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The Phenomenon of “Hypebeast” among Young People in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

In the era of globalization, digitalization has accelerated technological development which created one of the most life-changing innovations: social media. As a modern form of mass media influence that enables the instantaneous transfer of meaning between individuals worldwide, social media has been both a negative and positive impact towards the modern human life in significant ways, especially in the lives of young adults. The worldwide fashion phenomenon known as ‘Hypebeast’ is a perfect example of the negative side of social media. With young people as the primary target consumer, this phenomenon uses digital marketing to promote the rise of ‘conspicuous consumption’ in which the youth are ‘hyped up’ to consume high-end brands and luxury goods in order to feel included and increase their social status. This phenomenon is directly related with the school of thought called hedonism which argue that the right thing to do is to produce the greatest amount of happiness and as little of pain; in this case, this philosophy argues that youth should purchase things that bring pleasure or sparks to the consumer but actually has little to no needs in his or her life. Using the qualitative approach as our method of research, in particular phenomenology, this thesis gives insight to the impact of consumerism and hedonism in the ‘Hypebeast’ phenomenon of the mainstream youth culture today.

Keywords: Hypebeast, social media, hedonism

Introduction

In its inception in 2005, Hypebeast was nothing more than the personal blog of college student Kevin Ma in which he regularly posted about his interests in streetwear fashion and most often, sneakers. The blog’s page-viewers soon skyrocketed, and Ma began monetizing the contents of his online journal. Eventually, Hypebeast evolved into its own company and was able to file for initial public offering in 2015. As of 2016, the company managed to raise 65 million HK dollars and had a valuation of 270 million US dollars, which is Asia’s best performing debut stock of that year (Wang, 2016). The evolution of Hypebeast meant that it was no longer just an influential website; it is now a multi-million-dollar brand and lifestyle phenomenon transmitted through new media. Hypebeast is now the leading online destination for streetwear fashion worldwide, and it mainly targets the demographic of adolescents and young adults between ages 18-30 that are mostly male. According to Ma, the website’s readers are “coming from high school, college, or those that graduated and just entered the workforce” (Lieber 2016). In simple terms, Hypebeast’s main audience are young people who have a lot of money to spend and are tech-savvy.

The company’s success in mainstreaming niche streetwear brands like Supreme, Bathing Ape, and Off-White in youth culture worldwide was made possible because of digital technology and social media. Hypebeast has become a powerful player in the

digital media industry that provides valuable advertising services and an e-commerce platform for fashion businesses worldwide. As one of the world's leading trendsetters, Hypebeast's "stamp of approval can help make or break an underground or indie brand trying to catch the attention of influencers or even savvy mainstream consumers" (Zax, 2012). It's like a Michelin Star for fashion brands. Now, the term Hypebeast does not simply refer to a single website or a trendsetter; it has transformed into an identity to describe individuals or communities who chase trends to impress others involving high fashion streetwear, expensive fashion items that are “hype” (cool and trendy). Consequently, the Hypebeast brand has a substantial leverage over the consumer preferences of young people in this digital era.

Since Hypebeast has found its way to young people's hearts in Indonesia, there has been a rising demand for streetwear fashion in Indonesia. As a result, import of expensive fashion goods, particularly those popularized by Hypebeast, from developed countries like the United States, Italy, and Japan has increased in recent years. It is disputable that the rise of the streetwear phenomenon in Indonesia would positively impact the country's fashion industry and the sustainability of its local cultures. Considering that 60% of Indonesians have the tendency to consume international products more than their local products (Yulistara, 2018), this Hypebeast phenomenon has seemed to make this issue worse, especially in terms of fashion and the youth. Moreover, the growing obsession of following trends leads to the rise of consumerism, narcissism and the lack of nationalism.

Purpose of the Study

1. To determine whether the impact of Hypebeast phenomenon is more negative or positive towards the young people in Indonesia.
2. To understand the future of Indonesia's local cultures, especially in the fashion industry.

