Fetish of sneakers and youth lifestyle simulation representation in Indonesia

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Abstract. One of the prestige of young people’s identity today is through fashion. Fashion has even become a “religion” that binds the identity of the individual who wears it. The Sneaker, a form of fashion, also has a big role; even now, it has become a commodity and prestige with a fetish nuance. Therefore, this study aims to identify how the sneaker fetish becomes a space for simulating the lives of young people in Indonesia. Furthermore, this study also examines the problem of the representation of youth-lifestyle simulations in Indonesia. This research uses a qualitative case study approach to play on Jean Baudrillard’s approach to simulacra and hyperreality, which also discusses David Chaney’s approach to fashion. Data collection was obtained from audience studies by examining tagging on social media, Instagram, from July 2022 to October 2022. The results of the study show that the sneaker trend does not only act as a complement to appearances, more than that, but it can also display the personal identity of the wearer. A sneaker community also facilitates the lifestyle of young people towards sneakers. Finally, the community shifted the concept of young people towards sneaker consumption to be more consumptive than before. On the other hand, young people do not realize that what they have done is a hyperreality that tries to identify itself with the best possible image and continues to shape it through massive consumption activities. This is where the sneaker concept shifts from a “community” to a “commodity”.

Keywords: fetish, representation, simulation, sneaker, youth-lifestyle.

INTRODUCTION

As part of society, young people have different cultural characteristics in their respective regions. Furthermore, each culture has specific social characteristics. So when a group of young people migrate from one cultural environment to another, they experience social processes that affect the pattern of adaptation and the formation of their new identity1. Culture in a new area as a goal provides a

1 New groups, new definitions of life stories, and meanings of identity are forces that change cultural expressions and social behaviour towards them as
new framework for traditions because it also provides a formulation and standard for measuring values for the life of a group of people. Including how the trend of young people towards the sneaker phenomenon became a lifestyle.

In Indonesia, culture is a historically transmitted pattern of meaning embodied in symbols (Daddesio [2013]: 9). It is an inherited system of conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by which humans communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge and attitudes towards life (Roudometof [2016]: 113; Svasek [2012]: 39). The relationship between sneakers and young people’s lives to become a culture has regional boundaries. The three negotiate as a group, where each cultural agent looks for the meaning of the Indonesian society’s symbols. The symbols and meanings used by a group of young people result from the mutual agreement in a group or community. Sneakers as a symbol that is a behavioural guide for all members of the youth community in a society (Brace-Govan & de Burgh-Woodman [2008]: 188). Through these prerequisites, the sneaker trend is finally formed as one of the cultural identities in scope.

Symbols and behaviour of a society can also be explained by analyzing the context in which the construction of the symbol was constructed (Daddesio [2013]: 11). Therefore, the sign or symbol is no longer a condensation of meaning but depends on the multi-meaning of the social group it refers to. Meanwhile, cultural reproduction occurs when immigrants affirm their cultural identity, such as the culture of origin. The process aims to assert its existence in Indonesian social life, which requires adaptation to groups with different cultural backgrounds.

At the same time, the sneaker has reproduced itself as a cultural agent in a new trend that explains the contemporary change (Noland [2009]: 77). Therefore the area of culture is no longer important in the process of giving meaning to one’s personal life when an individual move from one place to another which makes his cultural area change. Thus, the original identity of young people (which in the context of this research is Indonesia) originates and grows in the end into history and life stories that they cannot leave because it will turn into their life guide in his new trend area. This dynamic process will occur continuously along with the ongoing interaction between general or social characteristics until it becomes a fetish symptom.

The symptom of the sneaker fetish refers to the theory of cultural construction, which is an important basis for explaining sneaker adaptation as fashion to construct the identity of young Indonesians (Bide [2021]: 5). The fetish symptom of sneakers appears because of a new group of different people (Skeates [2016]: 11). This grouping is a process of adaptation of newcomers, which means forming new social relationships. Subsequently, the sneaker worn by young people was redefined as a new stage of life took shape. This stage may have very different meanings for a person because their social environment is different from the environment they were in before. Finally, there is a process of giving new meaning to someone and guiding him to redefine his identity and cultural origin through the use of sneakers.

