

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

The consumption of the younger generation is not based on what they need, but what they desire. They buy things which they do not need, spend more, and had less loyalty to the brands than previous generations. The reason for this low loyalty may be due to the greater exposure to lower prices and promotions. They also look for products and brands that match their personality, lifestyle, and social and community values. They use brands to create images, to represent their personality, and communicate their values (Moreno, et al. 2017).

According to Featherstone (2007), consumer culture is divided into three parts: The first one emphasizes the expansion of capitalist commodity production leading to the deployment of leisure and consumption activities in contemporary western societies. This situation is welcomed by some as it enables individual freedom and equality. At the same time, on the other hand, it is criticized by others since it increases the capacity for ideological manipulation. The second perspective underlines the satisfaction derived from goods related to their socially constructed meanings. Consumption functions as a source of status differentiation as people use products and experiences to “create social bonds or distinctions.” The third perspective considers consumption as a source of fantasy and pleasure “celebrated in consumer cultural imagery and particular sites of consumption such as malls

which generate direct physical excitement and aesthetic pleasure” (Featherstone 2007).

Not only willing to spend money on clothes, food, and gadget, many young generations nowadays also willing to spend money to buy non-physical objects provided by digital brand creators. This is done solely to get a new kind of experience rather than playing casually with free items in the game (Barr 2011). One supporting factor is because the young generation perceives video games as one of their dominant entertainment media and an important source for their social lives and spare time activities. The young generation in this era, ranging from adolescents, school-age children, and young adults (age range 20-39), has become the most active consumer of video games. This fascination urges them to spend a considerable amount of time and effort in the virtual world (Gentile and Anderson 2003). Online game offers the opportunity for players to purchase in-game items.

Park and Lee then defined this as the Free-to-play (F2P) business model, a game model where the player has access to the core of the game, completely free-of-charge. “Contemporary F2P video games appeared in the late 1990s and early 2000s when popular Asian MMO games such as Neopets (JumpStart 1999) and MapleStory (Nexon 2003) used the F2P model to gain revenue by selling virtual goods” (Riecki 2016, 2). The main business goal for the F2P games is to attract a significant number of players and then offer them incentives to purchase the in-game items.

Lin (2007) stated that purchasable items could be divided into two categories: (a) functional props that increase the offensive or defensive power of a

character or its pet (e.g., increase the speed of character vehicles, double or triple the speed of experience accumulation, repair weapons, or help retain experience value upon a character's death); or (b) decorative props for altering the appearances of characters or their pets, or enhancing social or communication tools (e.g., public-channel broadcasting). Items in the first category enable gamers to play easier, those items are usually found in freemium games; the latter is primarily decorative, which are generally used in Free-to-Play games. In most MOBA (Multiplayer Online Battle Arena), game developers tend to sell decorative props that will not intervene in the gameplay. This is because MOBA requires skill to win the game rather than the power of money to enhance a character's ability. There are even several MOBA games that sell functional props. However, it merely affects the level of the user's account rather than the characters themselves. MOBA game developers try to persuade gamers to buy their in-game items by giving out special events or limited items and even discount. With these ways of marketing, players tend to think that they need to buy an in-game item, despite not getting any advantages because it only affects their appearances. Among gamers, there is a stigma which states that players who wear in-game items in MOBA games are considered as master players. E-Sport players show off their skills using in-game items on the hero that they are playing; this later results in the impressions that players who are skillful in the game always use in-game items. Items in the first category, which is functional props, are used to level up their characters, affecting characters' ability, status, and so on. Functional props are used to gain an advantage from other players by investing real money to buy certain items. This kind of mechanic is mainly found in Mass

Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game (MMORPG) genre or casual games such as Online Board Games. While on the other hand, decorative props aim to decorate the appearance of players' characters. The prop is referred to as Skin. Skin provides a different model for player's characters, different visual skill effects, and so on without giving any additional in-game advantages such as status, enhanced ability, and other kinds of profit. Decorative props are usually used in First Person Shooting (FPS), Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA), and Survival games. Skins could be found anywhere in these genres and are commonly used by pro players while they could also be bought in-game by casual players as well. Casual players tend to mimic pro players in order to follow the new trend, which is e-Sports.

