MATERIAL CULTURE AS A LIFESTYLE AND SELF-IDENTITY: A CASE STUDY OF THE ROTATING SAVINGS TO BUY AN IPHONE IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT
Branding as a cultural production is a phenomenon that involves the creation of narratives, symbols, and identities that affect individuals and social. Through the study of material culture, this article discusses the representation of a person's lifestyle and self-identification in meeting the needs of smartphones with the iPhone brand. Using the literature study method, social media data on the internet shows that there is a business service strategy in the form of savings or social gathering in buying an iPhone to consumers. The research results show that strong branding images built by Apple Inc. make people who economically are not in the upper middle class and cannot pursue these lifestyles (lifestyle and consumption) so that they take actions that can provide middle-class touch which can also be called virtual consumption. In this case, material culture can be understood as a giver of meaning and related, with strength, power, and self-construction.

KEYWORDS: material, branding, iPhone, culture, consumption

INTRODUCTION
The development of communication technology today is very rapid. The higher level of productivity of the community, demands a communication tool that can simplify and ease the activities of the community itself. The development of communication technology (cellular phones) is then not only limited to its main function, but also the ease of accessing various information that can be obtained from a small object that can be carried anywhere. This article will explain how cell phones today, not only limited to communication technology, but can also be seen as a material culture that can see an individual in his assessment and interpretation of objects that can lead to meaning for the individual.

At present, cellular phones can also be categorized into fashion or fashion, especially among the younger generation in urban areas. Woodward (2007: 4) states that: "in a complimentary fashion, objects also carry personal and emotional meanings, they can facilitate interpersonal interactions and assists a person to act upon him or herself." When someone uses certain items as part of his mode, usually he will choose...
items that have a brand image that is able to raise his social status. The image of the brand is related to attitudes in the form of beliefs and preferences towards a brand. Brand image is a set of consumer beliefs about certain brands (Kotler and Armstrong, 2001: 225). This brand image is of course inseparable from the company's strategy in capturing public consumption interest by forming its image more positive than other brands. Through the study of material culture, this article will discuss the representation of a person's lifestyle and self-identification in meeting the needs of communication tools in the form of smartphones with the iPhone brand.

**Branding as Cultural Production**

Branding is not just a marketing tool to increase the sale of products or services, but also a complex and multidimensional process involved in cultural production. In this context, branding can be seen as an effort to create, modify, and promote symbols, values, and identities which then become an integral part of consumer culture. According to Holt (2004), branding can be seen as a form of modern "mythmaking" in which companies create stories and symbols that capture public imagination and form social identity. "Brands are modern myths that communicate ideologies about the good life and individual identity," he wrote in his book "How Brands Become Icons: The Principles of Cultural Branding" (Holt, 2004). The brand not only represents the product but also reflects and forms cultural values.

Cultural production through branding involves several stages, including narrative creation, selection of symbols, and strengthening associations through various media. Brand narratives are often tied to stories that are relevant to certain cultures or subculture. For example, Nike with the "Just Do It" campaign has succeeded in associating itself with courage, enthusiasm, and determination, which are values that are highly valued in Western culture.

The symbol also plays an important role in cultural production through branding. Barthes (1972) in "Mythologies" states that the symbols used in advertising and branding not only convey messages about products but also contain deeper cultural meanings. Apple Inc. logo, for example, not only represents technology companies but also symbols of innovation, creativity, and courage to be different.

Branding has a big influence on individual and collective identity. In the era of consumerism, identity is often formed by what we consume and how we present ourselves through these items. McCracken (1988) in his book "Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities" argues that consumer goods, including brands, function as a tool to build and express personal identity.

Furthermore, brands often create consumer communities that are bound by the same interests and values. Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) introduced the concept of "Brand Community" in their article "Brand Community," where they define the brand community as "a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships A brand." These communities show how branding can create a strong collective identity.

Although branding can enrich consumer culture, there is criticism that states that branding often strengthens stereotypes and promotes materialistic values. Klein (2000) in his book "No Logo: Taking Aim at The Brand Bullies" criticized aggressive branding practices and how this could affect culture and society. Klein argues that branding often exploits consumer emotions and insecurity to create artificial demand and lead people towards excessive consumerism.

In addition, branding can also reduce cultural diversity by promoting homogeneous values that are packaged in a global campaign. This can be seen in how big...
brands dominate the global market and spread the culture of Western consumerism to various parts of the world, which often erode local traditions and values.

Branding as a cultural production is a complex phenomenon that involves the creation of narratives, symbols, and identities that affect individuals and society. Although it has the potential to enrich consumer culture and build a community, branding also carries the risk of strengthening materialistic values and cultural homogenization. Therefore, it is important to have a critical understanding of the role of branding in cultural production to be able to take advantage of the positive aspects while overcoming the negative impacts.

