

Self-Presentation of Vanshead Solo's Members as Vans Sneaker Subculture in Instagram Posts

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ABSTRACT

Vanshead Solo Community, a Vans sneaker enthusiast community, became a place for those who love Vans sneaker and has strong skateboarding subculture values. Their strong affinity is not only shown in their offline gathering but also one of the famous online platforms, Instagram. Thus, this research attempts to study how its members express and negotiate the values of Vans sneakers in their Instagram accounts as their digital self-representation. This research uses a digital ethnographic approach to collect the data and applies qualitative thematic analysis to code, generate and review the themes from the observation to the posts. This research finds that Vanshead Solo members show off their values by showing their creativity and self-expression. Their self-presentation, which distinctively varies from using the shoes as a canvas to draw creatively into wearing it in various occasions, shows that the meaning of Vans become complex and individually interpreted by its member.

1. INTRODUCTION

Fashion has developed simultaneously in this modern era. Year by year, the fashion mode has become the new trend in society. In the globalization era, avoiding other countries' influence is almost impossible, so every aspect of our life is possibly related to cultures outside us. As a global phenomenon, the sneaker hugely impacts the fashion culture worldwide. The sneaker was initially created in America in the middle of 18 century by Charles Goodyear after he innovated the durable rubber that saved the rubber industry in America during the 1830s, which afterward became the main material of the shoe sole (Smith, 2018). This kind of shoe has become a trend recognized by many people, either famous public figures or common people worldwide, and the demand for sneaker increase yearly.

Sneakers have become well-known outfits for everyone in the world nowadays, the fact this culture was only consumed by certain people in the previous. Yuniya Kawamura (2016) explained that the sneakers phenomenon was categorized as a subculture for the first time, and it grew as an alternative for those unable to consume the mainstream culture then. Kawamura (2016) also divided the category of sneakers development into three stages: the first wave, the second wave, and the third wave. Those stages describe how the sneakers phenomenon developed and can be as phenomenal as today.

Sneakers cannot be separated from their root; that is streetwear culture. This culture flourished during the skateboard and surfing trend on the West Coast of the U.S.A, especially in Los Angeles, California. Skateboarding is a unique sport compared to others, like football and baseball, because it has some significant aspects that make it different from others (Beal and Weidman, 2003). In their study, some values of skateboarding become its authenticity as an American extreme sport. Two central values create its structure, participant control and de-emphasizing competition. Beal & Weidman (2003) also explained three values of skateboarding that shape its member authenticity as skateboarders. First is individuality, second is non-conformity, and last is masculinity.

Sneakers as streetwear can also be categorized as a subculture. In definition, subculture means "an ethnic, regional, economic, or social group exhibiting characteristic patterns of behavior sufficient to distinguish it from others within an embracing culture or society." (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2011). Dick Hebdige (1979) has explained that subculture is subordinate to society's main culture. In the subculture, the gentle approach of

hegemony that the dominant group implements is less influential than what the subculture does. It contradicts the dominant group such as skateboarding, or against the dominant sport culture.

One of the most famous and iconic streetwear used by many youngsters worldwide is the Vans brand. It is a famous American streetwear brand that is broadly known and has many enthusiasts because of its unique and iconic product, especially its sneaker. The outcome of Vans has a strong atmosphere of skateboarding, including its logo, "Off The Wall." This logo became iconic and popular to skateboarders since it was created in nearly 1976 after Vans directly worked with some skateboarders such as Tony Alfa and Stacy Peralta on shoe production named Vans #95, broadly known as the era. Several years later, Vans announced their iconic logo called "Off The Wall," which is taken from the acrobatic style of skateboarding when the skateboarder shoots off the edge of the pool, which is referred to as 'the wall' into the air (Smith, 2018). Besides being the image and identity of Vans sneakers, the logo Vans "Off The Wall" is also strongly bonded with the skaters as their target market. The company said that Vans "Off The Wall" previously referred to the skateboarding trick commonly heard in the skateboarding circle. However, Vans Senior Director of Global Brand Marketing, April Vitkus, said that today the meaning of this logo has become more general and not only about skateboarding (Wong, 2016).

