

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Sneaker is a must have item for people nowadays. Its flexibility, comfortable insole, soundless outsole and trendy models make sneakers loved by young and old people, especially young people. Young people love sneakers because they make sneakers as a symbol of rebellion, along with t-shirt and jeans. That is why t-shirt, jeans, and sneakers are popular among youths (Heard 26).

Sneakers derived from the word sneak, which means to go stealthily (Merriam-Webster np). It is called sneakers because the sole is made from rubber and does not make any sound compared to wooden or plastic soles. There are also other nicknames for this kind of shoes: Keds (derived from a brand), while Australians called them as kicks, and British called them as trainers (from the word training, which is the main function of this kind of shoes) (Heard 16).

The first ever sneaker manufacturer is Converse, with its model the Chuck Taylor All-Star. Even though the Chuck Taylor All Star is the blue print of any sneakers, but the “mother” of modern sneakers was Adidas Samba. Its advance in technology by using foam mid sole, longer tongue, leather material, and double stitching process were followed by other shoes manufacturer (Heard 27).

Year after year, sneakers are developing. Not only basketball, almost every sport has its own model of sneakers, from running, badminton and tennis, martial arts like tae kwon do, even cross training (Heard 9).

Among the youths, there are a group of them who admire sneakers more than anyone else. They are called as sneaker heads. This group of youths making a culture part of youth culture called as sneaker culture. Sneaker culture is a youth culture emerging in New York in 1970s. Being a part of hip hop culture, the sneaker culture is popular among African American; in fact they are the pioneers in this culture, as shown by American hip hop group RUN DMC in their song “My Adidas” (Just For Kicks 1:42 – 2:46, 12:16 – 12:50).

In movies like Wild Styles, Do the Right Thing, and Just for Kicks, we can see that African American in New York with their hip hop culture and street basketball activities are the first doers of the culture. But, according to Neal Heard in his book Trainers, there are two other communities that started the culture in the same time. They are soccer fans in UK called as casuals and skateboarders in California. Together with African American, they started the culture, but with different kind of sneakers. In New York, the African Americans wore Adidas Superstar and Puma Suede, while in California; the skateboarders wore vans because it's independent spirit. Across the Atlantic, football casuals wore football shoes derived sneakers, such as Adidas Samba, local brands like Fred Perry and classic running shoes like Adidas Italia and Adidas city series. The interesting fact here is that Adidas becomes the most popular brand in UK, beating original UK brands like Fred Perry and Dunlop (Heard 23).

In sneaker culture, there is one main activity usually the sneaker heads do, collecting sneakers. Sneaker collecting is the basic part of the culture. Sneaker heads usually collect sneakers from certain brands. Some of them are fanatic to

one brand, while the others are not. Their collections usually contains of limited edition sneakers, even though there are some sneaker heads collects all kind of sneakers to be a “sneaker library”. Limited edition sneakers can worth over US\$ 10.000 even though the release price was not over than US\$ 150.

The reason I choose sneaker culture as my study because it is a social phenomenon in Indonesia and the world. It can be shown by the numbers of sneakers exhibitions held in Indonesia from year 2005 until 2007, the high amount of sneaker and urban boutiques in Jakarta and Bandung, the amount of queue made in 707 Annex in Cilandak Town Square Jakarta in a sneaker launching event (special evening event final release of Nike SB SBTG dunk 1), and the emerging of local sneaker dedicated website such as sevenohseven.com, sneakersindo.com, and footurama.com. As written above, sneakers brought news and controversies. The New York Sneaker Riot for example. It happened in the release date of Nike Dunk SB “Pigeon”, a part of Nike’s White City Series. Only released 150 pairs and sold in Reed Space New York, the sneakers heads were queuing for two days and made riot in the release day which made 2 persons died, and 2 hours after the release, the sneaker was auctioned in eBay with opening price US\$ 750. The riot became a headline in New York Post in the following day (Just For Kicks 55:41 – 57:25). Controversies from famous athletes like Michael Jordan who must pay US\$ 5000 per game in his debut year because he wore a black Air Jordan 1 (Just For Kicks 25:39 – 26:20) and Andre Agassi who couldn’t enter the Wimbledon because he refused to change his Nike Air Tech Challenge into white color way, the only color way allowed in the Wimbledon (Heard 43).