E-Sports have become a new culture among gamers as a result of the competitive scheme offered by games, especially in *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang*, which include ranked division match and leaderboards. Players who pursue higher division and leaderboard ranks tend to be more competitive, as shown by the informants. This could lead to e-Sports product consumption, which builds a competitive atmosphere among their community by pursuing the highest rank division and leaderboards possible through playing and watching tournaments. Even players who do not have intentional motives to nurture e-Sports later develop a habit that would eventually preserve the e-Sports culture. While the first milestones of e-Sports happened in 1972 (Kane 2017), the emergence of e-sport started when Valve organized The International in 2011 with the biggest prize pool money ever offered, as much as 1.6 million (Valve 2017). Media then recognized

e-Sports as a serious subject after considered e-Sports as laughingstock previously (theScore esports 2017).

According to Yang Dongsheng (2011), e-Sport was considered as the first 99 formal sports by the General Administration of Sport of China in 2003. While according to Karhulahti (2017), English academic observations on e-Sport started to appear in the 2000s. There are some definitions of e-Sport proposed by researchers. Hollist (2015) defined e-Sport as professional video game matches where players compete against other players before an audience. Yang Dongsheng (2011) considers e-Sport as an intelligent movement between people who use high-tech software, hardware, information equipment as sports equipment. While Hemphill (2005) states that e-Sport is an alternative reality sport where electronically extended athletes compete in a digitally represented sporting world. In other words, e-Sport is understood as a sport that is played through electronic devices and utilizes the same style as traditional sports such as teamwork, reflex, and strategy. E-Sport has several game styles where players compete against each other one-on-one (like tennis); team events where teammates assume different roles and work cooperatively to score points against other teams (like basketball); and competition where each competitor takes a turn and then compare their final scores (like Olympic skiing or gymnastics) (Hollist 2015). This branch of sport is later broken down into several genres, such as Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA), First Person Shooting (FPS), Real-Time Strategy (RTS), Fighting, and even Sports games.

One of the famous e-Sports is Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA), which is usually done with five players against five players. The players battle each other in three (3) lanes, top, mid, and bottom, to gain advantage from other teams by taking a small objective. To win, the team needs to destroy the structure in enemy's base. The minor objective varies from taking enemy's tower, kill the enemy's heroes, or taking neutral creatures that give buff or in-game items. The player could pick heroes that have their own roles, among them are Offlaner which is used to solo fight 2 enemies, usually serves on the top lane; Midlaner who is in mid lane, fight against 1 player, and can gain faster XP and in-game currency; Carry who is the fragile hero that can gain in-game currency faster and snowballing to prolong the game; and Support, which as the name suggests, supports carry and prevent midlaner from getting killed.

Mobile Legends: Bang Bang, that is considered as MOBA, has the same gameplay with any other MOBA games. *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang* still consists of 5 vs 5 players. The minor objective, such as pushing towers and killing midlaners, could be called Ganking, and taking Turtle or Lord. Turtle could give players shield buff, which makes them the tanker. There are three more buffs in *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang* that could be used as an objective, which is Red Buff, Blue Buff, and Heal Buff. These buffs could give advantage to players such as true damage, amplify magic damage, or healing the characters. In *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang*, these roles have different concepts, though they are made from the same basic. In the game, Carry is known as Marksman, Midlaner could be defined as Mage, Offlaner as Fighter or Assassin, and Support as Tank and Healer.

Nowadays, the Indonesian gaming scene is not only a side interest or a hobby, but it can also be taken as a career, or it a way of life and occupation. Indonesia is one of the best markets for e-sport, with the association handling e-sport in Indonesia known as IESPA (Indonesia e-Sports Association), and one of the most popular games is *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang*. Regarding this phenomenon, the writer is interested in conducting a study examining the consumption pattern in *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang*. The writer also intends to explore why *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang* players are willing to spend their money to buy in-game items in this game and. The writer uses the consumerism pattern theory by Mike Featherstone. It is hoped that the consumption pattern of *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang* (MLBB) can be found. The objective of this study is revealing the consumption issue behind owning and buying diamond and/or skin in *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang*, and how it can affect players' status.