Cultural practices will always experience a process of reproduction, reproduction and even commercialization that go hand in hand with the gradual development of modernity. Furthermore, the transmission process depends on the individuals who play a role in the cultural arena. Therefore, referring to one of the prestige of young people’s identities today is fashion. Fashion has even become a “religion” that binds the identity of the individual who wears it. So, the sneaker, a form of fashion, also has a big role; even now, it has become a commodity and prestige with a fetish nuance. Therefore, this study aims to identify how the sneaker fetish becomes a space for simulating the lives of young people in Indonesia. Furthermore, this study also examines the problem of

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2 Cultural reproduction in the context of the sneaker trend for young people is a meeting of several different cultures that influence each other, resulting in a new culture containing elements of these cultures (Adom [2019]; Brady et al. [2018]).
METHODS

This research uses a qualitative audience studies approach to Jean Baudrillard’s approach to simulacra and hyperreality (Baudrillard [2018]: 22; Baudrillard & Johnston [2007]: 31), which also discusses David Chaney’s approach to fashion (Chaney [2019]: 12; Gartman & Chaney [2003]: 98). Data collection was obtained from audience studies by examining tagging on social media, Instagram, from July 2022 to October 2022.

This research emphasizes the approach’s interactivity, demassification, and asynchronous aspects. The presence of an interactive virtual community through the development of web 2.0 has become an enabler factor for young sneaker fans to communicate interactively. The capabilities of this new communication system facilitate young people to communicate almost as in a face-to-face conversation. The level of internet interactivity is close to the level of interpersonal communication so that participants can communicate more accurately, effectively, and satisfactorily. Therefore, by conducting a critical study of the phenomenon of the virtual sneaker community, we can provide a perspective on how massive the sneaker trend is in Indonesia. Furthermore, with demassification, a specific message can be exchanged individually between the young fetish sneaker. Demassification also means that control or control of mass communication systems usually shifts from producers to consumers, which indicates the emergence of community transitions to commodities (Altinay & Williams [2019]: 90). Then, asynchronous gives the characteristics that fetish sneaker and youth lifestyle simulation can send and receive messages at times desired by each agent, which distinguishes it from old media, which are synchronous, which requires communication to occur at the same time by both parties, such as conversation by telephone or face to face communication represented through the use of sneakers. Furthermore, the analysis is carried out with Jean Baudrillard’s approach to simulacra and hyperreality, which also discusses David Chaney’s approach to fashion.

DISCUSSION

FASHION AND CULTURE DIALOGUE: THE BEGINNING OF FETISH SNEAKERS SYMPTOMS IN INDONESIA

Sneakers and fashion are interrelated and complementary. The sneaker, originally used as a complement to the needs and footwear, has now developed as a supporter of one’s appearance and identity. Social interaction between sneaker users creates new thinking about the meaning of fashion as a social identity and leads to fetish symptoms. Lookism is when someone wants to be seen at the same time without any dominance. Thus, young people see sneakers as a fashion to increase their status and to be noticed by others. And lookism as an early symptom of a fetish against cultural products.

Before, some young people using sneakers were known to have an ordinary appearance. However, after using sneakers and joining the sneaker community, he changed his appearance and fashion to become more trendy to have an advantageous position in his social arena (Bauer et al. [1999]: 107). Symptoms of sneaker fetishes are increasingly visible when sneaker, as a cultural entity, stimulates their users always to display a luxurious fashion style. Usually, a sneaker fetish person also uses a variety of expensive branded clothes, which makes fashion not only a complement and support for everyday life.

3 Sneakers become a symbolic entity when young people want to be someone who is not too dominant in society but still pays attention to their appearance and always develops their fashion style (Brace-Govan & de Burgh-Woodman [2008]).

4 The meaning of sneakers for their social identity is as a self-image and obtaining the social status desired by young people (see Furnham & Bachtiar [2008]; Peirson-Smith [2013]).
The sneaker fetish causes a hyperreality of the sneaker’s meaning. Not only as a fashion but also as an identity displayed by its users. The sneaker is a favourite and creates a sense of comfort for its users. In addition, it can help raise the social status of the assessment held by the public regarding sneakers as goods from well-known brands. Young people who always look trendy and fashionable in front of the public, supported by various fashion brands, can create their social identity. When identity is created through a sneaker fetish, a hyper-reality world or a world that transcends reality (hyper-reality) is created. Hyperreality is a reality that is artificial or superficial, created through the help of simulation technology and imaging engineering, which takes over the natural world of reality (Baudrillard & Lane [2000]: 223); then it models of reality which have no reference to reality.

