

DIGITAL CULTURE AND INSTAGRAM: ‘AESTHETICS FOR ALL?’

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ABSTRACT

Aesthetics is the study of beauty but in a cultural discourse is a representation of cultural expressions that mark its position in social reality. Thus, aesthetics is not a subjective expression of culture but rather a mechanism by which beauty is produced and distributed. The mechanism continues to operate even in a wider landscape such as in multidimensional technological space. This has resulted the aesthetic deconstruction because the norm operates differently. Instagram, which attracted latest generation, has birth a digital culture oriented to the new aesthetic visual forms. The aesthetic visual on Instagram constructed through visual production that is continuously interwoven with one another. The mechanism of cultural production in Instagram tends to deconstruct aesthetics as a norm. The public is more oriented to actions rather than philosophical contemplation. However, the mechanism of culture produces the discourse of aesthetics in Instagram still needs to explore. This research is important because we facing ‘loss of ideological and historical awareness’ of the aesthetics and aesthetics are the alternative to explore the nature of humanity. This research tries to explain how the aesthetics mechanism works on Instagram by virtual ethnography method and Bourdieu's ‘Capital Culture’ theory.

Keyword: Instagram, Aesthetics, Digital

INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of Internet technology has given birth to a new culture known as digital culture. According to Ross, digital culture is a circuit of cultural practices touched by advanced technology (1991). Digital culture is not just a technological transformation but also a cultural transformation because it has changed human habits from the most important to the most trivial. Digital culture is not without problems. Because the practice is built through communication technology-based interactions such as in social media which in its development causes a variety of disruption and one of them is the disruption of aesthetic values. Before the digital culture emerged, Pierre Bourdieu's define aesthetic practice as a works through the mechanism of social reproduction where knowledge and tastes are distributed through regenerative systems that take place hierarchically and at the same time structure agencies (active actors) involved in the reproductive field of that culture. In this context, Bourdieu emphasized that 'cultural capital' plays a role in the cultural field in which 'the norms are normalized' and become a social classification mechanism (Setyaningrum, 2009). In simple terms, aesthetics is the science that seeks to understand beauty. Or knowledge of things about beauty (Agung, 2017). But, Bourdieu suspects that there a form of control from certain social classes on individual aesthetic preferences because those preferences according to Bourdieu's view are a form of knowledge that is largely determined by the individual position in social class. Therefore, aesthetics in the practice of Internet technology-based culture such as in social media is disrupted which deconstructs even destabilizes aesthetics as a norm. The disruption of the aesthetic in social media can be seen on Instagram. Instagram is a social media sharing photo and video, which, since it released in 2010, has been popular with a worldwide audience. In June 2018, Instagram has reached the 1 billion active user mark monthly (Statista, 2018). More than 500 million active users are using the platform daily. As of now, the Instagram app is one of the most popular social networks worldwide (Oberlo.com, 2019). Instagram's popularity is due to their strong users engagement, of which 71% are young people under the age of 35. Instagram provided features that are functionally very supportive of the mechanism of artistic production and reproduction by the younger generation. This mechanism then gave birth to relatively 'newer' aesthetic forms with audiences who actively affiliated themselves with these aesthetic forms. We can understand the mechanism of aesthetic production and reproduction in Instagram by Walter Benjamin's perspective in *The Work of Art in The Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (2006). Benjamin noted that the location is very important in cultural transformation that involve the role of technology and changes social, economic and political practices, and the emergence of the masses and mass movements. Mechanical reproduction allows actors (we as originators of ideas and producers of works or cultural forms) to have an unlimited public (Setyaningrum, 2009)—Instagram from Benjamin's

perspective has become a legitimate field of cultural production. The mechanism of aesthetic production and reproduction in Instagram tends to disrupt and deconstruct even destabilize aesthetics as a norm. This is because agents (producers) who produce and reproduce aesthetics gain a wider mass (consumers) and disruptions occur when the masses tend to be oriented to action rather than contemplation that gives birth to the philosophical catharsis even agents who produce and reproduce aesthetics only exposed to a growing trend. Therefore, Instagram in its development gave birth to popular-mass aesthetic forms due to producers and the masses (consumers) that tended to be more action-oriented. The action is the aesthetic repetition actions that are popular on Instagram. This study attempts to understand how the mechanisms of aesthetic production, reproduction, and consumption as 'norms' in Instagram give rise to popular-mass aesthetic forms that are much favored by the younger generation. This research is important because if producers and consumers only understand aesthetics merely as a trend, there is a possibility that aesthetic historical and philosophical awareness will disappear so does our awareness as humans.

RESEARCH METHOD

Researching on Instagram is something new, especially research on how aesthetics as a norm applies on Instagram. This research uses virtual ethnography, which can be said as a new method of seeing cultural and artifact culture in the digital world. Virtual ethnography reveals how cyber culture is produced, meanings that arise, relationships and patterns, to how they function through the Internet medium (Nasrullah, 2018). According to Nasrullah (2018) there are 4 domains that can be analyzed (1) 'media space' which is related to the technical aspects of digital culture, (2) 'media document' which is related to 'text' in digital culture as cultural artifacts, (3) 'media objects' are objects that are related to interactions between organisms in digital culture, and (4) 'experiential stories', namely the connectedness of organisms offline and online. In this study we examined how the mechanisms of aesthetic production, reproduction, and consumptions gave birth to relatively 'newer' aesthetic forms. From the search results we have done, there are 22 types of aesthetics that are popular on Instagram, namely: Grunge, Vaporwave, Vintage Kawaii, Baddie, Hoe Art, Minimalist, Witches, Indie, Gothic, Hypebeast, Nerdy-Geeky, Soft Grunge, Gothic Pastel, Soft Dark, Soft White, Classy, Peachy, Space, Pearly, Ocean, Weird, and Artsy. From the 22 types of aesthetics we decided to choose Vaporwave, Minimalist, Witches-Gothic, Grunge, and Hypebeast because the five aesthetics were very popular. We analyzed the five types of aesthetics at the 'media document' level, because we conducted an analysis of the visual aspects to then trace their aesthetic values.