Iphone from Apple Inc.: Material Culture for Lifestyling Purposes

The iPhone brand from Apple Inc. companies in communication technology devices is a brand that not only creates a technology as a supporter of activities, but also sees the needs of consumers of the technology they use can be in line with their daily lifestyles. The brand has a very positive image in society. The sophistication offered by Apple Inc. products. Through advertisements in various media is one of the reasons someone is interested in buying the product. In addition, the product design seems luxurious and different from other brands. Both are the initial knowledge of a person to recognize Apple products that can lead to the desire to buy it.

A person's specialization on certain brands is based on the brand image that develops in the community formed by the company. Branding image is a set of consumer beliefs about certain brands (Kotler and Armstrong, 2001: 225). This belief is based on experience and knowledge embedded in a person's mind about the positive image of a brand. According to Kotler Citra must be built through all existing media and sustainable and the message can be delivered through symbols, media or visuals, atmosphere, and a particular event (Kotler, 2001: 401). Brand image and innovation are the main concern when someone decides to buy a smartphone or cell phone.

According to Aaker (1991) branding image is a group of associations that are usually grouped into ways that have meaning. Furthermore, the brand association has a definition of all the impressions that arise in the mind of someone related to his memory of a brand. The impressions that arise and settled in a person's mind then give a positive or negative image to something. The branding image will be continued by people who have the perception and experience in using the product they share with the people around them. A brand that has a positive image in society will be a person's first choice. This understanding matches the phenomenon of the use of Apple Inc. brands in the field of smartphones or cellular phones that are quite high in the community.

Apple Inc. is one of the most influential brands and can be recognized in the world, which is responsible for the rise of smartphones with the iPhone. Valued at more than $2 trillion in 2021, this is also the most valuable technology company in the world. Based on the Business of Apps data, the number of active iPhones worldwide reached 1.33 billion units in 2022. This figure increased 8.13% from the previous year (year-on-year/yoy) by 1.23 billion units. For more than the last decade, the number of iPhone that is active globally continues to grow every year. Noted, the number of active iPhones worldwide in 2022 is the highest since 2008 (Curry, 2024).

When branding images have influenced someone to buy a trendy product among the community, it forms a consumptive consumer culture. Developing countries are the main target markets for these industry players, especially countries in Asia that have a high consumptive impact. According to data from the Maxuri website about luxury goods, the Asian continent is the most prosperous continent, especially seen from the behavior of its people who like to consume luxury goods. While data from Capgemini Asia Pacific Wealth Report in 2015, shows that Indonesia is a country in third place in Asia in

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terms of consuming luxury goods.

![Smartphone Market Share Worldwide (2024)](image)

**Figure 1**
Apple Inc. is the most popular mobile brand worldwide with a 27.95% smartphone market share (April 2024) (GS Statcounter, 2024)

Apple Inc. product prices that are expensive for a communication tool are not an obstacle for consumers to have the desire to buy it. In Indonesia cases, with a community background whose economic conditions are lower compared to developed countries, interest among the younger generation is very high to have products with the Apple Inc. brand. Uneven economic conditions make some parties take advantage of the high interest of young people to buy cellular phones through unique strategies to make it easier for consumers to buy Apple Inc. products. One of these strategies is the existence of a system or service in the form of savings and monthly rotating savings (*arisans*) (Apple Inc. cellular phone brands) that can be found in various social media sales accounts.

The enthusiasts of the service strategy in the form of savings or Monthly Rotating Savings (*arisans*) iPhone were also quite found, this can be seen through the comments proposed by potential customers in the service provider account. One thing that is quite interesting about this phenomenon is when consumers pay off savings or monthly rotating savings (social gathering) in the form of products that have been agreed upon in the initial repayment period of three to 12 months, the product series obtained by consumers has been out of date due to the latest output series products With a more sophisticated system has been launched by Apple Inc. companies with prices that are not much different from the previous series.

Referring to this phenomenon, Gerke (2002) calls it a *lifestyling*, which has an understanding that economically it is not in the upper middle class and cannot pursue the lifestyle of these people (lifestyle and consumption), making them get pressure social so that they take actions that can provide a 'middle-class touch' life that can also be called virtual consumption.
The number of enthusiasts from the younger generation in Indonesia with a low-medium economic background to buy Apple Inc. products to sellers using service in the form of savings and monthly rotating savings (arisan)

The touch can be in the form of use or ownership of an item that is a symbol of a modern lifestyle that does not merely have to take the form of actual consumption. Gerke also stated (2002: 137):

“Consumption of mass-produced goods and the promotion of lifestyle of leisure have become their defining characteristics in Indonesia.”