Research Questions

1. What are the positive and negative consequences of the Hypebeast phenomenon in Indonesia, in particular towards the country's young people?
2. How does the Hypebeast phenomenon affects Indonesia's culture and economy in the long term?

Theoretical Framework

According to Functionalist theory, mass media as an institution of society is a force of social integration that is necessary in educating and informing the public particularly concerning the cultural heritage and identity of the society. Therefore, the media have the function of continuity wherein they express the dominant culture, recognize subcultures and new cultural developments, and forge and maintain commonality of values (McQuail, 2007, p. 99). However, due to the tendency of mainstream mass media to conform and support rather than be critical towards dominant values (McQuail, 2007, p. 97), the media's role in educating the public becomes problematic when the dominant values they disseminate through their content have been influenced by the cultural hegemony of external forces like international business corporations. In the case of our discussion, the Hypebeast phenomenon found its way to the dominant culture of young people in Indonesia mainly through social media. Consequently, new media in Indonesia is often less of a platform that educates the public on the country's own diverse array of local cultures and more of a means by which international brands can advertise their products and promote the culture of consumerism and the preference for foreign goods as opposed to that which are locally produced. This is possible due to globalization and the fact that

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the Internet economy lies especially in the **commodification** of the users of free access platforms which deliver targets for advertisers and publicists (Mc Quail, 2007, p. 97).

In a critical cultural theory of mass media, it is also stated that mass culture embodies a hegemonic ideology (McQuail, 2007, p. 117). Hegemony, according to Em Griffin is “The subtle sway of society’s haves over its have-nots.” (Griffin, 2014, p. 346) People who have more power, more wealth and more influence in the society can shape people who have less impact than them in terms of opinion. This leads to the commodification of content and audiences since the people who are rich wanted to get richer, they try to “sell” even the simplest thing we can get for free like TV shows now are being commodified, we need to buy certain “premium” TV shows if we want to watch it. When more and more things are commodified people in the society becomes prone to consumerism, as they keep buying more things that are not what they need.

Methodology

In this research, we are using a qualitative approach to explain the phenomenon of Hypebeast among young people in Indonesia, we use the phenomenology method and content analysis to collect the data. We specifically studied 8 accounts, which constitutes 4 accounts that regularly publish Hypebeast-related content and 4 other accounts dedicated in promoting Indonesian-made products. We analyzed the pictures and videos that the first four accounts posted on their Instagram page to observe how they promote and project the expensive lifestyle of a typical Hypebeast as well as their numbers of followers to make comparison of the people that are interested and loyal to those accounts. Furthermore, we also analyze the pictures and videos of the other four accounts to see how they give publicity to locally made goods and Indonesia’s cultural heritage.

