

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Background of the Study

Bag is one of the usual things that are used by humans to bring something. As we know, when we are going somewhere like going to malls, offices, we usually wear bags to bring our luggage, such as wallet, mobile phone, etc. Bags become the needs of many people especially women because almost every time they need to wear bags. Historically, bags began to be known by many people at the time after World War II (Cox 2007, p. 26). At the first time, bags were produced because pocket stitching on clothing and purses were considered insufficient to carry money or other goods (Cox 2007, p. 26). At that time, bags began to be introduced through advertising in print media such as magazines, tabloid, and then advertising on the television (Cox 2007, p. 27). Because of the advertisement, bags became popular and favored by many people until today. Along with the development of time until the modern era like now, bags have been increasingly produced with variations of modes, shapes and styles, and also with various brands.

Nowadays, bags are not only to carry luggage but also to be consumed for fashion and appearance. The emergence of bags of famous brand designers makes the bags has a high value and also become luxury consumption. Veblen (in Steele, 2005, p. 391) stated that “famous label would give prestige more than a specialty

of goods”. He added that brands of famous designers become a factor to increase the reputation of the user. Branded bags with good materials will be expensive, and it can show the user’s wealth.

One of the branded and famous bags which are also used as the luxury consumption is Louis Vuitton. Louis Vuitton is a famous brand that has been established for hundred years. Historically, Louis Vuitton is the owner of this brand. He began his career as craftsman trunk. In 1854, he established a company that sold suitcase which later became the best-selling suitcase in the world (Steele 2005). And then, in 1896, Georges Vuitton (Vuitton’s son) created the monogram canvas like circle contains four flowers valvate and four-pointed star, and then Georges also gave LV initial between the circle of flowers and star, as a tribute to his father. It is created to combat falsification. Louis Vuitton is included in valuable brand and also a very expensive product in the world. Until recently, the brand has been known around the world and has stores in various countries. Louis Vuitton is included as the most prestigious brands (Steele 2005, p. 408) and, the largest of Louis Vuitton products is bag.



**Figure 1.1**



**Figure 1.2**

Since Louis Vuitton bags have high value, and very expensive products, they are included into the most prestigious brands, this condition makes the bags have meaning for its consumers. Louis Vuitton bags become meaningful objects when consumed. Douglas and Isherwood (cited in Lee 1993) stated that consumption of material goods is something that cannot be separated from its social meaning of consumption. It means that bags are consumed not only from functional side but also from the meaning of bags as a symbol. And also, it can be said that bags can be a status symbol of the user, which means that what we consume is not the object of consumption itself but rather the meaning and value of signs. What we wear will show who we are; this is a form of our communication to others. People will see who we are from what we wear because when they see us at the first time they will see our appearance and our consumption. And, “material objects often have a function as an element that

contains the dynamics of self” (Lee, 1993, p. 47). It is the formation of identity, who we are, our perception of ourselves, and the views of others; an assessment of our self-esteem is influenced by what we have, what we wear, and what we can do well.

Branded goods such as branded bags show a high social value. In the branded bags has been attached the value of exclusivity. In fact, consumption can be a system of distinction. It is almost like there are differences in systems of social prestige, status, and also a symbol. Here, an object of consumption is seen as a form of self expression. Besides that, the consumption can be global communications that can make a lot of people have the ability to be able to interpret commercial symbols.

Actually, all bags in general have the same function which is to carry the people’s luggage when they want to go, but unbranded bags with branded bags can have vastly different prices. Image can transform an item that basically has the same function, turning to different (Simamora 2002, p. 75). The image also can distinguish high value goods than others, such as Louis Vuitton bags. Louis Vuitton bags have a great image and certainly has a high value compared to the unbranded bags. Branded goods are considered better than unbranded goods by the people, and used as the symbol, image, and association in order to increase the value of an object.

Brand was considered important by the consumer society. Brand is the mark, name, design or symbol, which aims to identify and distinguish a product (Simamora 2002, p. 30). In addition to the attributes associated with the quality,

scope, and utilization, brand is also associated with who is using the brand, the origin of the product, brand personality, symbols, and emotional benefits of self-expression.

Febriane and Suwarna's article in *Kompas* (2011, p. 1) viewed the branded bags as a statement of social status, which means that there is a status importance when consuming these bags. Bags become fashion statements which are calculated. Lately, urban women increasingly excessive in consuming branded bags. They take variety ways to have branded bags, such as buying the second branded bags or buying on the official stores. Consuming branded bags could mean as acting to shows the status of someone (Kompas 2011, p. 11). It can be said that if we bring branded bags, other person will admit our social status.

In urban society, consuming the branded bags shows the people's identity. There are communities who have specific symbol and standard of their own. They consume with standards of their class. It seems that they compete in consuming the branded bags to show off to others their status symbol as satisfaction or indicator of their wealth. It can be called "conspicuous consumption". Veblen (cited in Barnard 1996) stated that conspicuous consumption is consuming something that is used by people to form themselves different from others. Status is the result of economic prosperity. Then, status and prosperity are shown from the ownership and use of a good (Barnard 1996, p. 159). Consuming the material object is a way to state one form of class mobility. According to Veblen, status can be purchased by certain social groups through conspicuous consumption (Veblen 1899, p. 51).

