

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the approach which was applied as the instrument to verify the consumption practices in the recent change. This study used cultural studies approach through the theory of conspicuous consumption by Veblen. Some theoretical arguments of consumption in everyday life or cultural consumption were also included to support the consumption practices, to give more explanation, and to get extensive and complete analysis.

2.1.1. Conspicuous Consumption

Consumption is an activity not only to fulfill the primary needs but rather to use the goods commodity and services to fulfill the desire, a manner or attitude which can be influenced by the social structures around them. This can be included into conspicuous consumption. It means that consumption of goods is intended as ability sign and prerequisite human dignity, the secondary needs to be nucleus like the primary needs. Consumers consume more on the desire rather than on the needs (Veblen 1899, p. 50). Consuming of luxury goods directs to the comforts of the consumers themselves (Veblen 1899, p.51).

Conspicuous consumption refers to the consumers' desire to show that they have ability to get luxury goods and that they are more inspired by the social

function rather than the economical function of a product because motivated by the desire to make others impressed with their ability to pay high price for the prestigious products. According to Veblen about conspicuous consumption:

The basis on which good repute in any highly organized industrial community ultimately rests is pecuniary strength; and the means of showing pecuniary strength, and so of gaining or retaining a good name, are leisure and a conspicuous consumption of goods (Veblen 1899, p. 59).

It means that consumption is no longer centered on the function of goods. People consume the goods to get high position within a society because the purchasing of expensive goods can make someone more superior than others (Veblen cited in Plemons 2008).

Because the consumption acts are done to make people looks superior., it can be said that people has done conspicuous consumption to get social status. Veblen (quoted in Barnard 2011) noted that “status is related to the result of economic prosperity”. And also, Plemons (2008) explains conspicuous consumption can be the reason of the people to follow the increasing of status standard in the society. People who have high social status will tend to be appreciated by others.

Veblen stated that conspicuous consumption is done by the consumers to show the signal of wealth, power, and status (Veblen 1899, p. 57). The purpose of the consumers is to show their ability to spend a lot of money buying expensive

goods and finally to be considered better by others. The wealth is a sufficient reason of status recognition of someone as long as showed by such commodity consumption and competitive display. Some people will spend a lot of money buying goods which actually are functionally the same in order to be more recognized. Status can be bought by certain social class through conspicuous consumption.

Conspicuous consumption is also related to the identity of the people and the membership of particular group. An individual who gets interpersonal influence tends to do conspicuous consumption. They want to obtain recognition, acceptance, and support from their group. If people begin to show their appearance and the material objects which they have such as the luxury goods with expensive price and from famous brand, this is called as their identity form. Veblen (cited in Paterson 2006) explained:

The consumption and display of certain key objects symbolic value articulates our position within a certain group. Therefore, a major way that both self-identity and social identity is established and maintained is through the consumption of particular goods (p. 55).

It means that an opinion of others about someone is the form social identity of someone (Paterson 2006, p. 38). And, the consumption of material object also can be global communication that can make a lot of people have the ability to interpret commercial symbols to increase their identity.

Besides that, the consumption of certain goods can be in the form of conformity of someone from a particular group. According to Veblen, conforming to the value of a group can stimulate the conspicuous consumption to raise the identity of someone and the fear of exiling socially (Veblen 1899, p. 58). The people consume something to be accepted by other members.

2.2. Reviews of Related Studies

There are some studies that are related to this study. However, the writer met a difficulty to find a related study held in Indonesia. And then, the writer used some related study from outside Indonesia. The first study entitled *Commodifying Fido: Pets as status symbols* by April M. Plemons, from Texas A and M University. This study found that pets are used by the owners to convey the social message, status position, and wealth. Plemons analyzed this study through the theory of consumerism, status, commodities, and distinction by Veblen, Karl Marx, and Bourdieu. In this study, Plemons observed that the main function of pets has been turned into a commodity that was initially for friends to relieve loneliness, but now it is used to support the increasing social status of someone. The rich people with high social status increase their expense on their pets through goods, such as designer of pet furniture, expensive accessories, and expensive custom breeds. Wealth is sufficient reason to recognize the status of someone, as long as wealth is displayed in the form of commodity consumption and competitive display (Plemons 2008). The similarity of this study with the one of Plemons's is the use of the theory by Veblen. The writer only used the theory of

conspicuous consumption by Veblen but Plemons elaborated the Veblen's theory with Marx and Bourdieu's theory.

The second is an article from International Journal of Contemporary Ethnography entitled *Conspicuously Consuming: The Red Hat Society and Midlife Women's Identity* by Marybeth C. Stalp, Rachel Williams, Annette Lynch, M.Elise Radina. This article talks about the organization which is called RHS. RHS is an organization whose members are women aged forty years old above. This organization unify women who at first did not know each other and become a new place to make independent friendships of social relations associated with church, family, work, and children (Stalp et al. 2009). RHS encourages midlife women for having fun. Consumer culture occurs in the RHS, where they are conspicuously consuming. The RHS membership allows forming an identity and they are placed on the conspicuous consumption. Each member has a lot of hats and wears conspicuous dress and t-shirt that are used to identify them. They have a lot of hats used for many occasions such as for lunch, shopping, outing, attending cultural events, and exhibitions. Hats which they use are not unusual hats and they are really expensive (Stalp et al. 2009). Veblen (cited in Stalp et al. 2009) noted that dressing is included into the part of leisure (wealthy) class; our dress or clothes are not only expensive but also must clearly be seen by others. It means that the wearer is not related to productive labor. Stalp et al elaborated conspicuous consumption with gender, appearance, and aging. Consumption becomes a medium to create and keep social meaning and identity. It also shows the women's dressing and appearance. It becomes a clue of their or their

