

Conference Paper

The Power of Digital Media: Instagram and the Distribution of Kebaya Designs

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Abstract

The world has witnessed many changes including the use of media. In this third millennium period, new media plays a major roles in distributing news and advertisement. The emergence of digital media such as Instagram has changed the traffic of photos, videos, and stories distribution. Due to its speed, Instagram has been chosen by many people as an effective media tool. Anne Avantie, an Indonesian *kebaya* designer has used Instagram for introducing, distributing, and advertising her *kebaya* designs. This paper intends to present the discussion on how Instagram works towards the distribution of Avantie's *kebaya* designs and how it contributes to Avantie's domination in the field of fashion. Walter Benjamin's theory about the mechanical reproduction and Douglas Davis's concept of the digital reproduction are used to examine the effect between Instagram and the distribution of Avantie's *kebaya* designs. To achieve its objective, this project applies a qualitative method. The finding reveals that Instagram has multiple functions in the field of fashion and it contributes much towards Avantie's fame and success.

Keywords: Instagram, distribution, *kebaya* designs

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1. Introduction

Instagram, one of the newest forms of digital media in this era, has been popular since its introduction. Hu, Manikonda and Kambhampati (2014: 595) explained that since October 2010, more than 150 million active users have used the photo and video sharing application and each day approximately 55 million photos are uploaded. This huge number proves that Instagram has successfully attracted users. In all fields of business, including the fashion industry, the advancement of media plays a major role in introducing products and influencing people to use the products. Instagram as a form of new media has served as a means of communication and an advertisement tool as well. This paper addresses the research question: how does Instagram help Anne Avantie gain popularity and success in the field of *kebaya*? The need for this study stems from the scarcity of academic discussion dealing with the connection between

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the power of Instagram as a form of digital media in the globalization era, and the domination of Avantie's *kebaya* designs. As Rantanen (2005:17) argued, the media significantly impacts the process of globalization. Based on this fact, this project seeks to fill this gap.

Before discussing the findings, this paper outlines the theoretical framework to highlight the relevant theories and concepts for this project. After that, the data obtained will be analyzed and discussed.

1.1. Theoretical framework

Since this paper is particularly interested in the connection between Instagram as the new media in this globalization era and Avantie's fame and success in the *kebaya* field, the theories used to analyze this project are Walter Benjamin's theory of the mechanical reproduction and Douglas Davis's concept of the digital reproduction.

1.2. Mechanical reproduction theory and digital reproduction theory

In Benjamin's time, the technique to reproduce works of art was in the form of mechanical reproduction, and the way to enjoy images was by having the printed form. This invention was then surpassed by the emergence of the technically digital reproduction. The situation into which the product of digital reproduction can be widely, easily and rapidly duplicated and accessed, has brought some questions about aura and authenticity. In the past, duplicating or copying a work of art was a problem, yet it seems nowadays the accessibility and massification of images and even the loss of copyright through social media does not matter. The world has shifted its way of look at a work of art. In the old days, a copy or duplication of a work of art was considered fake and was less appreciated. Nowadays, however, the ignorance of aura, authenticity, and intellectual property copyright is common. The world has shown big acceptance and tolerance towards digital manipulation. This present situation was, in fact, prophetically mentioned by Benjamin (1955: 221) when he wrote, "[t]o an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility." This argument was supported by his other concept. Benjamin (in Durham and Kellner, ed.2006:19) argued that basically the reproduction of a work of art would not be avoided. The practice of imitating and copying has been done widely for different purposes, such as for learning in schools and searching for economic gains.

Media evolves, and now is the time of the new media era. Instagram as one of the new media amplifies the reproduction process. The digital reproduction enables an unlimited number of reproductions instantly. As it happened previously in the mechanical reproduction age, aura and authenticity problems appear too in this digital reproduction. Davis (1995:383) argued that the work of art in the age of digital reproduction is physically and formally chameleon. There is no longer a clear conceptual distinction between original and reproduction in virtually any medium. These two states, one pure and original, the other imitative and impure, are now fictions.

