

**CONSUMERISM IN THE USERS OF
APPLE COMPUTER, INC. PRODUCTS**
(A Case Study of Faculty of Law Diponegoro University)

Submitted by: Rr. Anisa Caesar Intan Firdausi, Prof. Dr. Nurdien Harry Kistanto, M.A.*

E-mail: *anisacaesar@yahoo.com*

English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University Semarang

ABSTRAK

Produk teknologi perusahaan *Apple Computer, Inc.* adalah salah satu artefak budaya Amerika dan sangat populer di Amerika Serikat serta negara maju lainnya meski baru populer di tahun 1984 setelah didirikan pada tahun 1976. Gadget *Apple* seperti *iPhone*, *Macbook* dan *iPod* memang populer di telinga pengguna teknologi komputer dan ponsel pintar. Namun kepopuleran ini tidak sesuai dengan jumlah pemilik gadget *Apple* di Indonesia. Produk *Apple Computer, Inc.* memiliki dua sisi yaitu sebagai budaya populer dan bagian dari budaya ekonomi menengah ke atas. Namun mahasiswa Universitas Diponegoro dalam penelitian ini sejumlah mahasiswa Fakultas Hukum masing-masing memiliki lebih dari satu produk *Apple* yang sering disimbolkan kaum muda sebagai gaya hidup mereka. Melihat hal tersebut, *Apple Computer, Inc* tidak hanya membawa pengaruh kapitalisme Amerika kepada penggunaannya melainkan juga ideologi konsumerisme. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui bagaimana ideologi konsumerisme masuk dan diaplikasikan sehari-hari oleh mahasiswa Fakultas Hukum pengguna produk-produk *Apple*. Lebih jauh lagi penelitian ini juga bertujuan untuk mengetahui beberapa aspek kuat konsumerisme yang terdapat dalam gaya hidup *Apple* mahasiswa. Hasil Analisis menunjukkan jenis oligopoli pasar yang diterapkan oleh *Apple Computer, Inc* mempengaruhi pola konsumsi pengguna produk *Apple*. Kemudian, aspek sumber materi adalah poin utama penentu gaya hidup konsumerisme mahasiswa.

Kata kunci: *Apple, konsumerisme, gadget.*

ABSTRACT

Technological product of Apple Computer, Inc is one of American culture artifact and popular in the United States and other developed countries although the company had its popularity in 1984 after it has been established in 1976. Apple gadgets like iPhone, Macbook, and iPod are indeed popular among computer technology users and Smartphone users. However, the popularity does not match the number of Apple gadget owners in Indonesia. Apple Computer, Inc products have two different sides which are the products as popular culture and as a part of middle-high economy culture. Meanwhile, Diponegoro University students in the research, a number of Faculty of Law students own more than one Apple products for each student. Apple gadget often symbolized as one of student's life style. From the issue, Apple Computer, Inc is not only bringing American capitalism influence towards the users but also the consumerism ideology. The research aims to know how consumerism ideology gets in and applied daily by students who use Apple in Law Faculty. Furthermore, the research also aims to know some strong aspects of consumerism which are existing in student's Apple lifestyle. The analysis result shows that the type of oligopoly market that applied by Apple Computer, Inc affects consumption pattern of Apple product's users. Thus, material aspect is the main point that determines student's consumerism lifestyle.

Keywords: *Apple, consumerism, gadget.*

1. Introduction

As one of technology products, Apple is well known as an American Product that has widely used. The writer sees that Apple has one of a kind product, which triggers fanatic that showed in consumption practice. Below are glimpses of the background where the researcher draws *Apple Computers Inc* consumerism as a suitable object of case study in American Cultural Studies. First, *Apple Computer, Inc.* products have expanded their influence from popular culture artifact in their origin country and other industrial countries and even bring it into a developing country such Indonesia especially on the college sphere of Diponegoro University. Second, *Apple Computer, Inc.* products in this context have turned consumption which used to be viewed as a product of production into the artifact that transcends consumerism ideology to its consumers. In the words of Karl Marx, “The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political, and spiritual progress of life” (Marx, 1970: 21). Indeed according to Marx, there are two outcomes of a capitalist enterprise: production and consumption.

