

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I.1. Background of the Study

As a social creature, people tend to unite with other people who have similarities; such as the same hobby, occupation, status, music interest, school, or any other similarities. It is not surprising that many in communities today, we can easily find Harley Davidson Club, Slankers, journalist alliance, workers unity, and many more. Those are the examples of community in the corporeal world united by certain similarities and the members are real and have exact identities. Then, how about the virtual world that is known as internet? As people know that internet has linked million people worldwide for many years through many ways such as e-mail and chat-room. Recent years, people also make community in the internet called cyber community such as Friendster, almost everyone knows it or at least ever heard about it.

Friendster is the popular social-networking service that cleverly assimilates real-life social groups into a large virtual network. Friendster is managed by Friendster Inc. which the head office is located in Silicon Valley, California, USA. It was created and built by Jonathan Abrams in 2002. He was graduated from Computer Science, McMaster University and had ever been the CEO of Hotlinks (Retrieved

April 7, 2007, from <http://detikinet.com/index.php/detik.read/tahun/2006/bulan/12/tgl/20/time/094054/idnews/722230/idkanal/398>). Actually, Friendster is not the only one cyber community server in internet, it also has friends such as; Orkut (www.orkut.com), MySpace (www.myspace.com). Multiply (www.multiply.com), MeetUp (www.meetup.com), Tribe.Net (www.tribe.net), LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com), TheFaceBook (www.thefacebook.com), and Monster (www.monster.com). Meanwhile, in Indonesia there are local servers such as; Temanster (www.temanster.com), Fupei (www.fupei.com), and SohIB (www.sohib.com).

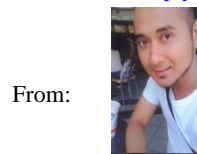
The writer is interested in choosing Friendster as observation object because of some reasons. First, in Indonesia, it is the most famous and largest members amount among other social net-work servers. Second, friendster is more familiar to Indonesian people than others. Furthermore, the members of Friendster are various (it is opened for any sex, ages, jobs, hobbies, and destinations in joining the community), any unexpected thing could happen in Friendster. For instance; a famous Indonesian musician, Maia Estianty, found her partner for the Duo Maia, through Friendster (Retrieved January 10, 2008, from TV broadcast RCTI of *Silet* program). [Friendster](#) helps users find dates and new friends by referring people to friends, or friends of friends, or friends of friends of friends, and so on. Friendster connects people through networks of friends for communicating, sharing and making new friends. Each Friendster member creates his or her own profile, which contains

the personal information such things as; name or nick name, gender, age, marital status, occupation, school, location (city and state), and photos.

Actually, on Friendster webpage, it does not merely show member's profile but also friends list, testimonials, advertisements and etc. Testimonial is a note from member's friend. It could be comments, greetings, information, or anything. At the prior of Friendster developing, we just can send message, but now the feature is more complete. We can post a blog in bulletin board, change the webpage background (wallpaper), and add photo slide show or music (mp3) on media box so that it looks catchier. Below is the example of blog in Friendster.

Bulletin Board Message Detail

[Post BulletinReply](#)



[bagus](#)

Date:

Subject: trnyata sakit bnget ya rasanya
meski uda brulang kali gw jatuh
cinta,dan brulang kali juga gw sakit
hati,tapi tetep aja gw ga terbiasa dg
rasanya sakit hati,sakiiiiit bnget.

Message: ga kapok2nya deh gw.
abis gmn lg,klo uda cinta....
kok ga ada ya,didunia kyk gn yg
setia....smua ancur2an.
apa gw hrs ga mencintai lg...?????

From the example given above, people can guess the identity of Friendster's member, his/her personality, or his/her feelings. Identity plays a key role in building virtual communities. In communication, knowing the identity of the people whom you communicate to is very important to understand and evaluate the interaction. Yet,

in virtual communities, identity is very ambiguous. The identity in digital publishing, especially Friendster, is blurring. People can not exactly notice the truth and lies there. Online identities may be multiple, fluid, manipulated and/or may have little to do with the 'real selves' of the persons behind them.

The writer would like to explain identity first before talking more about cyber-identity. Identity concerns with human existential to represent their selves as entire. Identity requires the telling of stories both by and about themselves, or stories others tell about the person, or stories in which the person is included (Whitebrook, 2001: 22). In the case of this study, identity is an individual's narrative story entails identity as the public presentation of the self. Cyberspace has accelerated the transition form from the real to the hyperreal. In cyberspace, sense of corporeal identity is exchanged into hyperreal identity. Corporeal identity is the identity of the self in the real world, able to seen, and tangible. Meanwhile, hyperreal identity is the identity construction from nothing (something inexistent before), has no real origin, a copy identity transformed from unreal into reality. It is difficult to distinguish the real or fiction, product of goods or product of signs (Retrieved April, 30, 2007 from <http://www.cyberhobbit.de/identity.htm>).