Hyperreality defines sneakers as a world of constructing social identity. Moreover, their lifestyle is very important. The meaning of sneakers in the scope of hyperreality is not only as fashion but also as a form of self-image in front of others which aims to be seen, observed and hopes to be an example for the viewer (Holt et al. [2013]: 184). Identity is the main reason young people form their social identity through sneakers and gain a legitimate position in the Indonesian sneaker world as “old kids”. “The old kids” is a term for members who have been in the sneaker world for a long time and are usually filled by people who are already active in the forum for forming the sneaker community in Indonesia. The same thing happened to the meaning of sneakers among young people in Indonesia, where they tried to present their identity as good as possible, as high as possible, in front of other members.

Hyperreality defines sneakers as a world that constructs social identity. They are willing to make secondary and even tertiary needs into primary needs while their primary needs are left aside. Fetish is increasingly visible even though it is ironic, namely when the hedon phenomenon through sneakers is inversely proportional to the original life, which is still improvised, and various primary needs are not fulfilled (Kelly [2018]: 189). In addition, fetishes can be seen in construction through social media by portraying themselves on Instagram social media accounts with posts about very “branded” clothing styles (Al-Gailani [2009]: 72). Of course, with recent photos, photo filter edits and the composition of the items worn are of added value.

FASHION THROUGH SNEAKERS: YOUTH IDENTITY, YOUTH LIFESTYLE IDENTITY

According to the environment in which the self is located, identity in the social realm does have different functions, but this identity is special and can change at certain times. Identity itself is a key element of subjective reality (Segre Reinach [2012]: xxi). Like all subjective reality, it has a dialectical relationship with society; and social processes form identity. Once it is formed, it will be preserved, modified, or even transformed by social relations. The social structure determines the social processes involved in forming and maintaining identity through sneakers. On the other hand, personal identity and social structure respond to certain social structures, maintain them, modify them or remodel them (Brady et al. [2018]: 44). Depending on the environment in which the self is located, identity in the social sphere has different functions. However, identity is always special and will change over time. Identity itself is a key element of subjective reality. It comes from understanding being part of a social group with various norms, values and emotional ties that process within the group (Green & Feldman-Barrett [2022]: 8). This is a collective identity and does not require all social group members to know each other and have close personal relationships.

5 Hyperreality has no reference or reference to reality but refers to itself (self-reference) as a «trendsetter» or «one of the carriers of the sneaker trend» (Holt et al. [2013]; Johansson [2017]).

6 It can be concluded that the social identity of young people through the sneaker fetish is part of a person's
The culture in a society determines the way of communicating and the behaviour of the individuals who are members. Young people always interpret their actions and attitudes based on their cultural values, both as individuals and as members of a sneaker group (Bruggeman [2017]; Hwang [2017]). Their expression and behaviour in satisfaction are influenced by cultural variables practised in the form of rules or norms. Therefore, culture is a major determinant in many community decision-making even though there are contradictory interactions between Indonesian urban society’s global and local nature. Contradictory interactions make the psychological orientation of young people towards sneakers influenced by the role of the conventional environment, which is contrary to the principle of independent modern individuals (Batchelor et al. [2020]: 65). This combination is the core of the practice of socializing traditional values in Indonesian urban society, which is a form of public acceptance of their dependence on modernity, tradition, and individual groups. Although sneakers as a form of modernity will continue to demand the development of old values into new values, the assimilation between the two will form subtle differences between the various types of modernity in each conventional habit (Liu [2022]: 10).

Moreover, the sneaker is included in modernization which is often driven by purely economic interests, which is predicted only to become a homogenization process because, in the end, it will eliminate cultural diversity, which in the end only makes the sneaker community or young people a soulless economic entity. In this paper, reproduction is considered a cultural phenomenon. In the current era of cultural globalization, the process of cultural reproduction in the form of art to literature is centred on the community or the collective (Kavanagh et al. [2021]: 9; Sraml [2022]: 4). So, to explain the cultural phenomena contained in sneakers, use the perspective of cultural reproduction to understand the existing symptoms. This is what is now being done by young people in responding to sneakers, namely reinterpreting lifestyle or fashion to their identity.