In the United States where *Apple Computer, Inc* was born and growing, the products such as portable computer, Smartphone, and music player are popular culture artifacts since they fulfill popular culture characteristics such as its availability, commercialism, interconnectedness and youth appeal. Popular culture is the beliefs, practices, and objects that are part of everyday traditions widely accessible to the public (Storey, 1998: 2-3). A US\$2,300 *Macbook Air* is a contrast to Indonesians consumer with US\$ 3,420 of Gross National Income per capital (The World Bank, 2012). As a result, *Apple* products are unaffordable for most Indonesians. In addition, limited knowledge to Information Technology and language distraction could be the obstruction for

any Indonesian who wants Apple. Do the distractions exist between Diponegoro University students?

Universities are the most potential expansion media in transmitting foreign technology into a country (Baumol, *et al.* 2007: 501). Some subculture theorists suggest that youths are not passive but they are active toward culture consumer (Storey, 1996: 153). The writer decided to conduct a micro research toward Law Faculty students of Diponegoro University. Based on the capitalist enterprise’s outcome, students in the research are pure consumer as they do not use the *Apple* products they own as a tool to generate a new product which either economically or exchange valuable.

This research focuses on the discussion of consumerism in the research participant’s daily activities that are connected to *Apple* gadget. To support the impact of consumerism the writer also focuses on why *Apple* products become the popular among Law Faculty students in Diponegoro University although Apple users are less than other brand’s users. Moreover, the research was conducted during the end of December 2012 to January 2013 in the research participants’ campus environment of Law Faculty, Diponegoro University including campus, research participant’s boarding house, and their hangout spots. Law Faculty student class of 2009 who own more than one *Apple Computer, Inc* product are the targets of research. Specifically, students who own *Apple* products released from 2008 to 2012 that include *iMac, Macbook, iPad, iPod* and *iPhone*.

In arranging the thesis, the researcher has some purposes, namely:

1. To produce in depth and complex knowledge of *Apple* products consumerism

on Law Faculty students of Diponegoro University.

2. To gain a better understanding of what triggers *Apple* products popularity within Law Faculty students.

3. To focus on what the specific cultural impact established by *Apple* products to its users, the Law Faculty students of Diponegoro University.

The researcher chooses *Apple Computer, Inc* consumers in Law Faculty therefore; she decides to apply consumerism theory by Professor Steven Miles from University of Plymouth in order to help the researcher to analyze her research (Miles, 1998: 1).

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Consumerism

Steven Miles in *Consumerism as a Way of Life* defines consumption as “the selection, purchase, use, maintenance, repair and disposal of any product or service” (1998: 3).

Steven Miles concludes, “while consumption is an act, consumerism is a way of life” (Miles, 1998: 4). In addition, to connect with technology, Miles claims that technology emerges as a way of capitalism to expand its market where technology has serious and fun uses to the extent that Miles put computer as a typical example of consumerism in technology (1998: 76). Moreover, technology has the real impact in social life because there are slightly different results from society with knowledge expertise and from society that do not have knowledge expertise in technology (Miles, 1998: 71). Therefore, the argument supports researcher in putting *Apple Computer, Inc* products as popular culture in the United States

and as middle-high economy culture in Indonesia which in Steven Miles words “In effect, material resources clearly play a fundamental role in consumers’ experience of computer technology” (1998:76).

3. Research Method

3.1. Type of Research

The writer’s research is a qualitative one based on interview at field research. Sentences, explanations or short stories are what qualitative research presents (Bungin, 2007:103). Qualitative research usually presents certain case and it does not aim to test certain hypothesis (Bungin, 2007: 104). Therefore, the qualitative research scope range could be very large such as national scope or it only covers a small group of people (Bungin, 2007: 104). The researcher applies qualitative research since it is supposed to be in more depth and it has an impact on the width and depth scope (Pickering, 2008: 57). The writer’s research work is a field research one that means it conducts in real social situations where the researcher is involved (Burgess, 1984: 53). Refers to his own research, Stenhouse in Burgess implied that *case study* is based on the researcher’s field experience which involves direct observation, tape-recorded interviews and document that are collected (Burgess, 1984: 2).

