

CHAPTER THREE

CONCLUSION

Having analyzed the ideologies behind the consumption process of IMVU's virtual items and Name Registration upgrade through Stuart Hall's encoding and decoding theory, I would like to draw a conclusion in this chapter. Hall's theory basically explains how the message sent by the sender or the company may be received or translated by the users differently from what the sender meant. The different ways of the users in receiving the message depend on the ideologies the users adopted. There are three categories of the decoder that Hall created, they are the dominated, the oppositional and the negotiated. The dominated category contains the respondents who spent money on this application, there are 25 respondents out of 62 respondents. The oppositional category contains the respondents who do not spend any money on this application, there are 5 respondents out of the 62 respondents. Meanwhile, the negotiated category consists of the respondents

who spend their real money on the application but under some specific conditions that bring advantages to them. The negotiated category consists of 32 respondents out of 62 respondents. Based on my analysis, the respondents from dominated category adopted materialism and classism ideologies. The respondents from oppositional category adopted the frugalism ideology and the ones from negotiated category adopted the opportunism ideology.

The respondents that belong to the dominated category adopted two ideologies which are materialism and classism. The materialism and classism ideologies adopted by the respondents are aligned with the capitalism ideology of IMVU as a company. This is proven by the encoder's message that has been successfully decoded by the users on this category smoothly without any significant resistance from the decoder. The reason why the respondents are willing to spend their real money on this application is not only limited for buying Name Registration upgrade but also for purchasing IMVU virtual items. Based on the respondents' answers, they purchase virtual items to beautify their avatars, seek pleasure, give gifts to other users, and show off their avatar. The users from the dominated category bought the Name Registration upgrade without any discount or special promotions. The users' action in purchasing virtual items and Name Registration Upgrade in IMVU for fun shows that the main purpose of the users in this category is to gain pleasure through spending their real money for virtual items. Thus, their actions show how the consumers' materialism ideology is aligned with the producer's capitalism ideology. The company's intention to reap the maximum possible profit from the consumers has succeeded because the users that belong to the dominated category measure their satisfaction by

spending their real money on the application. The alignment of two ideologies can be seen from the willingness of the users in this category to spend their real money on the application without any discount and special promotions to fulfill their desire and pleasure that brings full profit to IMVU or the company.

Besides materialism, the respondents from the dominated category also adopted the classism ideology that made the users strive for elevating their online reputation and privileges. Therefore, they also bring maximum profits to the company because they paid the Name Registration upgrades without discount and some of the users spend a larger amount of money to buy VIP membership. In addition, the company's policies in providing more privileges to the users who spend more money on the application led the users to construct their own virtual class system in which those who spend more money are deemed to have a higher rank or higher status compared to the users who spend less. VIP members are considered as the elite in the IMVU community because they have VIP badge on their profiles, and they can earn money from selling their creations in the Creator Program. The users that adopted this ideology considered the guest users have lower social strata than them. The discrimination against the users that have 'Guest_' on their avatars' name caused the respondent who adopted classism ideology to dislike the guest users and they do not want other people considered them as the same level as the guest users. The discrimination toward guest users in the virtual community perfectly matches the classism ideology. The users of this category that adopted the ideology of classism paid more price for VIP Membership and they bought the upgrade without any discount that brings full profit for to the company. Therefore, it reveals how the users in the dominated category

adopted the classism ideology which aligned with the capitalism ideology of the company.

Next, the respondents from the oppositional category did not spend any money and refused to pay a dime of their money on this application unlike the respondents from the dominated category and negotiated category. The ideologies that respondents of this category adopted are frugalism and Islam. The respondents in this category who adopted the ideology of frugalism refused to spend their real money in this application and prefer to save it for other causes. The respondents' action in allocating their money for their real-life necessities rather than spending their money on the application like buying RN and virtual items shows that they adopt the frugalism ideology. Some respondents save their money by collecting free credits and free items that are provided in the application. Meanwhile, some respondents stated that they prioritized their social interaction experience rather than spending money for gaining upgrades and beautifying their avatars. For the respondent who adopted Islam ideology, the respondent's decision in not spending any money in the application because he considered spending money in the application was kind of wasteful act and based on the respondent's answer wasting money is not approved in his or her religion.

The respondents of the oppositional category are aware that the application with its capitalism ideology tried to gain profit from the users but they opposed the capitalism ideology with the ideology of frugalism and Islam ideology they adopted. The respondents' answers about refusing to buy IMVU's virtual items and Name Registration upgrade with their real money show how the frugalism ideology and Islam ideology they adopt contradict the capitalism ideology. The application or the company's intention to gain as much profit