As a renowned brand, Vans has many loyal users that spread all over the world. They are sneaker enthusiasts, collectors, and connoisseurs with the same interest in this brand. The high number and enthusiasts drive them to create a community of Vans sneaker enthusiasts. In Indonesia, Vans enthusiasts are grouped in a community named Vanshead Indonesia, a community of Vans brand enthusiasts that was started by the online discussion forum about the history and the interest things of Van's products, especially its sneaker in the online forum, Kaskus.com. (Ramadan & Verica, 2016). One of the most active chapters of Vanshead is based in Surakarta City, established in December 2014. Such as Vanshead Indonesia, which previously used the online forum as their medium of discussion; Vanshead Solo also allows every Vans brand enthusiast to join their online platform, such as Instagram. As a popular social media, Instagram has a huge impact on promoting the sneaker subculture to the sneaker enthusiasts in the Vanshead Solo community.

Streetwear, especially sneakers, cannot be separated from the skateboarding subculture as its root. Skateboarders themselves are very identic with their idealism that influences their fashion. In Indonesia, especially Surakarta, streetwear has become youngsters' clothing. The phenomenological study on youth consumption of streetwear fashion as identity in Surakarta has found that the male youngster streetwear enthusiasts in Surakarta fall into two categories. The first is those with a street subculture background, and the second is those who deem streetwear only as a fashion and do not have activities related to the streetwear culture. (Lawe, 2016) Still taking sneakers as the object of the study, this research also continues to study streetwear, especially Vans, to understand the phenomenon of youngsters choosing Vans and negotiating its usage of streetwear for various occasions. This study explores how the Solonese youngsters create their online identity on Instagram by negotiating and subverting Vans as streetwear into different usage and wear of formal and informal occasions.

2. METHOD

This research takes the approach of digital ethnography. Like its predecessor, the ethnography technique, it is also based on direct and deep observation of social stories and behavior. This method is essential to get the information from the conversation of the subject or what Gobo calls the 'actor,' read the document related to them, and ask them questions. Two strategies of ethnography, non-participant observation, and participant observation, are also taken for digital ethnography. (see Gobo, 2011). According to Dhiraj Murthy (2008), digital ethnography helps ethnographers retain their sociocultural gazes in new digital media. The potential dissemination of this method eases ethnographers to reach wider and more fruitful information from the subject.

In their work, Pink et al. (2016) state that in digital ethnography, researchers are often mediated with digital technology rather than doing a direct presence in the social life of their subject. Pink et al. (2016) then divided seven concepts in social and cultural theory that can be adapted for digital ethnography. Those concepts are: experience (what people feel); practice (what people do); things (the objects that are part of our life); Relationship (our intimate social environment); Social worlds (the group of wider social configurations through which people relate to each other); Localities (the actual physically shared context that we inhabit); Event (the coming together of various things in the public context).

The data of this research are divided into two categories. They are the primary and secondary data. This research uses Instagram as the source of the primary data to observe Vanshead Solo members' digital activity and to get to know about their online identity. The researcher collects the data by observing Vanshead Solo members' posting activities on their Instagram accounts. The researcher focuses on the members of some interactive Instagram features such as comments and D.M. (Direct Message) as the medium to dig down more information from the subjects. Besides their posting on Instagram, the research has also conducted platform-mediated interviews with some of the members of Vanshead Solo to get information on the meaning of streetwear fashion. The supporting data were taken from the website in 2017 to Vans Global Brand President

Doug Palladini by adweek.com and Senior Director of Vans Global Brand Marketing April Vitkus by hypebeast.com in Vans 50th anniversary in 2016. All the data are then analyzed to find out their forms of self-presentation by using Hofstede's theory on cultural dimensions.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Vanshead Solo Members' Instagram Posts Content Analysis

The five subjects were named based on the nickname of their Instagram. Their nick name were @fura26, @arizalfirmanda, @okidwiyanto29, @ari_fajary and @dirtycoca. Each subject has a different number of Instagram posts and various numbers in each type of post.

Table 1
Fura26's type of posts and numbers

No	Categories	@fura26						Total	%	
		Year								
		2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020		
1	Selfie and Self-Potrait by wearing Vans products				1	6	1		8	7
2	Regular selfie by wearing other brands' products					2			2	2
3	Pictures of shoes and stuffs					2			2	2
4	Places and views					1			1	1
5	Group or wefie				2	10	1		13	11
6	Other people without the users									
7	Events and posters					8	9	1	18	16
8	Skateboarding						1		1	1
9	Arts and Collaboration				9	35	42	11	97	60
Total								142	100	

Fura26 showed that 97 posts, or 60% of his postings, are dominated by the Arts and Collaborations category. The second and third dominant types are "Events and Posters" and "Group or Wefie," with 16% and 11% percentages. Furthermore, the rest of his posts are photographs of other styles described in the following. The finding in his posts is unique and different from other subjects because it is dominated by the activities or practices related to art, especially visual art. His visual artworks are made in digital and also manual. Uniquely, he often manually makes some paintings on shoes (shoe painting), mostly done on Vans Shoes. In his Instagram posts, the research also finds that he often collaborates with some companies to collaborate digitally and manually with some shoe brands, mostly Vans shoes and other products. Besides collaboration, he also joins and wins some of Vans Asia's competitions.