3.2 Data Sources

Primary sources are materials that are gathered directly and have a direct relationship with the people situations or events that are studied (Burgess, 1984: 123-124). The researcher uses interview record as her primary data source from interview at the field research. Additionally, a secondary source often means

looking at materials that has already published and which represents secondary sources (Burgess, 1984: 123-124). These sources may include transcript or summaries of the primary source materials (Burgess, 1984:124). The writer uses library research in order to obtain underlying theories and supporting information. Summarized from *The Oxford Guide to Library Research*, the writer uses two over the fifteen suggested sources both online and offline sources. They are focused browsing to journal and articles and focused browsing to published bibliographies (Mann, 2005: 135).

3.3. Population and Sample

Population is the whole components of respondent who have a role as subject of the research (Pickering, 2010: 62). Meanwhile, sample is part of population that involved directly to the research (Pickering, 2010: 62). The population of this research is Law Faculty students' class of 2009 who own more than one *Apple* electronic products. The products that qualify the research scope are *Apple* electronics which are released from 2008 to 2012 including *iMac*, *Macbook*, *iPad*, *iPod*, and *iPhone*. Further, the researcher applies snowball sampling where the researcher inquire an informant to get in touch with his friends who are consequently interviewed and asking them to get their friends and interviewing them until a number of informants has been obtained (Burgess, 1984: 55). Law Faculty class of 2009 regular class consists of two hundred and fifty students. From the informant's information, there are eighteen students own *Apple* products. The researcher has contacted eight students however; she only succeeded in having sustainable interviews of four students as the sample of study.

3.4. Technique of Collecting Data

In associate with her qualitative research, the researcher uses interview as her method in collecting data.

“Interviews involve an interviewer and interviewee engaging in face to face conversation, with the interviewer guiding the conversation by asking questions related to particular topics in order to gain a better understanding” (Pickering, 2008: 70).

Based on Burgess, straight question and answer session may cause the research participant to be introvert during the research, thus, the researcher may use unstructured interview method to create a better relationship with the research participant (Burgess, 1984: 101). A research participant may expands the conversation during an unstructured interview since this method allows both the researcher or the research participant to develop conversation's theme and topic that the interview flows in a friendly situation (Burgess, 1984: 102). The researcher uses interview records in collecting the main data; when a researcher needs to record interview conversation or data most of them use recorder that the data would not get lost or forgotten (Burgess, 1984: 120).

3.5. Technique of Analyzing Data

Once the data are collected, they must be classified, the proposed relationship analyzed, and this is what we called as analyzing data (Persell, 1991: 39).

In data analysis, the interviews from field research that the researcher has recorded are

transcribed. This forms the transformation of oral data into written data which can be analyzed later. The researcher technique in analyzing the data is by reading the transcript, making notes and highlighting certain elements that are important to the research question and then put them into the description table (Pickering, 2008: 82). Descriptive analysis is what researcher applied to her research analysis. In short, the goal of a descriptive analysis is to describe something such as behavior and values of a cultural artifact (Persell, 1991: 33).

4. ANALYSIS

4.2. Research Analysis

4.2.1. How Consumerism Reach the Research Participants

From the interview result, the researcher finds some ways of consumerism reaching research participants. The first and foremost is the oligopoly applied by *Apple Computer, Inc* that the company created its own market and one of a kind commodity where *Apple* users purchase and repurchase goods only from *Apple* store. Moreover, the exclusive market, special software and the luxurious branding provided by *Apple* has turned the act of consumption into consumerism as *Apple* users have been implementing their *Apple* lifestyle every day. One over four research participants has stated clearly that using *Apple* gadgets is one of his lifestyles. Meanwhile, the three others did not state their *Apple* lifestyle openly. However, as they are using their *Apple* gadgets, purchasing original software and accessory frequently, the consumerism ideology has attached on their mindset daily life. All of the research participants stated that they chose *Apple*

Computers products due to their quality, exclusivity and durability. The fact identifies *Apple's* durability, exclusivity and special features turn into consumer's loyalty. Research participants' statements in the interview support the researcher inference, where the first participant, second participant and the third participant chose *Apple* products because other electronic manufacturers cannot provide the durability, exclusivity, and the special features they want.