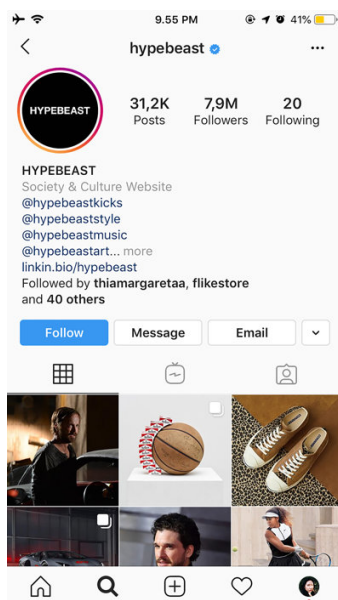


Figure 1

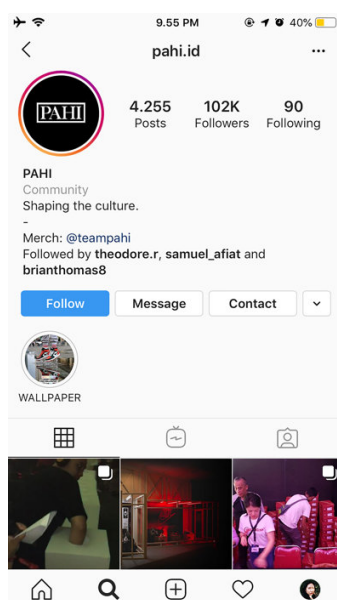


Figure 2

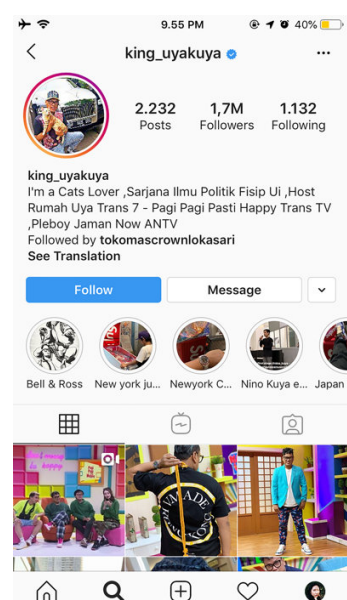


Figure 3

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Figure 4

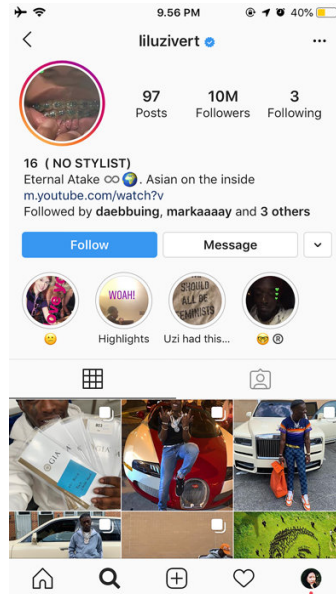


Figure 5

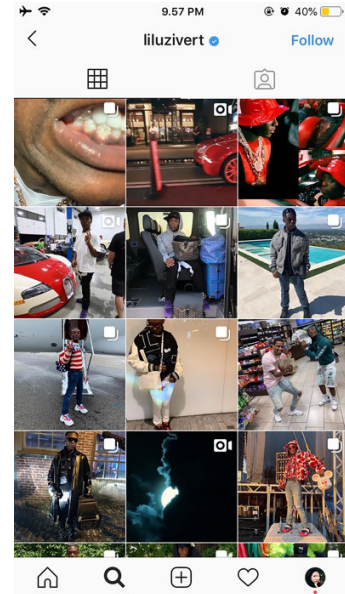


Figure 6

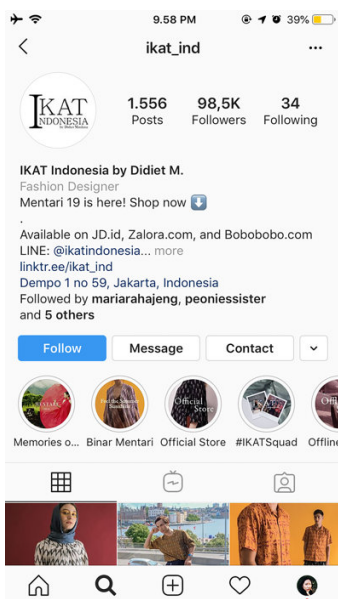


Figure 7



Figure 8

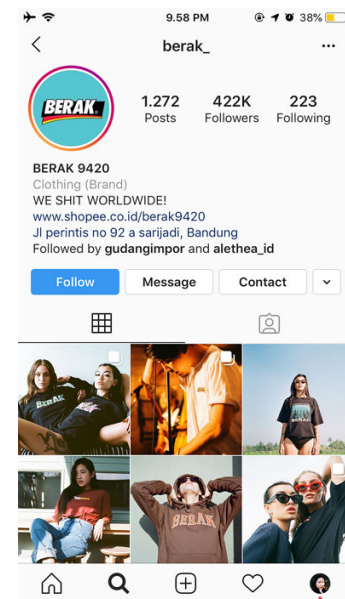


Figure 9

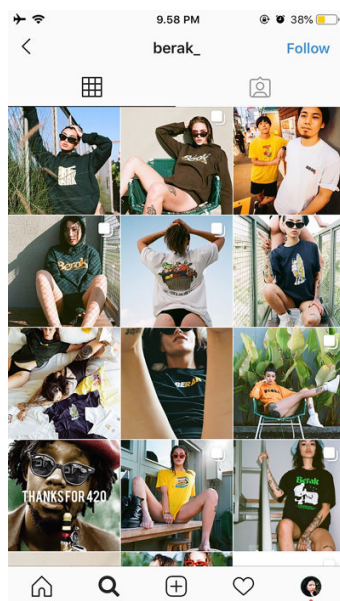


Figure 10

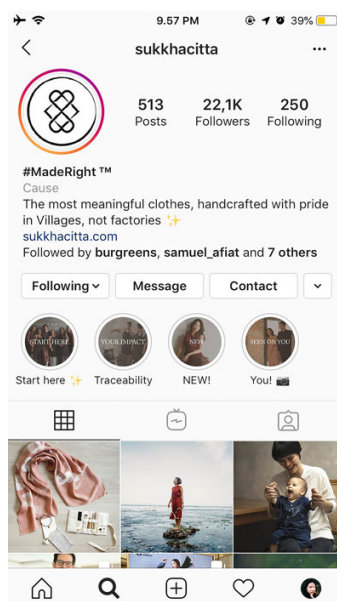


Figure 11

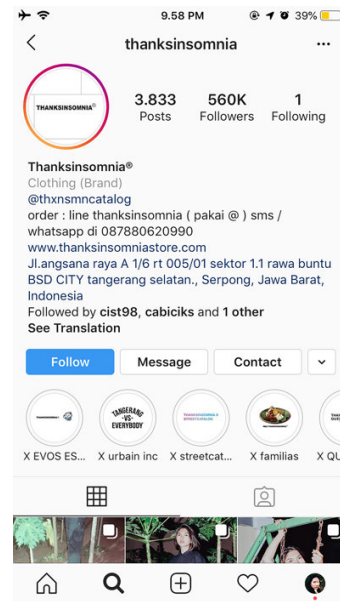


Figure 12

Literature Review

Hypebeast

The term Hypebeast is most commonly used as a derogatory slang to describe someone who is a beast (or obsessed) about hyped-up fashion brands and will thus undertake whatever means to achieve that hype (Beltran, 2018). The ‘beasts’ typically refer to Millennials and Gen-X who are well-off and keen on spending their disposable income on expensive, high-end streetwear fashion goods that have been curated by the leading influencers of the Hypebeast community and popularized by celebrities like Kanye West and Jay-Z on social media. Streetwear brands that have received the stamp of approval of the Hypebeast community typically cultivate ‘hype’ around a particular product by selling only a limited supply of retail (Orloff, 2017). Moreover, Hypebeast streetwear brands have been able to enter the mainstream partly because of the rise of hip-hop and rap music culture throughout the world. The Hypebeast phenomenon certainly has dominated the lifestyle of young people globally; its most loyal followers have earned the reputation as social climbers working tirelessly to develop their image on social media by showcasing their high-end apparel.

New Media

The modernization and diversification of communication technologies in recent decades has made the expression ‘new media’ increasingly common when referring to electronic and digital communication devices and practices. New media renders its predecessor obsolete because of its main features like interconnectedness, accessibility to individual users as senders and/or receivers, interactivity, and ubiquity (McQuail, 2007, p. 39). The Internet, which is arguably human history’s most significant advancement in the field of communication, is a form of new media that fueled the spread of the Hypebeast phenomenon because of its “potential as a purveyor of goods and many profitable services and as an alternative to other means of personal and interpersonal communication” (Mcquail, 2007, p. 40). In particular, social media has been the primary means through which Hypebeast influencers develop a cult-following around high-end streetwear brands and spread news and information about the latest hype.

Instagram. With 60 970 000 users in Indonesia, Instagram is one of the most popular social media platforms in the country. Instagram is a social networking application for sharing photos and videos from smartphones (Moreau, 2019). These photos and videos are shared to users' followers who can then view, like, comment, and share the posts. Moreover, since the majority of users are between the ages of 18 to 30 years old, using Instagram to market fashion goods of high-end streetwear brands and the Hypebeast brand to the Indonesian youth has proven to be very lucrative.