as possible from the respondents of this category has been resisted because the respondents refused to spend any of their real money on this application. Consequently, the respondents of the oppositional category brought zero profit from the sale of virtual items and Name Registration upgrade to the company. It can be concluded that the respondents of the oppositional category only focused on enjoying the socialization aspect that this application provides by using their avatars without seeking any pleasure and benefits from spending their real money for their avatars looks and other upgrades. Their actions are different from the actions of respondents that belong to dominated category and the negotiated category. The third category is the negotiated category, the ideology that is adopted by the respondents of the negotiated category is opportunism. The opportunism ideology that the respondents of the Negotiated category adopted did not fully oppose and also did not fully support the capitalism ideology of IMVU Inc. The proof can be seen from how the respondents decoded the message sent by IMVU and they can find their own unique ways to bring more advantage to themselves. All of the respondents in this category spent their real money in the application but on the terms that can be advantageous or profitable for them such as having discounts, split their bills and receiving gifts from others. The respondents spent their money for IMVU virtual items and IMVU upgrades that contain the name registrations. Also, some respondents in this category take the opportunity to sell their virtual creations in the application via one of the VIP membership's privileges which is using the creator program that can bring extra cash or income for them. The encoder's message is well decoded by the respondents because all of them spent their real money on the application and bought the Name Registration upgrades. However, the company or the encoder has failed to reap the maximum possible profits because the respondents in the negotiated category only want to

buy upgrades when there are profitable opportunities to improve their experience in using this application by spending less amount of money.

Based on my analysis, most of the respondents in three categories used this application to socialize with other users. But the majority of them are required to own virtual items and upgrades to maximize their experience in using this application. The respondents from the dominated category and the negotiated category stated that they are willing to spend their real money to beautify or customize their avatar which implies that the users prioritize their avatars' look because their avatars represent them in the virtual world, and it may affect the other users' impression. In IMVU, other users can determine whether someone spent their money on virtual objects or use free items just by looking at the outfit of the avatars. Obviously, the use of free items and purchased items show some distinguishable differences on the avatars' appearance. Therefore, many IMVU users tried their best to make the avatars look great by dressing them up in nice clothes, skins and makeup because the appearance of the avatars affected their confidence in virtual settings and social experience. Meanwhile, the respondents from the oppositional category only prioritize the socialization aspect from the application, they did not care about using free items on their avatars and they said they utilize the Daily Spin feature to gather free credits little by little. Some respondents from the dominated category that adopted the ideology of materialism also spent some of their real money to please other users by sending them virtual items as gifts. They did such practice to indulge their online friends in order to gain favor from them and be able to engage more social interaction with them.

For the Name Registration upgrade or RN, most of the respondents from the dominated

and negotiated categories bought the name registration upgrades, whereas the respondents from the oppositional category did not. The respondents from the dominated category bought RN in full price and even some of the respondents bought the name registration upgrades from VIP Membership also in full price. The respondents from the dominated category bought the name registration upgrade to gain pleasure they get from the omission of the 'Guest_' label. Some of the respondents in this category that adopted the classism ideology bought VIP Membership to elevate their social status by being the elite in the IMVU community, they flaunt their VIP badge on their profiles and their VIP privileges they gain to other users. On the other hand, the respondents from the negotiated category bought those upgrades in discounted price and some of the respondents in the negotiated category bought Marriage Package by splitting the bills with their friends in order to get (the) name registration or Guest_ label omission in cheaper price but with better benefits. Some of the respondents in the negotiated category also bought VIP Membership, but their reasons are different from the respondents of the dominated category. The VIP's of the negotiated category joined the IMVU Creator Program that can bring income to the users by selling their creations in the application whereas the VIP's in the dominated category bought the upgrade mainly as a way to elevate their social status and pride on their avatars.

The respondents' answers show how the majority of them do spend their real money on the IMVU application. However, based on the responses of few respondents of the oppositional group, it is shown that there are some respondents who have the ideology that resists or opposes the producer's capitalism ideology. Moreover, from the Negotiated category it is shown that the respondents can cleverly create their own ways in getting more advantages for themselves when they purchase the name registration upgrades. The

respondents from the negotiated category took advantages from other users and from the application's features to get the upgrades with cheaper prices or free, thus they are not fully submitting to the ideology of capitalism IMVU adopted. Most of the respondents from the dominated and negotiated category have claimed that they spent a lot of money to buy virtual items. I believe this is due to the fact that many users of IMVU are obsessed with their avatar looks because they think that their avatar represents their identity when they socialize in the virtual world. Regarding the Name Registration upgrade, I believe that the omission of the 'Guest_' label in front of the avatars' name has a massive impact on most of the respondents' confidence when they do social interaction. After analyzing the data, I see many different answers and views regarding spending money on the virtual items and name registration upgrade that open my mind. Many people feel happier when they buy virtual items also name registration upgrades, and a lot of them cherish their avatars as they cherish themselves in real life. Before I read the respondents' answer, I used to think and insist that IMVU virtual items are not that important and name registration upgrades are really unnecessary because they only remove the guest label. Moreover, reading the creators' answers on the questionnaire makes me want to try to learn how to create virtual items and how to sell them in IMVU to earn extra cash.

Furthermore, by using IMVU people can gain fun or benefits from socialization and the purchase of virtual objects and people also can earn real money from the application by participating in IMVU Creator Program. Furthermore, in IMVU people can do things that they would not be able to do in the real world such as gathering with their friends from afar in the same chat room due to the long distances and COVID-19 pandemic. I also think that IMVU will keep developing in the future because it has attracted many users and many users

are willing to spend money on IMVU that bring tremendous profits to the company. Due to the rapid technological advancement, I believe the users of virtual communication application are no longer recognize the boundaries between virtual items and concrete items as long as both provides fun and benefits for them. Therefore, the practice of buying virtual items in virtual or digital world will most likely become more common on our near future.