In order to obtain the answer for the research question, an interview with Avantie was held on August 08, 2018 in her workshop in Semarang. Further data was collected through observations about the number of her followers in Instagram since July 2018 to September. Another point that goes with new media (Instagram) is the satisfaction desire. In the days of mechanical reproduction, the satisfaction desire can only be fulfilled later. Benjamin (in Durham and Kellner, ed. 2016: 31) wrote that in the time of mechanical reproduction, the process of reproduction was not instant. It took sometimes for people to see or enjoy the reproduction results. In the time of Instagram however, the satisfaction desire can be reached instantly, or in seconds. This rapid process within the work of Instagram influences the way fashion (in this case the *kebaya*) is reported, distributed, shared, and consumed. The digital reproduction of *kebaya* designs answers the demand of the contemporary society which is based on speed.

2. Methodology

Throughout 2018, the number of Anne Avantie's followers on Instagram was written down every week. After that, the number was put into a table in order to see its trend. The next data was obtained from her autobiography and biography. Finally all findings of this project were interpreted, discussed, and reported.

3. Result and Discussion

To initiate the discussion, let me begin by exploring the definition of globalization, since globalization deals with interconnection and Instagram as a new media has the power to establish and intensify the interconnection. Instagram serves as an instant way to connect people in the globalized world that demands quick movement.

3.1. Globalization

There have been different definitions of the term globalization. Schiranto and Webb (2006:2) wrote that there is no single definition of globalization which is broadly accepted, either in general use or in academic writing.

According to Giddens (1993:64), globalization is the intensification of world-wide social relations, which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa. Tomlinson (1992:2) defines globalization as a phenomenon that links or connects people. Furthermore, Tomlinson (1999:150) wrote how it is fair to say that for most people most of the time the impact of globalization is felt not in travel but in staying at home. Supporting Tomlinson's argument, Reddy (2015:2) stated that media such as the telephone, television, and internet enable people to be more effective in terms of time consuming as they are able to do activities without leaving from their domestic place. In discussing globalization, Appadurai (2006:596) said that globalization talks about the use of different kinds of instruments of homogenization (armaments, advertising techniques, language hegemonies, and clothing styles) that are absorbed into local political or cultural economies.

3.2. Instagram

According to Whiting (2013: 362), individuals look for communication and media that fulfill what they are searching for. Social media is used to find information about deals, sales, products, businesses, birthdays, parties, and how to do things. Supporting Whiting's concept, Ginsberg (2015: 78) mentioned that Instagram as a popular digital media has a pivotal role in the modern culture. This mobile photo and video sharing application channels the inner users. It grants users the freedom to publicize their personal memories and interests through their edited photos. In supporting Whiting, Galion (2014:3) stated four major uses and gratification factors of social media users, namely socializing, entertainment, self-status seeking, and information.

Avantie as a *kebaya* designer understands that the ability to reach people and to be well-informed cannot be neglected in the field of fashion. Contemporary people are multifaceted. Therefore they apply the effective media for the daily needs. The third millennium society believes that the power of globalization has forced people to be online in order to cope and survive with the demand of the modern technology. In response to this demand, Avantie has used Instagram to share the images, videos of her designs, and to write on her Instastory. She admitted that Instagram gives her