Friendster is one product of popular culture. It is produced in mass, spread the same product in the worldwide, booming for certain time, then presumably goes to be inexistent slowly by the time. To understand the identity on Friendster, the writer has to interpret the signs found there. Sign is something that stands for something else; it may be understood as a discreet unit of meaning. Signs are not limited to words but

also include images, gestures, scents, tastes, texture, sounds – essentially all of the way in which information can be processed and communicated by reasoning mind. Signs are elements that can be related together logically in a variety of different ways. The sign is supposed to be based on the categories of ‘similitude’ or ‘identity’. This presumed fallacy renders the sign coherent with the ideological notion of the subject (Eco, 1984: 25). By this theory, the writer tries to analyze how individuals represent their identities on Friendster through signs. The signs used by Friendster users tend to be hyper-sign since the cyberspace is a product of hyperreality. Hyper-sign is a sign that out of principle, definition, structure, and it self’s function (Piliang, 2003: 53). Hyper-sign itself divided into several types such as; artificial signs and recycled signs.

One study which is related to this research has done by Satiti Ingastin, student of Letters Faculty Airlangga University. Her study was entitled *Nesta’s Appearance Viewed from Hyperreality in Hopkins’ Mates, Dates, and Sequin Smiles* (unpublished thesis, 2006). The study conducted a research of hyperreal identity. She analyzed the identity of the main character, Nesta, which tends to be hyperreal. She indicated that Nesta’s self confidence is formed by hyperreality regarding appearance. Other study is an electronic journal by Danah Boyd and Jeffrey Heer from University of California, Berkeley. Their study that entitled *Profiles as Conversation: Networked Identity Performance on Friendster* (2006) discussed how the performance of social identity and relationships shifted the profile from being a static representation of self to a communicative body in conversation with the other represented bodies. The last

study which is also related to this study is conducted by Kathryn Everly entitled *Textual Violence and the Hyperreal in De todo lo visible y lo invisible* by Lucía Etxebarria. On that study, Everly discussed the manipulation of traditional narrative structure in order to challenge preconceived notions of the reader/writer relationship in Etxebarria's novel.

Those studies deal with this research since they are concerned with hyperreality and Friendster. Satiti Ingastin analyzed the hyperreality of the character in a novel which is absolutely known as imaginary since it is just a fiction. Then, Everly analyzes how the author, Etxebarria, created a textual hyperreality in her novel. Meanwhile, Danah Boyd and Jeffrey Heer analyzed the communicative aspects of Profiles within the Friendster service. They focused on the role of Profiles in context creation and interpretation, negotiating unknown audiences, and initiating conversations. On the other hand, this study tries to interpret the identity performance in Friendster profile, by identifying the signs found in profiles.

By doing this research, hopefully, the result of the research could be useful for the Friendster users. They could use it as a guide when surfing virtual world to identify the identity of individuals in internet. It is necessary to avoid cyber crime since many criminals are happened in and through internet. People who are interesting in semiotics study can also use this research as additional information about sign application especially in cyberspace field.

I.2. Statement of the Problem

Finding individual's identity on cyberspace, especially Friendster, is quite confusing because it is hard to recognize the truth and the lies there. There are full of counterfeits since everyone could change the identity from one to another, even change gender. The signs used to perform identity in Friendster tend to be hyper-sign. Therefore, the writer curious to understand the identity performed in Friendster. However, this research does not concern with the problem whether the identity is a real or a fake. The writer conducted a research on Friendster profile to figure out these questions:

1. How do individuals represent their hyperreal identity in Friendster profile through signs?
2. How are such signs on Friendster then semiotically read?

I.3. Objective of the study

The goal of this study is to understand the identity performance on Friendster. The writer will choose the representative Friendster from her friends and second degree of friends list. The writer limits the observation only on Friendster profile. The interesting fact, the content of profile is quite much includes the photograph, status (whether single, in relationship, or married), hobbies, occupation, and many more. The profile represents individual (a friendster user) by his/herself view.

The Friendster profile will be analyzed using semiotic approach. Theory of hyper-sign proposed by Jean Baudrillard and relation of sign proposed by Barthes are applied to recognize the signs on Friendster profiles which are represent the individual's identity. Based on the statement above, this study is intended:

1. To understand the way individuals perform the hyperreal identity in Friendster profile through signs.
2. To semiotically recognize the sign types used to perform hyperreal identity in Friendster.

I.4. Significance of the study

The hyper-signs and narrative identity in Friendster are explored in this study. Therefore, this study is expected to offer an insight to the Friendster users. They could use the result of this research as a guide when surfing in virtual world to distinguish the identity of individual in cyberspace. This study also gives additional information to readers who are interested in semiotics study about sign application in cyberspace.

I.5. Definition of key terms

- Friendster : an online social networking community that connects people through networks of friends for communicating, sharing and making new friends.

- Friendster Profile : a personal profile of a Friendster member contains of photograph, status (whether single, in relationship, or married), hobbies, occupation, and many more.
- Hyperreal : an exceed world that occurs because of the using of hyper-sign and hyper signification of reality. So, the differences of reality/non reality, sign/reality become blurred (Piliang, 2003: 53).
- Identity : requires the telling of stories both by and about themselves or stories others tell about the person or stories in which the person is included (Whitebrook, 2001: 22).
- Sign : something which stands somebody for something in some respect or capacity (Pierce qtd in Eco, 1984: 14).