Identity is an ambiguous idea, where there is a difference between identity and character that is difficult to distinguish, which in the context of this research is the sneaker trend as a lifestyle and a symptom of a fetish. Identity is also a code that defines youth membership in various communities, and consists of many symbols interpreted simultaneously in a community group (Bourdieu [1999]: 388). Identity is a concept about who we are and what we perceive as a person. At the same time, identity is a form of self-understanding and self-labelling (Bonnett [2017]: 38). The definition of identity has a broad meaning. Identity is dynamic and diverse; from this character, identity is not static but changes according to the function and life experience of an individual as a human being. Therefore there is a specific definition of cultural identity.

Humans cannot live only in one identity because they need other identities, especially cultural ones that cannot be considered more important than other identities. Therefore, when we want to understand or even determine a person’s cultural identity, we cannot only judge it from the physiological or biological characteristics of the person. Nevertheless, we also need to examine the factors that influence it in terms of thought and detail the psychological aspects. Society is divided into different groups, and each considers itself representative of a particular culture, which in the context of this research is sneakers as a youth lifestyle (Bainbridge et al. [2018]: 41). Sneakers as a youth lifestyle within the scope of cultural identity will determine whether individuals belong to...

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7 As mentioned that cultural identity is a person’s sense of belonging or subordination to a particular culture (see Airriess et al. [2012]; Hobsbawm & Ranger [2012]; Svasek [2012]).
internal groups or external groups, depending on how the application of their cultural identity is manifested regularly or not.

The identity of sneaker culture as a youth lifestyle formed in social life will affect the self-perception of every young person as a member of society. Their cultural identity strongly influences how they see themselves and their behaviour. Sneaker as a youth lifestyle within the scope of identity includes the following three cultural contexts: individual, community, and public. Thus, the sneaker’s identity as a youth lifestyle is the main link between youth and society. Communication is the link that makes this relationship happen, which is formed through different stages. Sneaker as a youth lifestyle develops through a process that includes several stages, namely (1) conscious and unintentional cultural identity, which occurs due to the process of interaction in everyday life; (2) The search for cultural identity, namely the process of exploring, questioning, and proving identity. The community can do this with cultural identity or other parties. When we want to find identity from other cultures, this process is what we often do; (3) The acquired cultural identity is a form of identity, which is characterized by a clear belief in one’s self-acceptance through cultural internalization, thus forming that person’s identity; (4) Conformity: internalization, namely the process of identity formation from internalization helps to make our norms equal (in accordance) with the dominant norms, or can change the norms that we have assimilated into mainstream culture. At this stage, people often see themselves through the lens of mainstream culture rather than the culture of origin; (5) Resistance and separatism, this process of identity formation usually takes place in the lives of minority groups of a nation, race or even religion. The behaviour of this society is to completely reject the dominant cultural norms; (6) Integration, namely the formation of culture, is carried out through a process of cultural integration. The process of a person or group of people developing a new identity as a result of the integration of various cultures in the sneaker community spread across Indonesia.

YOUTH LIFESTYLE SIMULATION REPRESENTATION THROUGH VIRTUAL COMMUNITY

A community is a collection of social groups consisting of individuals who come from different backgrounds, have a place to live, are interested in sharing the same things, and care about one another. Their relationship is usually strong because they share the same values and interests. Currently, the human community includes two types of life, namely real life and virtual community life, which arise due to the impact of social media, which forms changes in the interaction pattern between people. This is because community boundaries can not only be understood as real entities or those that exist in a certain area but can also be formed in non-real or virtual areas (Chen [2011]: 6; Yang & Chen [2014]: 5). In the context of this research, the virtual community appears as an arena for the contestation and communication of sneaker fetishes.

Virtual or cyber communities in the context of the sneaker as a youth lifestyle can be grouped from community members with the same profession or interest. There are five community types (Shen et al. [2010]: 12): (1) General community is a community that is intended in general. It aims to allow its members to communicate with anyone on any topic in various ways; (2) Practice community, namely, the community facilitates its members to conduct online group discussions and share knowledge among its members; (3) Interest community is a community that specifically discusses a common interest or interest among its members; (4) Affinity community is a community based on the similarity of the identity of its members or a certain community group; (5) Sponsored community is the type of community built by an institution with a certain orientation. On the other hand, there are some fundamental differences between the concept of a traditional community and this virtual sneaker community. A virtual sneaker community refers to using the Internet as the primary means of communication and not holding physical in-person meetings. One form of
communication expression in this virtual sneaker community is to use virtual communication features to replace gestural communication.

