexual benefit from those body. Then, when asked about inner beauties, Bryan said that inner beauties are indeed an important criterion but even if the sexy girl he met really doesn't have inner beauties or with bad personality, he still wants to be their boyfriend then added: "but just for a short period".

Bryan said that he enjoys watching Pitbull video clips because those video clips

is refreshing. He said that as a student he gets bored easily because of assignments he gets from his lecturers and the bachelor thesis he has to write. He wants to escape from those boring routine activities. In his own words: "I watch those videos when I get bored with assignments and get stuck when I wrote my bachelor thesis", and "after I watch those video I became fresh again".

Bryan admits that he gets some kind of pleasure when he watches those videos. There's unique sensation that he doesn't get from other media. Bryan says that: "it's because I'm a man and man loves to see sexy women". When asked, "thanyou must be a fan of porn movies?" Bryan responded that as men he normally wouldn't say that he dislikes porn movies, but there's different sensation between watching video clips and porn movies. In his own words: "sexy appearance in video clips creates imaginations, porn movies show nude women and nudity cannot create imaginations". He explains that those video clips he watches is exposing something that made him imagine himself as the artist surrounded by many beautiful women. He also said that most of his friends that watch the same video also have the same imaginations. In his own words: "I have an imagination that I was like Pitbull, surrounded by many beautiful women. It must be very nice to be that close to many sexy women at one time".

When asked if he had an experience of being close to many beautiful women at one time, Bryan answers that he had been in that situation but very rarely. In his own words: "when I was clubbing, I met and introduce myself to those beautiful girls". Bryan added that in this kind of situation, he started to remember what he sees in those video clips. He starts to wonder that is his imagination will become reality or not. In his own words: "I start to think about possibility that what I see in those videos will become reality because now I've met many beautiful women in the club".

Bryan then tells his experience with more details. He said: "when I see sexy women, I was

inspired by Pitbull; I want to be close physically to those sexy women". He also added: "those Pitbull video clips actually inspired us to seduce those beautiful girls. So, when I met those beautiful girls I start to copy what I see on those videos. I ask myself how to seduce those beautiful girls".

When asked is his plan to get close to those girls physically is succeeding, Bryan responded: "no, I don't have enough gut to do it". Bryan added: "at first, I want to try. I think it might be works, but then I realize that what I see is just video clips and video clips are really different with real life". Why is Bryan being afraid? Bryan says that: I will be embarrassed if the women I seduce will say no to me and thinks of me as pervert men".

Bryan admits that before watching those video clips, he is satisfied just by looking at any beautiful women he met. But after watching those video clips he feels that these experiences of looking at beautiful women become more enjoyable. That's because the video give him some materials to think about to create imaginations about the women he is looking at. In his own words: "pleasure is in the videos" and when I see beautiful women after I watch those videos; I could create imaginations about those women I gazed"

### **Interpretation**

At least, we could make three interpretations of Bryan experiences. First, we could interpret Bryan visuality or scopic regime. Second, we could interpret how Bryan operates his 'male gaze'. Third, we could interpret what kind of pleasure that Bryan enjoy or Bryan scopophilia.

Visuality or scopic regime is about how some image is seen in some cultural construction. Bryan thinks that's those video clips he watches is interesting because those video is showing a beautiful and sexy female models. Bryan does not have any rational argument to explain why beautiful and sexy female models are interesting

to watch. Bryan only says that because he is a man so he thinks of it as interesting. This mean that he takes it for granted that women bodies is something interesting to see and because of that reason, those videos indeed are interesting. Bryan also takes it for granted that men must be loves to see sexy female bodies. So, it's obvious that Bryan visuality or scopic regime is patriarchal. The male student community culture is also patriarchal culture and the member's visuality or scopic regime is also patriarchal. It's showed from the way they gazed and talked about the female students at the campus cafeteria. Bryan and the members of the male student's community, unconsciously accept that patriarchal value that women are a passive sexual object and men is an active sexual subject. That's why when he talks about the criteria of sexy women, Bryan is only talking about physical criteria. This is a process where sexual differences and sexual imbalance is created.