Consumptive Behavior

Consumptive behavior is best explained as a behavior that involves an excessive consumption of particular purchases; in other words, it is known as consumerism. Consumerism according to Colin Campbell in the book *Elusive Consumption* is “its very nature predominantly concerned with the gratification of wants rather than the meeting of needs” (Ekström, Brembeck, p. 28), consumerism is highly individualistic because decision-making is positioned strongly within yourself as different people can have different wants. It is also possible for other people to tell what your needs are or what humans need but telling each individual what they want is impossible because “no one but you is in a position to decide what it is that you want” (Ekström, Brembeck, p. 29). To be able to completely understand consumerism as a whole we have to see consumerism as more of a feeling or emotion in the form of desire than reason or calculation.

Hedonistic Lifestyle

Hedonism is a school of thought closely related to the famous normative ethics philosophy called utilitarianism founded by Jeremy Bentham and refined by John Stuart Mill. Utilitarianism argues that a human should do things that bring happiness to the most number of people, hedonism has a more individualistic approach which argues that an individual should maximize one's own pleasure and minimize one's own pain (Kozlowski, 2019). On the other hand, lifestyle is the way someone lives their life, However, Hawkins define lifestyle as more than just the way someone buy, uses, and thinks of a product it is how someone express their self-concept, “Life-style is the manifestation of the individual's self-concept” (Hawkins, 2010, p. 29). He reasoned that self-concept is deeply affected by the culture an individual experience on a daily basis and this is very relevant with our topic of discussion relating to the Hypebeast phenomenon. Therefore, hedonism lifestyle is the way someone lives their life by self-expression that is deeply affected by one's everyday culture based on maximizing benefits and minimizing pain.

Findings

Throughout our observation, we found that there is a scarcity of Instagram accounts dedicated primarily for the purpose of promoting a lifestyle based around locally-made-and-owned Indonesian products. We were only able to discover a handful of Indonesian fashion businesses and startups that regularly post their locally made apparel on their Instagram accounts and have followers on their social media that reach thousands in number. However, our observation has proven that is far easier to discover Indonesian-owned accounts that cater primarily to the interests and trends of the Hypebeast community. Moreover, these accounts have amassed tens, and even hundreds, of thousands of followers and likes.

Impacts on Local Fashion Businesses

Two parties are negatively affected by the rise of the Hypebeast phenomenon in Indonesia which are local fashion businesses and the nation's youths. Local fashion

businesses, not to mention those that are start-ups, find it difficult to compete with Hypebeast brands when it comes to marketing to younger demographics because they receive few opportunities for publicity and promotion on social media. On the other hand, Hypebeast brands receive constant exposure from thousands of online communities that promote and update the latest news regarding Hypebeast fashion trends for free or based on endorsements. For example, the Instagram account @Pahi.Id (e.g. *figure 2*), which is an Indonesian Hypebeast community, has over 100,000 followers and post updates about sneakers, streetwear, and Hypebeast-wearing celebrities on a daily basis. Since it is unlikely that Pahi.Id offers paid promotion for the high-end brands, the Instagram account intentionally or unintentionally provides free advertising services for the brand, especially by mentioning the prices of the products and where and when people are able to purchase them.

As a matter of fact, Hypebeast brands have significant amount of resources and power to advertise their own products whereas most local start-ups and businesses don't. It has proven very difficult to find social media with similar influence and number of followers as Pahi.id with content promoting locally made goods. In other words, local brands are at a disadvantage because there is a severe lack of online communities dedicated solely to Indonesian-made products. In addition, influencers and celebrities that regularly and consciously promote locally made apparel is far less common than those who frequently post OOTDs of head-to-toe Hypebeast fashion items @uya_kuya (e.g. *figure 4*).

