

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### I.1. Background of the Study

Blog (an abbreviation of weblog) is originally used by John Barger in 1997, to identify web user or user who continually updates their blog by writing about their personal experience and information about their favorite link to other websites. Previously, user uses their blog only for giving information about link which they are interested with. Afterward, the functions of weblog are wider, it becomes online diary which the user is able to write and share a story about their life or their personal experience (Nasution, 2008). There are differences between online diary and diary journal in which online diary can be seen by other users instead of diary journal that is intended to be private. Besides, blog is completed with commentaries box which allows other users to give their opinion and share information about what it is written. From the commentaries, blog preserves possibility for us to look inside the head of the creator of the blog and his/her daily life. It means that we may recognize the characteristic of the blog's user as we are able to observe them from kinds of link they are interested and their opinion towards a certain topic.

According to Huffaker and Herrings in 1997, Blog characteristics are easy to use (or user friendly) which everyone is able to create their own blog. Nowadays, there are numbers of web page that provides application for creating blog. Besides, it can be the way of sharing information and knowledge between

the users. Blog gives opportunities to achieve feedback for them by sharing information and giving comments. Besides, it can be completed by adding their favorite links to other websites. There are several types of weblog which is differed by their function such as Personal Blog, Corporate Blog, and by media type, device type, and genre type. Personal blog, as in Friendster.com, is specialized for the users of blog who are intended to write their experience and their personal life into their blog.

Language in Friendster is obviously important for constructing the user's identity. First, the application of blogs is short of technical facility to be created or maintained despite of gender and age. Next, the ability to collect blog posts creates a way to support on previous impressions and expressions; thus, constructing identity can be continual process for youngsters, and one to which they can refer (Huffaker & Calvert, 2005). Finally, when blog software offers ways to provide feedback or link to other users, this can encourage a sense of peer group relationships, another important aspect for the developing youngster. In short, weblogs such as Friendster represent a new medium for computer-mediated communication and may offer close ways in which youngsters present themselves online, especially in terms of self-expression and peer group relationships, both of which impact the construction of identity.

According to Calvert, self identity process of someone has begun since she/he is young. The process in youngster development has become the most important ways in someone's life as youth to notice and define their identity in ways that the youth may not be able to express during their childhood (Calvert,

2002). One place that youngsters now spend a considerable amount of time is in online settings, and these online venues, such as multi-user domains (MUDs), have been linked to identity exploration (Turkle, 1995). One of the newest venues for identity exploration is the weblog, a reversed-chronological online journal, which is used in a variety of ways, but often as a personal journal or continuing commentary about someone (Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, & Wright, 2004a; Huffaker, 2004a). The aim of this study here is to examine how youngsters use weblogs in Friendster to explore their identity in online setting. In particular, the writer examines the language and emotional codes that youngsters use to express themselves in weblogs.

Friendster.com becomes the most common site to visit by youngster in Indonesia recently. Found in 2002 by Jonathan Abrams, Friendster is one of a web page which offers social networking service which is provides several features in its account such as profile, blog, commentary box, and etc. Therefore, the user can create personal profile, join groups, personal blog, leave comments, and allows the user to upload their pictures so that others might be able to know the user's appearance and interest to make a relationship by adding their profile as friend. The site has 50 million registered users (most of which are outside the U.S.). Users can customize their page using HTML and CSS. In addition, Friendster is viewable in both Indonesia and English (CrunchBase, 2008). Here is the example of picture added in Friendster:



The identity of the users can be analyzed through the use of their personal information whether they are female or male and by the use of language they used in their blog. Considering the use of name, age, contact information, birthdate, full name, etc they reflect the users in the virtual world. Internet technology provides capability for people to represent themselves as somebody else by hiding their personal information in their profile or to represent themselves as in their real world by giving real personal information. According to the type of blog, Friendster.com is a kind of personal journal because the users of this web are intended to write mostly about their personal life and experience. As in other weblogs, Friendster.com is completed with several features personal information such as name, age, location, email, upload pictures and etc.

In the previous study mentioned that virtual identity is ambiguous and blur which people can not exactly notice the truth and lies there. Some of the users in friendster provide pseudonym and counterfeit picture. In this case, the writer is intended to analyze the way how the users of Friendster.com use language to express themselves in virtual world, this is probably because of the anonymous character of virtual world, so that people can be and do what they like. Otherwise, there are reasons why users prefer being explicit rather than implicit while considering that blog remains private. It would seem that names, age, and other forms of personal information play an important role in creating and maintaining blogs since these kinds of descriptors reflect the self, and hence how the user of Friendster want to present themselves to others.

While physical constraints such as the body, biological sex, race, or age can have a profound effect on self-definition and self-presentation (Collins & Kuczaj, 1991), many of these attributes become flexible in online environments. In a virtual world, one even gets to construct one's body. The ambiguity afforded to youth in virtual worlds allows youngsters more flexibility in exploring their identity through their language, their role play, and the personality they imagine (Calvert, 2002). Most of the user in Friendster.com provides their sexual identity by revealing their status whether they are single, in a relationship, married or it's complicated.

There are differences between the language of female user and male user. This is called 'Netspeak' by Crystal (2001). Netspeak refers to the written speech which means writing as the way of speaking. It includes the use of emoticon

which is similar with paralanguage as the notion to express vocal variation in pitch (intonation), stress (loudness), speed, rhythm, pause, and tone of voice. Those notions can be replaced by the use of spelling and punctuation, the capitals, spacing, and special symbols for emphasis as it follows the traditional way of writing.