husband's socioeconomic. Hegemonic femininity such as high heels, corsets, skirts, long hair has become obstacle of women's ability to do physical work, which makes they are placed in the status of leisure class (Veblen cited in Stalp et al. 2009). Stalp et al. (2009) also elaborated in consumption with appearance and aging that most of women always consume clothes or dress and beauty product to cover up the aging process. And, this research used snowball sampling method with seventy respondents (RHS members) all of which were married. And then, they did interviews, used pseudonym for individual interview respondents, and focused analysis on midlife women.

The similarities of this study with Stalp et al are the conspicuous consumption which occurs to the women. And respondents of this study to be interviewed are also women. And, Stapl et al also used the theory by Veblen and discussed the identity in the conspicuous consumption. Different from Stalp et al who elaborated conspicuous consumption with gender, appearance and aging, this study did not elaborate with aging and did not discuss about organization (such as RHS). Even though the theory of the study is almost the same, there is still a difference between two studies. The difference is the object study itself. Stapl et al used The Red Hat Society (RHS) and the writer of this study used Louis Vuitton bags as the object.

The third is a journal article entitled *Social Benefits of Luxury Brands as Costly Signals of Wealth and Status* by Rob M. A. Nellisen and Marijn H. C.Meijers from Department of Social Psychology, Tilburg University, Netherlands. This article discussed that brand-labeled clothes has significance to

the wearer. People want to wear brand-labeled clothes because they want to get a social status (Hyman cited in Nellissen&Meijers 2010). It means that people want to have a higher position than others on several dimensions (such as wealth) that are considered important by the society. Conspicuous consumption was also discussed in this article but it focused on the psychology and sociology perspectives. Nellisen and Meijers (2010) stated that the wealth is a desirable characteristic because it means having abundant resources to buy luxury products and also because it can show the ability and skills to obtain resources. People will be more compliant and generous to other people who show luxury. The conclusion of this article is that the other characteristic status (such as age, intelligence, and specific skills) are related to positive result in the social interaction, included financial awards, and that there is a fundamental consumerist delusion in the conspicuous consumption (Nellissen&Meijers 2010).

Different from Nellisen and Meijers who discussed conspicuous consumption on the psychology and social perspective, this study discussed conspicuous consumption through cultural studies approach. Nellisen and Meijers use luxury brands for the object of the study, while this study only used Louis Vuitton bags as the object of the study.

Another journal article is entitled *Consumers' Motivation for Consumption of Foreign Products: an Empirical Test in the People's Republic of China* by Amy Wong and Lianxi Zhou. Young Chinese consumers who consume foreign products are discussed in this journal article. This article also discussed about young Chinese consumers' perception that prestige, brand value, brand quality

become motive to buy foreign products. Wong and Zhou (2005) found that consumers especially in developing countries and also urban city choose the foreign products the more because of its association with higher prestige. Foreign products have higher prestige because the price is more expensive than local products and as we know, prestige are rarely purchased and require a higher level of prominence and knowledge. It means that someone must have good knowledge about brands. Consumers prefer to buy foreign brands to increase their self-image as cosmopolitan, sophisticated, and modern people (Kapferer cited in Wong&Zhou 2005). According to Wong and Zhou (2005) the quality perceived by the consumer to brand products has bigger effect on purchase intentions. And, people want to have particular brands as symbolic makers of group membership. This research collected data on the four main campuses at Zhejiang, China. The similarities with this study are that Wong and Zhou's research used urban society as the respondents and the object is also foreign products. This study used Louis Vuitton which is one of the famous foreign products as the object of the study. However, the difference lies on the fact that Wong and Zhou categorized two foreign products as conspicuous products versus inconspicuous products.

The next study which also used qualitative methodology is the undergraduate thesis of FIB UNAIR (Faculty of Humanities of Airlangga University) by Eriesta Lila Permata. She discussed the modes and purposes of Surabaya University students in consuming batik products and did in-depth interviews and purposive snowball sampling technique, which is similar with what this study did. Similar with her study, interpretative analysis was also

applied in this study. Permata (2011) stated that the interpretative analysis can provide the opportunity for the researcher to interpret the answer of respondents. And, the population is also Indonesian urban people in Surabaya. Different from Permata's research which used the theory of circuit of culture by Stuart Hall, Paul du Gay, Linda Janes, Hugh Mackay, and Keith Negus and the theory Graeme Turner in the method to explains about batik "from below", this study used the theory of consumption by Veblen. The object of Permata's study is also different with this study.

The other study is from under graduate thesis of Airlangga University. It is done by Muktiono (2008) entitled *Viewers' Consumerism in Perceiving Pond's Ad in Kawanku Magazine*. This study concerned about the characteristics of consumerism among female teenagers. This study used questionnaires to find the data and the participants are female teenagers. The result of this study is that consumerism happens among female teenagers and skin lightening products affect them, physically and psychologically and the advertisement has role to influence female teenagers (Muktiono 2008). The difference is that this study does not use qualitative approach like Muktiono's study. And, the technique of data collection of Muktiono's study use questioners whiles this study use interview to get the data from participants.