some benefit in developing her *kebaya* business. She mentioned the advantages she gets from using Instagram: (1) She can introduce her designs from her mobile phone by herself. She can have daily links with her clients. In the old days a designer could not promote her/his designs without the help of a journalist or a photographer. This fact reverses the old conditions where capitalism limits the workers to a certain task so that they will not develop their skills. Instagram has flipped this condition on the other way around. This finding supports the argument which says that the ordinary citizen have access to a media profile that was unavailable before the digital revolution. It has encouraged some to argue that we have entered an unprecedented era of networked information, which in turn provides opportunities for participation that are so widespread and various that they constitute a form of democratization (Turner, 2010:1), (2) Instagram raises Avantie's fame as it can reach people miles away, including overseas, in just a short time. She understands the characteristic of a Millennial is that they want things instantly (3) Instagram is a cheap media as it cuts down the promotion cost. (4) Instagram saves her time and money as she can share images of her designs and write on her Instastory without moving out from her domestic place. (5) Instagram provides her a channel for doing charity by letting people copy her designs. She believes she can apply the take and give principle through Instagram. (6) She can conduct two ways communication. After she distributes images or writes captions, her followers can respond to her. This communication generates intimacy between her and her clients. The intimate relationship is surely beneficial to her.

Despite the benefits, Avantie admitted that Instagram has some disadvantages. She knows that she cannot control who watches, copies, shares, modifies or edits what she uploads. She even realizes that she loses her intellectual copyright as people can easily copy her *kebaya* designs. However, she believes by letting people access what she shares she attracts people to affiliate to her and in return, she becomes the trendsetter in the field of *kebaya*. She understands that reproduction fades authenticity, yet she thinks she still can control the authenticity through the textile choice and other materials. People who copy her designs and sell the designs with a lower price surely apply different quality of textile and materials. As a result, the copy will appear differently. She believes when people copy or imitate her designs it proves that her designs are superior than that of the other's. She believes originality pays price, and for wealthy people originality means pride.

Moreover, Avantie thinks that copyright does not correlate with her success. She explained, although her *kebaya* designs have been copied by people from Sabang to Merauke, she still dominates the field of *kebaya*. She believes when she lets people

access her designs and copy them, in fact she establishes and widens her social relationship. What she does refers to Bourdieu's concept of the economic world reversed. As Bourdieu (2016: 18) wrote, in the field of cultural production there is an upside down practice where there seems someone loses his/her capital in the business. However, he/she gains much more in return in the form of profit. In Avantie's case, it seems she gives her cultural capital to others and she loses her intellectual rights. However, she gains more social capital and economic capital. These two are indeed crucial in expanding her domination. The two types of capital have provided her an opportunity to expand her business to the field of ready-to-wear fashion, batik fashion, and even a culinary business. At present she has about 350 workers who work for her in three different cities, Semarang, Jakarta, and Surabaya.

This upside down economic theory of Bourdieu addresses Avantie as a loser who wins. Never does she take the case of copying her *kebaya* designs to the court as she believes what she does is a way to do social work that will bring a return of good fortune. The more people know her designs, the more well-known her designs. When more tailors and other designers copy her designs, it means more people are influenced and dominated by her. Letting people copy her designs means expanding domination. She does not feel threatened by the copying actions done by other parties. She thinks those who copy her *kebaya* designs have become her agents in establishing domination and domination is her power to keep on business. She would rather direct people's eyes to focus on her *kebaya* designs instead of arguing with them. Giving her cultural capital to others in order to gain more economic capital explains her strategy of domination in the field of *kebaya*. The bigger economic capital enables Avantie to do more social work such as building a school for mentally disorder children, helping hydrocephalus patients, and transsexual groups. Avantie admits that her social work generates wider networking that eventually produces a fruitful business. She also uses Instagram to share her social activities. Her posts include engaging captions. These inspirational stories or statements may lead to clicks that may create a closer customer base.

The table shows that copying her *kebaya* designs do not harm her popularity as follower numbers continue to grow.

The above table describes the number of Avantie's followers since June 2018 to September 2018. It adds up around 2.000 followers every week. The increasing number shows that more people are interested in knowing her designs and more people affiliate with her through Instagram. Since September 08, 2018 the number of her followers has continued to increase every week. It has not decreased or stagnated at any point.

TABLE 1: Number of Avantie's followers in Instagram.