From all of the research participants, the researcher found that *iPhones* and *Macbooks* that the participants own are for serious purposes while *iPods* and *iPads* are predominantly for fun and entertainment purposes. To conclude, since the fourth research participant stated that electronic gadget such as *iPad* is one of the current student's culture; therefore, unconsciously consumerism has become a part of student's daily life.

4.2.2. Material Resource in Student's Consumerism

In composing the research questions, the researcher has thought a hypothesis that one or more of research participants has bought *Apple* gadgets with their own resources (non-parents resources). However, the research has resulted in contrasting fact from the initial hypothesis. All of the research participants clearly admit that they receive *Apple* gadgets as gift from their parents, or the money they spent to buy *Apple* gadgets came from their parents. None of them earns their own money to fulfill the *Apple* lifestyle. The way material resource affects student's consumerism is determined by one crucial variable, the parents. Thus, the research participant consumerism is under control since they stated that they only purchase what they

need on *Apple Store* as the credit cards belong to their parents. Therefore, if the research participants' parents did not come up as the material resource provider, then the story of *Apple* lifestyle is over before it has begun.

Apple Computers' products position as a middle-high economy culture in Indonesia has already classified who can access the culture and who has the knowledge expertise in operating those gadgets so the user can be part of the culture. Demographically, all of the research participants come from middle-upper economic background families that that they are able to afford *Apple* gadgets. Research participants' parents jobs are vary from Indonesian State-owned Enterprises staff, Professor, Police officer, and the head staff of The National Land Agency. Whether the research participants' are bourgeois or not, in fact they provide their children the access to consumerism and support them in advance by providing additional material resources such as credit card for creating *Apple Store* account.

4.3. Further Research

In hearing the word "technology", most people probably think about manufacturing and economy. Rather than walking further into the economy subject which Humanities students do not have much expertise, the researcher would like to suggest further research in Fandom Culture thesis. *Apple Computer, Inc* has a huge number of loyal consumer bases waiting for the newest feature and newest product from the manufacturer. There are fandom websites and forums specialized for *Apple* users such as *obamapacman.com* and *macworld.com* which we scarcely see the same thing available for *Toshiba* or *Dell*. Carefully watch the back glass of the cars on the road or at the parking lot, you

may find one or more cars with *Apple* sticker on the window. The questions arisen are," is the car owner an *Apple* user?" or "do the car owner put the *Apple* sticker because it looks cool?" or "is the car owner an *Apple* fan?" The scope of Fandom Culture thesis on *Apple* should cover Human Motivation, Consumerism, and the fan culture itself that will support the research with strong arguments, theories and sample cases.

Bibliography

- Baumol, William, et al. 2007. *Good and Bad Capitalism*. London: Yale University Press.
- Bungin, Burhan. 2007. *Penelitian Kualitatif*. Jakarta: Prenada Muda Group.
- Burgess, Robert G. 1984. *In The Field*. London: George Allen & Unwin..
- Mann, Thomas. 2005. *The Oxford Guide to Library Review*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. 1970. *The Communist Manifesto*. New York: Pathfinder Press.
- Marx, Karl. 1970. *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. New York: International Publishers.
- Miles, Steven. 1998. *Consumerism as A Way of Life*. London: Sage Publications.
- Persell, Caroline Hodges. 1990. *Understanding Society: An Introduction to Sociology*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc.

Pickering, Michael, ed. 2008. *Research Methods for Cultural Studies*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Storey, John. 1996. *Cultural Studies and the Study of Popular Culture: Theories and Methods*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

The World Bank Group. "World Development Indicators." *worldbank.org*. 2012. Web. 20 Mar 2014.