In this thesis, the writer tries to analyze the consumption pattern of gamers who consume several elements in *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang*; such as game features, ranks, in-game items, and e-Sport. In-game items are also considered as non-physical objects provided by digital brand publishers to be used in online games or online communities. The items are used to stimulate players' gameplay or customize the gameplay features in order to get new experiences compared to casual gameplay (Evans, The economics of free: Freemium games, branding and the impatience economy 2015). Gamers could buy in-game items with virtual money that could be obtained through exchanging real money or buying it using in-game currency that can only be earned by playing the game. This shifts the meaning

of item purchase for gamers, making it different compared to other purchases in a culture. Consumption has become the main issue of this thesis because it deals with how products are consumed, in which meanings are attached on the objects through the consumption processes (Paul du Gay 1997). Consumption is the chain of interdependencies and networks that bind people across the world together in terms of production (Featherstone 2007). Therefore, games socially and culturally develop gamers' perception. A group of people who play games are identified, and identify themselves as "Gamers." However, the issue of identity is further complicated by the fact that some people intensely play offline or casual games like pinball or solitaire in Computers without considering themselves as "Gamers". This situation perhaps produced multiple ways of conversation and action between players of virtual reality (Mäyrä 2008).

This research was conducted in South and West Surabaya. According to Google Maps, South part of Surabaya is an industrial area, which is related to a harsh working environment and fast-paced life. Workers tend to take a break in café nearby and playing online games, which includes playing *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang*, in order to have a quick escape from daily routine. Even more, a lot of café nowadays provide Wifi to encourage people to come by, which could be used by workers to play online games. Meanwhile, on the West part of Surabaya are settlements for the elites and several malls. E-Sports events are sometimes held in malls such as Pakuwon Mall. Writers assume that area used as e-Sports event grounds could cultivate e-Sports culture itself because it would attract people to know more about it.

This study aims to reveal the consumption pattern and issue in West and South Surabaya game communities through the analysis of their consumption pattern, and the meanings that are attached in the game matches, ranks, in-game items, and e-Sport that they consume.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

1. How is the act of consumption represented by informants in *Mobile*

Legends: Bang Bang's community?

1.3 Objectives of The Study

The objective of this study is to reveal the motives of consumption and how consuming in-game items in *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang* can affect a player's social status, and how the act of consumption is shaped in a region.

1.4 Significance of The Study

The study gives the readers broader insights into understanding the act of consumption in the virtual group within Surabaya, especially its Southern and Western parts, and how virtual items can fulfill the players' pleasure as they have their intension in consuming these items. Furthermore, this study may encourage particular interests for the readers towards the game and consumption issue. This undergraduate thesis may also give a new point of view to the readers that the virtual group does exist, where its members purchase virtual things as their way of life. This research is also expected to be able to give a more critical contribution and data towards further investigations on the issue, particularly for the individuals who are interested in observing gaming and its social association as their object of study.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

- Community : A community is not bound to have a physical location, but by being a group of people with a common interest. It is a set of interactions, human behaviors that have meaning and expectations between its members. Not just action, but actions based on shared aspirations, values, beliefs, and meanings between individuals. (Bartle 2011)
- Free-to-play : Business model is a game business model where the player has access to the core of the game free-of-charge (Park and Lee 2011)
- Mobile Legends : *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang*, 2017's brand new mobile e-Sports masterpiece, developed by Moonton (Moonton 2016).
- Consumption : Part of the chains of interdependencies and networks which bind people together across the world in terms of production (Featherstone 2007)
- Consumer Culture : The movement towards mass consumption that is accompanied by a general reorganization of symbolic production, everyday experiences, and practices (Featherstone 2007).