Young adults in Indonesia actively use Instagram for their daily media consumption; according to napoleoncat.com, in 2018 81.2% of Instagram users in Indonesia are between the ages of 13 to 34 years old, indicating that Instagram is an appealing social media platform for Indonesian youths. Instagram as a form of new media serves the function to educate and inform the public particularly concerning the cultural heritage and identity of a given society; However, Instagram may not be an effective media used to inspire pride for local cultures and inform Indonesians of their national identity. This is because the online platform is personal and customizable in nature and the audience can choose to see and read according to their favor and in this case the country's users of Instagram prefer to disseminate and give more attention to content that give way to foreign influences like the Hypebeast phenomenon. This reality is demonstrated by the vast distinction in the quantity of followers of Instagram accounts (e.g. *figure 1, figure 2, figure 3, figure 5*) that are Hypebeast-centric or that idealize foreign lifestyles with those that promote the appreciation of Indonesia's cultural heritage and local lifestyles (e.g. *figure 7, figure 12*). We also see that there is a lack of Indonesian celebrities and influencers that utilize their fame and online presence to willingly give publicity to local brands and cultures without necessarily being endorsed. Surprisingly, even among local brands and fashion businesses it is clear that Indonesian accounts (e.g. *figure 9, figure 10, figure 11*) that sell goods influenced by foreign fashion trends, i.e. streetwear fashion, has far more followers compared to those that sell products inspired by Indonesia's cultural heritage such as Batik (@ikat_id e.g. *figure 7, figure 8*). Therefore, local fashion brands find it much easier and profitable to mimic the hype popularized by foreign trendsetters instead of promoting local cultures.

Impacts on the Nation's Youth

The expanding influence of the Hypebeast phenomenon in Indonesia discourages the nation's youth to carry out their social responsibility to support and preserve the country's cultural heritage. Instead, the phenomenon cultivates in them hedonistic tendencies wherein they are persuaded to achieve pleasure in the form of consuming

expensive streetwear apparel and publicizing them on social media. Consequently, the followers of the Hypebeast community are motivated by the desire to climb the social ladder by the consumption of whatever the community deems hype and trendy, building their self-concept based on the standards and expectations that the community sets to be. For example, Indonesian artist Uyakuya and American rapper Lil Uzivert (e.g. *figure 4*, *figure 6*) frequently post an OOTD of their Hypebeast apparels. The frequency of Hypebeast-related content in their accounts is no accidents as the two celebrities consciously choose to present themselves with high-end streetwear clothing that act as the celebrities' social currency to improve their social status. Thus, expensive streetwear symbolizes status, money, and power. Indonesia's cultural heritage struggle to compete because they lack the notion of exclusivity which Hypebeast brands are able to create around their products. Not to mention the wealth and glamorous lifestyle they publicized on Instagram like automobiles, diamonds and gold jewelry, cash, and private jets. With frequent exposure to these contents, especially those created by famous figures, it is not surprising that young people in Indonesia develops a self-concept that revolves around habitually purchasing Hypebeast apparel to climb the social ladder. According to Jonathan Gabay, author of *Brand Psychology: Consumer Perceptions, Corporate Reputations*, "a brand is an extension of one's self—psychologically, in terms of how you want the world to see you, or what you want the world to believe you are, but deeper than that: what you believe you are, through that brand." (Clifton, 2016). By purchasing these Hypebeast goods, young people in Indonesia tend to express their individuality in such a way that emphasizes the sense of status, money and power, "status is very externally focused - it's an opportunity to 'show off' and feel that you have 'made it' in life" (Kadence International, 2019). Young people that make the pursuit of trends set by the Hypebeast community a part of their lifestyle is susceptible to hedonistic tendencies because they develop the belief that their identity should revolve around the purchase and ownership of exclusive, luxury goods. In 2016, luxury goods sales in Indonesia have grown by 84 percent, becoming Asia's largest online luxury goods sales growth, according to the 2016 Asia Luxury Index. This index is based on the sales data and industry report for 2014-2015 of the Singapore-based online platform for luxury products called Reebonz. Reebonz Indonesia's senior marketing manager Bernard Widjaja Ng said that the group of luxury consumers in Indonesia are evolving and expanding. With growing affluence and accessibility, more consumers can readily purchase luxury goods. He added that the demographic of consumers capable of purchasing said goods have expanded to people in their early 20s (Rahmiasri, 2016). Since young adults constitute the primary audience of Hypebeast, the shift in luxury consumers in Indonesia is one factor contributing to the massive spread of the Hypebeast phenomenon in Indonesia. By adopting a lifestyle that prioritizes status, power, and money, Indonesia's youth as the nation's next generation will gradually abandon their civic duty to preserve and appreciate the diversity of indigenous cultures in the country which in comparison, has the exclusivity of the hypebeast items and should be more valuable than foreign goods for someone who calls themselves an Indonesian.