Bryan operates his "male gaze" in two ways. First, by search on video that contains content that show women bodies using new media such as *YouTube*. Second, in public arena where he uses his eye to gaze any beautiful or sexy women he met. But gazing activity actually is determined by subjectivity. Subjectivity as mentioned before refers to the emotional effects that arise from viewer complex and non-rational ways to interpret the vision they see. The key concept here is imaginations or fantasy. When Bryan watches those video clips, Bryan is not just consume images of female models but he also receive symbols as materials that he could use to construct his own sexual fantasy or imaginations. Bryan than use this sexual fantasy or imagination when he looks at women bodies in the real life. In his mind, he could construct and reconstruct many sexual fantasy or imagination on many women. In this process, female bodies become "a toy" totally under the control of male minds. This is what Jenks called as a gendered imbalance of ocular practice where women in the public arena are



turned into an object of desire to gratify men optical sexual needs.

Bryan scopophilia or visual pleasure is a result of his unconscious reaction of those videos. Bryan actually has learned to repress his sexual desires because those sexual desires are culturally forbidden. But, when he watch those videos that contains content that show women bodies, those sexual desires are leak out from his forbidden and hidden unconsciousness. This leak out reduce the mental or emotional tensions that he feel in his self and that is the pleasure he get. But this process furthermore becomes a cycle. First, he represses his sexual desires because it was culturally forbidden. Second, he unconsciously uses YouTube videos to let these sexual desires to leak out from his unconsciousness. Third, in real life, he learns to do the same thing he does with video contents. Fourth, in real life he faces problem that is in spite of he could create sexual imagination or fantasy about any women he met, but it is still just a fantasy or imagination so the sexual desires he feel is not satisfied. He gets new challenge about how to satisfy those sexual desires. In this matter Bryan again face the social and cultural boundaries on sexual desires gratification. Bryan repressed his sexual desires again because he was afraid that people will think of him as pervert men. Because of Bryan repressed his sexual desires, he then back to the first stage and the cycle is restarting.

## **Conclusion**

Male is using YouTube as a means to gaze at the female body. This process of searching and watching videos is based on two different needs at two different levels. First, is the need to escape from routine activities such as working on assignments or write bachelor thesis. This need is at the conscious level of personality. Second, is the need to reduce the tensions because of those sexual desires that people repress as the demand of social and cultural norms and values. This need is at the unconscious level of personality. This need is manifested into male optical sexual need.

By watching those video clips that contain content that show female bodies, viewer is gratifying their needs at their conscious level of personality and at their unconscious level of personality. Furthermore, those unconscious needs which are constrained by social and cultural boundaries could be released only by watching those video clips.

The scopophilia or visual pleasure that viewer get from watching those video clips is the reduction of mental or emotional tensions that they feel. But these process is then become a cycle. The video reduces the mental or emotional tensions they feel but real life experiences produce another mental or emotional tensions related to sexual desire.

This visual consumption using YouTube to gaze at female bodies has consequences on women position in society. The video itself represent women in typical way as sexual objects. These representations always show women with physical criteria such as curvy and meaty bodies with big breast and bottom. The effects of this representation are that men then adopt these criteria as the criteria of ideal women. In real life, women with that type of bodies could be harassed by male gaze of their bodies and create a sexual fantasy or imagination about them without they even realize it. At the other side, women with different type of bodies become less appreciated.

This condition shows us that women are still in a position that inferior to men in society. Men are active sexual subject while women are passive sexual object. Men are controlling women sexuality. So, we could say that this video and process of consuming those video visually is a process where patriarchy is reproduced in society. Woman in patriarchy is cursed to occupy the place of signifier for the male others, who can give free reign to his fantasies or imaginations, obsessions, and, what is more, implicate her in them.

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