RESULT AND DISSCUSION

The aesthetic production in Instagram which is meant here is the creation and uploads of each producer image—it can be by personal (celebgram, etc.) accounts or other media/blog accounts. While reproduction is how the upload is liked and even reposted by its followers—it can be consumers or producers. Instagram actually has aestheticization itself in its UI and UX. But what we will discuss is not that but the aesthetic form that is popular on Instagram like Vaporwave to this day is very popular. There is even the impression that Vaporwave is a digital 'aesthetic' itself. Vaporwave is very dominant in pink and purple pastels colors, retro 80-90 filters, Japanese typography (Kanji), wide-spaced letters, Classical Greek statues, Fiji branded drinks, glitches, old game consoles, and Windows 95.

Vaporwave is actually a genre of digital music with ambient, soft jazz, retro, easy beat hiphop, and tends to be experimental which is developed in the 80-90s. This genre of music combines a variety of musical genres as a criticism of the ignorant and the bigotries of modern capitalistic society. Macintosh Plus an artist popularized this genre, including its visual form, which later became the main reference for this type of aesthetics in the digital world—including on Instagram. If the Vaporwave looks cheerful, the type of minimalist aesthetic on Instagram looks very simple. The root of minimalism can be traced to 12th century Japan. Influenced by Zen Buddhism that emphasizes simplicity, solitude, and non-attachment. In Japan, minimalism is so popular until nowadays because it has aesthetic and pragmatic functions also individually, socially, and spiritually function. Scandinavian design movement of minimalism in the 1950s was important in the movement of aesthetic minimalism in the world because afterwards many artists, designers, and products with very minimalist designs were born, such as those products that produced by IKEA—and even from the USA, products from Apple have a very minimalist design because Steve Job was into Zen Buddhism. The minimalism aesthetic on Instagram is characterized by a very orderly, clean, simple design, and is dominated by just one color. Minimalism is very popular on Instagram and there is even the assumption that Instagram's good or aesthetic feeds are minimalist.

The Witches-Gothic aesthetics are actually different but because they expose dark things, we put them in one category. Witches exposed things related to sorcery in the Western world from witch clothing to items thought to be used by witches in the West from medieval times to the present day. While Gothic, the kind of aesthetics that developed in Northern France around the 12th century exposes the themes of darkness, death, macabre, mystery, violent to Satanism. Both of them are almost the same, only a few different details such as the Witches glorify the witchcrafts while Gothic glorifies darkness. Grunge was a

popular genre of music in the early 90s thanks to bands such as Nirvana, Pearl Jam, Soundgarden, Alice In Chain, and Stone Temple Pilot. The lyrical themes of this genre are about freedom, rebellion, self-alienation, betrayal, social isolation, and psychological trauma that visually in design and fashion becomes a realistic kind of aesthetic that is reckless, messy, dirty, and generally grunge design images have a realistic, genuine look which was created by adding simulated torn paper, dog-eared corners, creases, yellow scotch tape, coffee cup stains, hand drawn images and handwritten words, typically over dirty background texture which is done with dull, subdued colors).

Hypebeast is a term that refers to someone usually a man (teenager or adult) who is very concerned about his appearance in fashion. They use clothing with the current brand that has very expensive prices such as Supreme, A Bathing Ape, Off-White, Nike, Adidas, Anti-Anti Social Club, and so on. This hypebeast clothing is generally streetwear but is premium or intended for high-class circles and the purpose of its users is to assert that they are different and are in a particular social class—high-class. Hypebeast is very popular in the more young generations because celebrities, YouTubers, Influencers often dress and style this style of hypebeast.

CONCLUSIONS

Instagram offers a good environment for the growth and development of new or renewable aesthetics forms. However, the characteristics of Instagram as a social media consisting of millions of users make the relationship very complex because Instagram users come from different social classes. However, of the millions of very heterogeneous users, they have similarities in the mechanisms of production, reproduction, and aesthetic consumption. Aesthetic production are based on the principles of the aesthetic genre that they like and this can be explored from the circle of accounts that have something in common with it. For example, someone who is very fond of the hypebeast will follow and be followed by those who have the same aesthetic preference so that the aesthetic production mechanism will be relatively the same. This relationship is what Bourdieu calls a cultural capital because it becomes kind of capital in the mechanism of production as well as mass reproduction and consumption, which in rare cases results in a stronger economy, and social capital. But this is what then causes disruptions or deconstruction and a destabilization of aesthetics as a norm because historical awareness of it becomes lost. From five types of aesthetics that we have discussed except the hypebeast each of them has a long history with obvious philosophical content. However, when produced, reproduced, and consumed on Instagram, the history and philosophy of almost disappeared. The emerged of Instagram aesthetics were not enlightening enough to become such a catharsis but rather

shallow artistic repetitions. This means that on Instagram the aesthetic mechanism to this day only gives birth to new economic and social values rather than a kind of aesthetic catharsis or art that has fair values. So, aesthetics for all? Yes but without the history and philosophy awareness and this is hard for categorize kind of art on Instagram.

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