According to Crystal (2001), netspeak is an emergent discourse that is shaped entirely by the creativity of its community. The introduction of acronyms (e.g., "lol = laugh out loud," "brb = be right back"), plays or variations on words (e.g., "cya = see you", "latah = later"), graphical icons that represent emotions, called *emoticons* (e.g., :) or ;-{ } ) or graphical icons that represent a real person in a virtual context, called *avatars*, are all examples of language produced by online communicators. The progress of using netspeak remains an important area of study when considering the ways in which Internet users interact and express who they are.

According to traditional theory of language, female language is shown as politeness and passive while male language is shown as impoliteness and active. Traditional gender roles embody the male role as agentive, where action, self-expansion, and individuality are the rule. By contrast, traditional gender roles define the female role as communal, embodying emotional expressiveness and a focus on the needs of others (Bakan, 1966). Gendered language use in CMC contexts is not very different from that in face-to-face interactions and includes similar features of "verbosity, assertiveness, use of profanity, politeness (and

rudeness), typed representations of smiling and laughter, and degree of interactive engagement" (Herring, 2000).

Robin Lakoff's (1975) theories on women's language suggest that females use a language style that reflects diffidence, shyness, and lower self-confidence, indicating a lack of commitment or strong opinion (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). Female usually avoids using language which contains rudeness and profanity. Similarly, Herring (2000) finds that women are "more likely to thank, appreciate and apologize and to be upset by violations of politeness (Huffaker & Calvert, 2005). In contrary, male language is defined seems less politeness, sometimes rude but it is considered to be active and confident. Rodino (1997) said that the differences between the language of female and male blog, perhaps is oversimplified because there is no evidence for the user to be as in their real world because the virtual world allows freedom and flexibility.

According to Turkle (1995), there are number of youngsters and teenagers have expanded to seek their life for self-discovery especially during this 21<sup>st</sup> century. One place that youngsters now spend a considerable amount of time is in online settings, and these online venues, such as multi-user domains (MUDs), have been linked to identity exploration. Adults, 18 years old above are the most common user who sign up in Friendster.com. Most surveys suggest that a significant portion of the total blog population is inhabited by youngsters, and the split between genders is relatively close. *Perseus Development Corporation*, for instance, finds blogs are dominated by youth, with 52% of all blogs being developed and maintained by teens that are ages 13-19. They also find 56% of the

*total* users are female and 44% are male (Henning, 2003). Whereas, there are about 40 blogs in Indonesia according to the data in Indoblog.com which roughly count about 100 users has created their blog with each personality. Most of them are University student, IT worker, and Web designer.

Nowadays, Friendster.com becomes the most popular site to visit by the youngster especially in Indonesia because Friendster.com is a kind of webpage that is accessible for the users to make peer-group relationship by creating their profile and blog. Most of the user of this page is people at the age of 17 to 25 years old, though there is some of the user who is above 25 years old.

This study therefore aims to look at some of the ways of how young male and female users of Friendster construct their virtual identity and how this construction of virtual identity juxtaposes with the way they see themselves in real life. In relation to the issue that the anonymity of the internet allows people to assume any kind of identity they want, the writer is interested to understand users who choose to be open about their real identity. Samples are taken from two blog accounts – by female user named ‘KelzAgain’ and a male user named ‘Akudenan et toi’. The writer sees this is a very interesting issue to look at because it is related to the issues of anonymity in the internet and how internet users react to that in relation to their way of constructing virtual identity.



## **I.2. Statement of the Problem**

- 1) How do the users of Friendster.com reveal online identity?
- 3) Does the online identity relate to their ways of looking at themselves as virtual and in real life?

## **I.3. Objective of the Study**

The purpose of this study is examining the appearance of the user's identity in Friendster's profile and then analyzing the gender similarities and differences among weblogs which is created by youngsters. By using content analyses of their weblogs, we examined how youngsters present their identities online, as well as how they use language to express their experiences and feelings.

## **I.4. Significance of the Study**

This study is intended to explore the language that is used by teenagers and youngsters and its differences between male and female characteristic of language in their blogs. Therefore, we can find that sexual identity often appears such as in emoticons, username, the use of acronyms and other features in a virtual world, where flexibility and anonymity are possible, youngsters may feel more comfortable expressing their sexual orientation and exploring their sexual identity beyond social prescriptions. In online forums, including weblogs, language is a key means through which sexual identity can be expressed and explored.

### **I.5. Definition of Key Terms**

**Blogs** are personal journals or reserved chronological commentaries written by individuals and made publicly accessible on the web, and they have distinctive technological features that set them apart from other forms of CMC (Herring et al., 2004a; Huffaker, 2004b).

**Netspeak** is referred to the language of the internet which entails both traditional linguistic forms and adapted ones that include slang and non-standard forms that are sometimes used in offline life (Crystal, 2001).

**Identity** is often characterized in terms of one's interpersonal characteristics, such as self-definition or personality traits, the roles and relationships one takes on in various interactions, and one's personal values or moral beliefs (Calvert, 2002).

**Pseudonym** user's nickname but not as their real name such as 'Cutegirl' or 'Badboy' (Crystal, 2001).

**Paralanguage** is optional vocal effects (as tone of voice) that accompanies or modifies the phonemes of an utterance and that may communicate meaning.

**MUD** is multi-users domain is a type of real-time Internet conference in which users not only talk to each other, but also move around and manipulate objects in an imaginary world (Business Glossary, 2008).

**CMC** is computer mediated communication as the basic definition to analyze this study (Calvert and Huffaker).

**Emoticon** is icons that represent emotions (Crystal, 2001).

**Avatar** is graphical icons that represent a real person in a virtual context (Crystal, 2001)