Discussion

Limitations

There are a few limitations in this research, one being the scope of our research that is too wide, a national scale of a phenomenon needed more time for a more thorough result. In addition, there has been no further research regarding the ownership Hypebeast brands and statistics of those Hypebeast accounts in Indonesia which makes it harder for us to find supporting data for our results. Our findings are also affected as a consequence

of the vast scope making it very general and thus we were not able to provide specific examples of how Indonesian youths actually consume the Hypebeast products on a daily basis. This is because our method of sampling is purposive or judgmental, which is a non-random sample in which the researcher uses a wide range of methods to locate all possible cases of a highly specific and difficult-to-reach population (Neuman, 2014, p. 273). Moreover, our research is not representative and does not provide a definitive explanation of the consequences of the Hypebeast phenomenon towards Indonesian youths in general; this is because we intentionally select samples that we believe best showcase either Hypebeast trends or promote local cultures. Furthermore, the timespan of our research is quite constrained; consequently, we did not have the opportunity to do in-depth interviews with experts in this field and members of the Hypebeast community in Indonesia. It also proves unlikely for us to interview directly the artists and influencers who regularly post Hypebeast apparel on their Instagram accounts.

Recommendations

Our qualitative research provides a starting point for researchers in the future keen on studying the social, moral, and economic consequences of the rise of the Hypebeast phenomenon among young people in Indonesia in more concrete and specific manner. Instead of analysing the entire phenomenon as a whole, considering the fact that “we’re almost never able to study all the members of the population that interests us” (Babbie, 2014, p.119), we recommend researchers to narrow the scope of their observation; for example, researchers could focus on analysing the consumer choices and motivations of young people in a particular area, city, or province. With this, researchers are able to better understand their sample of research and to find more success in identifying patterns and similarities between respondents. Furthermore, we recommend researchers to employ the in-depth interview method with relevant subjects like influencers, artists, members of a Hypebeast online community, or even ordinary users which can offer a more complete picture of what happened and why (Boyce & Neale, 2006)

Conclusions

The increasing number of young users of social media, particularly Instagram, in Indonesia has certainly contributed to the rapid expansion of the influence of the Hypebeast phenomenon. Due to its high degree of personalization, reachability, and instantaneity, Instagram, as a globalized and digitized communication platform, allows trends like streetwear to spread like wildfire and contents to be easily commodified. Hypebeast phenomenon is also a contributing factor towards the increase in the tendency of consumerism amongst young people in Indonesia that encourages to develop hedonistic behaviours; this can be observed in the staggering rise in the number of luxury goods sales and the shift of luxury goods buyer demographics in Indonesia in 2016. In the long term, Indonesia’s cultural heritage will soon lose its relevancy and become obsolete primarily in the country’s fashion industry as foreign trendsetters continue to determine what Indonesians should consider as cool and trendy. In addition, the obsession with climbing the social ladder through the regular consumption and publication of high-end branded goods does not necessarily help the youths in preserving the nation’s cultural heritage and increasing the value and significance of such heritage in the eyes of the international community. As young people continue to consume imported fashion goods in the pursuit for increasing their social currency, the financial future of local fashion businesses, brands, and start-ups can be negatively affected.

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