Lifestyle is one that cannot be eliminated from a person's cultural factor, because lifestyle can be useful not only to construct self-identity and communicate that identity to others but is also considered suitable for determining and maintaining membership in the group's identity (Gerke, 2002: 138). Lifestyle creates consumerism behavior that is not easy to control. Consumerism is a cultural practice that has an impact on the lives of all people, captivating them on all types of freedom to consume items that provide a symbol of "modernization" and the lifestyle of the "urban" society.

Consumption of Iphone and Self-Identity

Woodward (2007) states that "Objects Might Significant Sub-cultural Affinity, Occupation, Participation in a Leisure Activity, or Social Status," so that an individual does not only choose a cell phone brand for communication purposes, but interpretation and assessment of a The cell phone brand can affect the identity of himself and his relationship with the surrounding environment, because an object has meaning and function in a particular context (Woodward, 2007: 3). Peers in the same environment become an important benchmark in one's social life. Other individuals who are unknown but being around their environment have the possibility to provide their assessment and interpretation of someone. This can be seen through ownership of objects, gestures or symbols that are indicated verbally and non-verbally. This consumer culture is the benchmark for interpreting individuals to an object of material culture.
Slater (1997: 8) revealed that "Consume Culture is an important of the Culture of the Culture of Modern West - Certain central to the meaningful practice of everyday life in modern world." This consumer culture is closely related to negotiations from one's status and identity with his social environment. Negotiations are seen one of them with the objects of someone he uses in a particular social environment and social network. Consumer culture shows that goods dominate the level of community consumerism (Slater, 1997: 8). An object is not only seen based on its function, but there is a broader meaning, namely a fashion or fashion that changes traditional society to modern. This shows that fashion demands consumption of an object that can show one's social status.

Identity is related to the consumption function as revealed by Slater (1997: 30) "Society Appears as a kind of fancy-dress party in which is identified, tried on, worn for the event and then traffic in the next." The use of branded goods worn by someone in its appearance is used as a symbol that shows a person's identity and economic and social status. Through an object, a person's identity can be 'purchased.' This shows that the identity can now be obtained based on ownership of an object which certainly has a high prestige in society. In addition, according to Arnould and Thompson (2005: 869) "Consumer Culture Denotes a Social Arrangement in which the relationship between lived culture and social resources, and between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources on which they depend. Markets." The culture of consumption emphasizes the relationship between community culture and social sources, between meaningful life and symbolic sources, as well as material in which it depends on which is then mediated by the capitalist market.

Ownership of an object can greatly affect a person's social and cultural life. When we talk about self-identification, then what is questioned in us is that the identity is obtained based on what and where? Self-identity is formed based on experiences gained in individual life. As explained above, these experiences can affect the interpretation which then produces meaning in a person to objects or events in certain events. Through this interpretation, various hopes, feelings, and motivations arise in the individual as a stimulus to respond.

Feelings are a condition in human consciousness which due to the influence of his knowledge is considered as a positive or negative state (Koentjaraningrat, 1990: 107). Individuals have feelings can be interpreted that he is responding to a reality that exists through his knowledge so that reality can be judged both positively and negatively. Erikson (1980) explains identity as a subjective feeling of self-consistent and developing from time to time. With the ownership of these objects, a person can be easily accepted by the surrounding environment, especially his friends he wants. Erikson (1980) states "The Term 'Identity' Express such a mutual relation in that it connotes both a persistent sameness within oneself (selfsameness) and a persistent sharing of some kinds of essential characteristics with others (Erikson, 1980: 109)." Through an identity built by an individual using Apple Inc. brand smartphone or cell phone products, the individual will look like other individuals who also use the same product. The individual will then also be classified by others who see it into certain groups that are associated with the Apple Inc. products they have, and even different from the group where he was previously known.

CONCLUSION

Ownership of a material culture along with the activities carried out by an individual, forming a pattern which is then called a lifestyle. This lifestyle is a manifestation of the relationship between individuals and an object that creates certain behaviors. This behavior is often not directly proportional to rational thoughts and leads to futile actions (Dietler, 2010: 220). Material culture has a certain meaning for a person...
or a group. This meaning only applies to those who understand the values and functions of the object, because not everyone has the same knowledge or interpretation.

Material culture symbolizes broader social discourse related to norms and values. Certain objects carry the meaning of individuals who can facilitate interactions between individuals and other individuals and can help someone to behave towards themselves. For example, when someone has an object, the object has various advantages that are often considered to be able to support identity, this is closely related to self-confidence and satisfaction that arises when using the object. This example can be applied to people who use Apple Inc. products. This assumption arises as a personal meaning of someone who is understood when using an object that has prestige. In this issue, material culture can be understood as a giver of meaning and related, with strength, power, and self-construction.

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