Nowadays, net forums and blogs like www.kaskus.us, www.niketalk.com, www.footurama.com, www.sneakerfreaker.com, www.hypebeast.com, www.solecollector.com, and www.nikeskateboarding.org are used to show their collection of sneakers, customized sneakers, and selling their own customized sneakers. Now, sneaker heads tend to keep their sneakers in “dead stock” condition where the sneakers are never used therefore they can raise the price. It happened because of the net forums therefore they do not have to wear their sneakers to show it into other sneaker heads. Because of those forums, the culture is now borderless.

B. Statement of the Problems

1. What is the significance of the sneakers to sneaker heads as it represented in Indonesian internet forums?

C. Objective of the Study

1. To know the significance of the sneakers for sneaker heads as represented in Indonesian internet forum.

D. Significance of the Study

This study is meant to observe the text written by sneaker fans in internet forums and their affection toward sneakers. By observing the point I hope I can obtain the significance of sneakers for sneaker head. This social phenomenon is interesting to discuss because it is a new subject, where the object of the study is

sneakers, and it is interesting to know how a pair of sport shoes affects someone's lifestyle.

From this study, I hope that I can give more information to the public about sneaker culture and giving a chance for others who wanted to know sneaker culture deeper. As far as my research, there is no study about sneaker culture, and I hope this study could give a picture on sneaker culture, what is it about, its significance to its fans, and encourage others to do a study on simple things around us.

E. Scope and Limitation

I will focus the study on the significance of the sneakers for the sneaker heads in internet forum. As far as my research, I found three Indonesian internet forums that discuss sneakers. They can be considered as Indonesian internet forums from their taglines and language used to communicate. They are *Kaskus*, *Sneakersindo*, and *Footurama*.

Each forum has its characteristics. *Footurama* is the oldest sneaker forum in Indonesia and South East Asia, and most of the members are veterans in the culture, even though there are newcomers there. The second is *Sneakersindo*, a forum made by a sneaker store in Jakarta My Shoes. Most of the forum members are newcomers, where they learn together about sneaker culture. Even though most of the members are newcomer, there are veterans joining this forum, because of its friendly atmosphere. The last is *Kaskus*. *Kaskus* is not a sneaker internet forum, but it is an online community forum. In *Kaskus*, there is a thread named

Sneaker Addicts, where forum members who have common interest in sneakers gathered.

Among the three forums, I choose *Sneakersindo* as my primary data. I choose *Sneakersindo* because *Kaskus* and *Footurama* were shut down for major maintenance and restarted all their forums and discussion topics. The restarting of the forums and discussion topics rid the dynamics of the forums made before. The other reason is that *Sneakersindo* blends newcomers and veterans; therefore the forum is more representing Indonesian sneaker culture among the three.

However, the two forums that are not becoming primary data are still used as supporting data in giving information about sneaker culture. Supporting data is needed because it contains information that strengthens primary data.

The observation occurred from October 2008 until July 2009. The research observes postings made by forum members, and it is limited only postings about sneakers, because in those forums there are postings which are not related to sneakers, such as hobbies, photography, and general talk.

F. Theoretical Background

Since the study uses internet forum as its primary data, it is necessary to give a picture about internet forum. Internet forum is a part of computer mediated communication, which result is a virtual community (Robinson 2). The media used in virtual community results to the difference of virtual and traditional community. To learn the difference, I will use social network theory by Jiali Ye. According to Ye, virtual community is different from traditional community,

because it does not depend on physical closeness (4). Virtual community also has advantages like it is more objective and provides anonymity, compared to traditional community. By giving picture about virtual community, I hope that readers will know its special characteristics.