As well as the largest sneaker community in Indonesia, the Urban Sneaker Society (USS), is one of the largest sneaker events in Southeast Asia. This event presents over 150 sneaker and streetwear labels from Indonesia and abroad. In addition, USS is also often enlivened by the launch of several new products. The sneaker event, which has been going on since 2017, is also complemented by other activities, such as talk shows, Basketball Court by DBL, Skate Park by Converse, and hip-hop music. In 2020, USS became the first event to carry the concept of online virtual multiplayer in Southeast Asia. In this virtual concept, visitors who attend can create their custom avatars and interact with other visitors through the chat box column. Communities like this are often used to further strengthen the relationship, especially for those who cannot interact directly with the real world due to regional limitations.

The existence of common interests, thoughts or ideas in their minds brings them to join this cyber community, where they do not need to know each other with members of a virtual community personally. In addition, the community in the virtual world also provides various ways for its members to communicate, collaborate and trade.

As a representation of the sneaker fetish in a youth lifestyle, the virtual sneaker community is a cultural arena in which young people are turmoil to find their personal and cultural identity because most members are between 18-30 years old. Two phases often cause turmoil within themselves, especially about who and what their goals are (Koh et al. [2003]: 50). Namely before the age of 20 years and when they are about to enter 25 years, often called the quarter-life crisis, which finally questions the context of the “sneaker” in their lives. Young people who are going through these times together with their joining the virtual sneaker community make them a place to share, get friends for discussion related to things that make them confused, especially about cultural identity and also find a group of friends whom they face the same problem so that in this disquieting condition they find comfort because of the individuals who accompany them in the process (Lin [2009]: 200).

In general, identity can be defined as a set of meanings given to individuals, groups, and society. So the identity of young people as sneaker fetishes does not always exist outside of cultural representation or adaptation because identity is a construction of society and culture itself. Identity is closely related to the interaction between individuals and the larger social structure (society), in which young people play a role in the virtual sneaker community to find meaning for themselves. Therefore, sneakers, as a symbol of identity, can be a guide and control for the behaviour of every member of the virtual sneaker community. Sneakers can have multiple identities according to their different roles in social interactions. Therefore, as a cultural agent, the sneaker can be in several positions out of many possible appropriate roles that an entity can play.

CONCLUSION

Fashion is one way for modern society to display social identity. Sneakers nowadays do not only serve as a complement to appearance. More than that, they can display the personal identity of the wearer. The lifestyle of young people when they join the sneaker community has changed to become more consumptive than before. Because they already had enough insight about sneakers, from the type of shoes, where to buy and what shoes were trending at the time, until the sneaker fetish sign appeared. However, young people do not realize that what he has done is a hyperreal-
ity that tries to identify itself with the best possible image and continues to shape it through massive consumption activities. Everything that young people do is seen as an activity to achieve the identity they want.

Regarding identity, young people also expect increased social status in their unique environment. Especially for urban communities, sneakers embodied in community life have an important role. Because the sneaker fetish in the community interacts with the value of urban modernity that represents and reconstructs the economy, the economy will reconstruct and represent the sneaker trend culture for young people. The collective identity of the sneaker community will become the identity pattern of each community, where relations between communities grow into a stereotype that forms the common values and attitudes within the wider sneaker fetish.

Young people tend to build dynamic relationships of personal relationships in a social bond based on a shared identity. He seems to simplify self-identity by eliminating individual factors in the identification process. Furthermore, it makes it easier for people to predict their identity as part of a sneaker community full of commodity behaviour. This pattern develops in each individual in their community environment and forms a common collective identity. This is where the sneaker concept shifts from a “community” to a “commodity”. Fetish sneakers and the youth lifestyle represented through the sneaker community become an alternative space young people use to work and gather from a commodity perspective. The reason refers to its members’ dependence on branded sneakers and their very high economic value. Especially when entering the new millennium, the sneaker community can provide experiences to its audience on multi-platform.

REFERENCES


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