Date	Follower
27 June 2018	654 K
06 July 2018	656 K
13 July 2018	657 K
20 July 2018	659 K
27 July 2018	662 K
04 August 2018	663 K
11 August 2018	665 K
18 August 2018	667 K
25 August 2018	668 K
01 September 2018	669 K
08 September 2018	670 K
15 September 2018	673 K
22 September 2018	677 K
29 September 2018	679 K

Instagram as a new media offers a new form of enjoying the kebaya. Through Instagram, people can see, check, and enjoy the kebaya without buying it. Instagram enables people to enjoy Avantie's shows without attending the performances or coming to her shops. It means it opens a door for lower class to access Avantie's kebayas. Instagram provides a room for everyone to access the *kebaya* and the designer irrespective of gender, ethnicity, and class. There is no inequality in it. Before the era of new media, attending a fashion show or reading fashion magazines were the ways to enjoy *kebaya*, two activities which are certainly more costly, therefore only accessible to wealthier communities. Distance can also be a problem in attending a fashion show; people may not be able to witness the fashion show as time and travel limit them to do it. Housewives are an example of a group who can benefit from the Instagram activities of Avantie. For housewives who are generally tied up with house work, this new media offers an alternative way to reach the *kebaya* fashion world as it can be operated anytime and anywhere as far as there is internet connection. Instagram provides a negotiation room for housewives. They can know *kebaya* trends without leaving the house and duty.

Moreover, Instagram brings Avantie closer to her followers and vice versa. According to Avantie, the value of closeness is crucial towards the consumption of her work. Instagram creates ties or some kind of kinship between her and her followers or clients. This typical situation did not exist in the past when she was dependent to other professionals such as photographers or journalists to distribute her *kebaya* designs. The one who controlled the authority of photo selection was the photographer or journalist. Instagram enables Avantie to participate by engaging in the DIY (Do It Yourself) culture.

She controls the traffic of her kebaya designs by herself. She selects them and uploads them herself. The decision is hers and not the photographer's anymore. Avantie as a female designer uses this DIY activity to confirm to her followers, consumers, and others that she engages with new media. It is to say that she is technology literate. She learns what is going on in the world of fashion through Instagram. This is a way to declare that her knowledge of fashion is updated. In the field of fashion, consumers demand up-dated trend, therefore it is important for Avantie to fulfill the clients' demand and build the consumers' trust. Being able to serve the consumers' demand is a way to maintain her position and even to strengthen her domination.

In her Instagram Avantie restricts her followers by not welcoming any endorsement. It means her followers are only those who really like her designs and appreciate her work. This limitation shows that she still controls the traffic in her Instagram in order to prove that people affiliate with her due to their appreciation of her work.

4. Conclusion

From analyzing the data obtained, it was observed that Instagram has been used by Anne Avantie since it serves as a fast, effective, and economical marketing tool. Instagram is a revolutionary marketing channel that supports the distribution of Avantie's *kebaya* designs. Avantie is becoming more independent in distributing her designs and her story since she can do it from her mobile anytime and anywhere. The demand of having instant results when sharing images and videos has made Instagram the choice of Avantie. The desire to gain fame, profit, and success deceives the value of aura and authenticity. On the other hand, Instagram provides people from all classes easy access to enjoy expensive *kebaya* designs or *kebaya* fashion shows that in the past could only be enjoyed by the rich. Avantie's *kebaya* designs serve as a sign of differentiation between social classes but Instagram merges the classes or eliminates the classes as it gives access to all classes. In addition, Instagram opens access to everyone, disregarding gender and ethnicity. Avantie has used Instagram to introduce her *kebaya* designs to the world and to share her love to others. Shortly, it can be said, Instagram gives a room to pluralism and charity. Finally, in Avantie's *kebaya* reproduction, the massification does not affect her business since she has her own market. Her clients, the upper class society will not downgrade their class status by consuming non-original *kebaya* designs. Her designs, the objects of desire, are the statements of her clients' financial positions, taste, and lifestyle. She understands when people love her designs they will pay for the price and money does not matter. Her affiliation with the upper class

secures her position. Instagram has changed the way people enjoy Avantie's *kebaya* designs.

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