For the analysis, I will apply branding theory Terrence A. Shimp as written in her book Advertising and Promotion. Branding is an image shown by products as a marketing strategy, goodwill, thus people would consume the product. Moreover, a brand is related to certain image, and brand forms market and then culture (Klein16). While according to David Ogilvy, founder of Ogilvy and Mathers, an advertising agency, brand is “the intangible sum of a product's attributes: its name, packaging, and price, its history, its reputation, and the way it's advertised” (Ogilvy 1).

From statements above, branding is how a product is being recognized by the consumers. A brand is not a product. A brand is a combination of products, packaging, history, reputation, price, and marketing strategy. A brand gives reputation to its products, and the reputation is used to form market, and infiltrate the culture to give a discourse that as if the culture is based on the brand.

I choose this theory because the sneaker culture has close relation to the brands, and the brands forms the culture. In this culture, there are nicknames for fanatics of certain brands. *Nikehead* for Nike fans, *Adifreak* for Adidas, and even *Jumpmen* for Nike Air Jordan. And these fanatics have different thoughts and ideas of their favorite brand.

G. Method of the Study

In writing this study, I will use qualitative content analysis method is applied to read the text on the forum. Qualitative content analysis is a method for summarizing any form of content by counting various aspects of the content. Qualitative content analysis to observe media such as newspapers, TV shows, radio programs, web pages, and computer-mediated communication (CMC).

The observation is started by lurking into the forums. The result of the observation is information about the forums. The first information is the name of forums and the background of forums. The second is members of the forums. The information will be used as limitation in collecting data. The last is content of the forums, which are the texts. These texts will be analyzed using the preferred theory.

The first information is forum name and forum background. The name is *Sneakersindo*. This forum is an Indonesian forum, as stated in its editorial. Sneakersindo is a sneaker community forum, where the members discuss sneakers in those websites.

The second information obtained is forum members of the forum. Registered members of the three forums are almost the same, even though some of them use different username in the forum. It can be seen from the forum posts in the forums, where they post same sneakers while their usernames are different. For example, a member uses “Deadstock” and “Paul Frank” the username, while *Sneakersindo*. The member use “Deadstock” when he acts as a forum moderator,

and doing forum moderator's job and authority. While "Paul Frank" is used when he post photos and discuss sneakers with other forum members.

The different usernames used by forum members because of the anonymity of the forum. In the internet, especially internet forums anyone can be whatever they want to be, because each members do not know the real person behind the username. The anonymity makes forum members become freer and more expressive in delivering information.

Anonymity in this forum made the study is limited to the forum, because a person's internet identity might be different with the identity in the real world.

The third is the content of the forum. According to the observation done, there are three form of texts contained in the forum. The first is written text, second is photographs, and the third is video. However, the texts used are only written texts and picture. Those texts are differentiating into three according to purpose of the texts; they are information, statements and conversations.

Information collected from the texts will be discussed in the analysis chapter, which is aspects that affect the significance of sneakers. These aspects will determine the significance of sneakers.

I also collect data and printed materials about the theory used in this study. "A researcher has to develop the theoretical base as well as to choose appropriate approach and method due to the literary research and analyzed object...has to formulate theoretical bases which eventually can be used to conduct every step taken during the research (Semi 47)."

After collecting data, I will arrange it in order to study it; therefore I can get an understanding about the topic that will be analyzed. In analyzing the data, I use qualitative method by elaborating posts, thread titles, conversations, and signatures found in the forum.

H. Definition of Key Terms

1. Sneaker: Shoe with rubber outsole. Because it makes no sound when stepping, it gives the “sneaking” feelings. Sneakers also called as sport shoes because of the usual usage.
2. Culture: the patterns of behavior and thinking that people living in social groups learn, create, and share which distinguish a group of human from others.
3. Subculture: Some groups of people share a distinct set of cultural traits within a larger society.
4. Sneaker culture: A part of youth culture, a culture where the doer treat sneakers more than just footwear.
5. Sneaker head: also called as sneaker fans and sneaker freaker. It is a term used to call the sneaker culture doer.
6. Dead stock: a pair of sneakers that is not being used by its owner. Therefore the condition is like new.