If we consume branded bags, the main function of the bag has been turned into a symbolic and social significance. Consuming a bag is no longer based on necessity, but has turned into satisfaction. After we have branded bag, there is passion that has been fulfilled. The statement itself will often be realized through the social status act of consumption. And then, an identity will be born. Bringing branded bags can make other people recognize us the more in the sense of a social status; this is where our identity is viewed by others. Barker (cited in Paterson 2006) noted that self-identity is a concept where we know about ourselves, and others' opinions about us can be called our social identity. The consumption of luxury goods and the act of showing certain object is our way to communicate our social identity to others. The consumption of luxury goods is a description that practice of consumption has changed at this time. Our society has become a modern society, such as urban society where they always consumes material object every day. Our society system recently has become consumer society.

Surabaya is an urban area, considered the second metropolis city, and one of the big cities in Indonesia. The study was focused in Surabaya because Surabaya is the representative of urban society. In urban society, certain class members have the ability to consume certain goods which attach to the lifestyle of certain status group. And, the region cultural metropolis simultaneously offers new potential for individual to enhance their subjectivity (Chaney 2011, p. 102). The writer chose Surabaya because Surabaya is a modern city which has modern society, most of whose people consume material objects. And Surabaya also becomes the centre of the East Java, which sells branded bags. At Surabaya,

people can buy the original of Louis Vuitton bags in its official stores in the Sheraton Hotel Surabaya. And then, people can buy for the second-hand bags in the City of Tomorrow (at one of the boutiques there).

Women consumers in Surabaya became the respondents of this research. The reason is due to the fact that bags are consumed by many women ([www.wolipop.detik.com](http://www.wolipop.detik.com)). Women always have social group like social gathering and they usually follow new models of bags, and as we know that many styles of bags are produced for women. The writer chose women who have at least five Louis Vuitton bags because women who have at least five Louis Vuitton bags can support the conspicuous consumption. As we know, the original Louis Vuitton bags are expensive. People who have these bags more than five can be considered having spent much money buying bags, because the average of original new Louis Vuitton bags reach almost twenty five million rupiahs and the average of the second-hand bags of Louis Vuitton are almost ten million rupiahs. It can be included and categorized into conspicuous consumption.

The description of consumption practices in modern life can be seen on the branded bag products consumed at this time. As approximation stated above, Louis Vuitton consumers may have certain reason in consuming this branded bag. And also, Louis Vuitton bags may have certain meaning for them. The consumption of Louis Vuitton bags is related to their identity. Douglas (in Paterson, 2006) stated that people indicate their identities through conspicuous consumption of particular luxury goods. It means that their identity is formed through conspicuous consumption of Louis Vuitton bags.

Finally, the writer of this thesis was interested in doing an analysis about the phenomenon that occurs at this time, which in this case is the consumption of branded bags like Louis Vuitton. Here, the writer discussed the meaning of consuming Louis Vuitton bags to the women consumers in Surabaya and how such meaning contributes in shaping their identity. And, the writer in this study used the theory of consumption by Veblen to answer these statements.

### **1.2. Statement of the Problems**

The background of the study leads to statements that were analyzed. The following statements are intended to make a clear focus on the analysis:

1. What is the meaning of consuming Louis Vuitton bags for the women in Surabaya?
2. How does such meaning contribute in shaping their identity?

### **1.3. Objective of the Study**

Based on the statement of the problems that is stated previously, the objectives of the study are:

1. To find out the meaning of consuming Louis Vuitton bags to the women in Surabaya.
2. To describe how about such meaning contribute their identity.

### **1.4. Significance of the Study**

The study was held to find the phenomenon of consumption that occurs in the era of globalization, to understand about the identity in consuming of branded



bags and the meaning of consuming Louis Vuitton bags for the women in Surabaya, and also to describe how such meaning contributes in shaping their identity. In addition, this study was also intended to study the culture that exists in this modern era. And, this study was purposed for the readers to understand the facts and the purpose of consumption acts and to find out the consumption of branded goods in social life and how the conspicuous consumption is working in a practice of everyday life. This study is also aimed to give contributions to the students of English Department of Airlangga University, especially the students who are taking cultural studies as their major and as their object of interest. And also, this study gave more explanations in the case of branded bags consumption and applied the theory of consumption by Veblen.

### **1.5. Definition of Key Terms**

- Bag** : One of the usual things that is used by humans to bring something.
- Conspicuous Consumption** : According to Veblen (cited in Barnard 1996), conspicuous consumption is consuming something by people to differ themselves from others.
- Identity** : Barker (cited in Paterson 2006) stated that self identity is the conception about ourselves while our social identity is the expectations and opinions from others about us.

Louis Vuitton : One of the branded bags and famous brand that come from France with monogram LV. This brand is included into valuable brands in the world and also a very expensive product and until recently the brand has been known around world and has stores in various countries, and also considered the most prestigious brands (Steele 2005, p. 408).