Table 2
Afrizalfirmanda's type of posts and numbers

No	Categories	Arizalfirmanda						Total	%	
		Year								
		2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020		
1	Selfie and Self-Potrait by wearing Vans products						4	13	17	17
2	Regular selfie by wearing other brands' products					1	13	11	25	24
3	Pictures of shoes and stuffs					1	5	8	14	14
4	Places and views						16	9	25	24
5	Group or wefie					1	7	8	16	16
6	Other people without the users						2		2	2
7	Events and posters									
8	Skateboarding						1	1	2	2
9	Arts and Collaboration							1	1	1
Total								102	100	

In the next subject's percentage, afrizalfirmanda_, each post's percentage is more varied and unique. The top number of his posts is dominated by two categories, 'Places and Views' with 25 posts or 24% and 'Regular selfie by wearing other brands' product' with the same number. The other types of posts that have big numbers are 'Selfie and Self-portrait by wearing Vans products' with 17 posts or 17%, photos of 'Group or wefie' with 16 posts or 16%, and 'Picture of shoes and kinds of stuff' with 14 posts or 14%. For the rest of the types, this second subject only has a few posts, but some of them are still related to Vans as the main topic of this research. Based on the chart above, it is revealed that afrizalarmanda_'s posts are mostly about his daily life and outfit. Uniquely, the outfit he uses is not dominated by Vans products but by other brands.

Table 3
Okidwiyanto29's type of posts and numbers

No	Categories	okidwiyanto29							Total	%
		2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020		
1	Selfie and Self-Potrait by wearing Vans products				6	18	8	9	41	45
2	Regular selfie by wearing other brands' products			1	2	5	2	1	11	12
3	Pictures of shoes and stuffs			1	5	6	4	2	18	20
4	Places and views									
5	Group or wefie			1	4	2	9	3	19	21
6	Other people without the users									
7	Events and posters									
8	Skateboarding					2			2	2
9	Arts and Collaboration									
Total									91	100

Similarly, okidwiyanto29's posts are mostly about daily life, outfit pictures, and video. 'Selfie and self-portrait by wearing Vans products' dominate the type of his post with 41 posts or 45% of the total posts. 'Group or wefie' and 'Picture of shoes and stuff' with almost the same numbers, 18 posts or 20% and 19 posts or 21%; those posts are dominated by pictures of him with his communities which are related to Vans like Vanshead Solo, and photographs of his Vans shoes collections. Unlike afrizalarmanda, which has heterogeneous types of posts, okidwiyanto has a more monotonous outfit post instead. For 'Regular selfie by wearing other brands' style product,' the number of his posts are only 11 or 12%, lower than his posts about Vans products. Although the outfit dominates his Instagram posts, there are two posts or 2% of him skateboarding, and there's no post in the rest of the post styles. That means his Instagram posts tend to show more about things related to Vans than others.

Table 4
Ari_fajary's type of posts and numbers

No	Categories	ari_fajary							To tal	%
		2014	2015	2016	Year					
					2017	2018	2019	2020		
1	Selfie and Self-Potrait by wearing Vans products	3	3	15	1	8	5	3	38	56
2	Regular selfie by wearing other brands' products		1	5	5	5	1		17	25
3	Pictures of shoes and stuffs					2	1		3	4
4	Places and views					1			1	2
5	Group or wefie	1	1	3	1				6	9
6	Other people without the users			2	1				3	4
7	Events and posters									
8	Skateboarding									
9	Arts and Collaboration									
Total									68	100

The percentage finding in the fourth subject, ari_fajary is almost the same as okidwiyanto26, especially its top type percentage. The total of his posts is 68. Although the type of his posts varies, as we see in the finding above, there are still two empty pieces of the diagram, "Events and posters" and "Skateboarding," showing no percentage in both post. The type of posts "Selfie and self-portrait by wearing Vans products" becomes the dominant type with 38 posts or 56%. Uniquely, in this type, some selfie pictures of ari_fajari are taken at some metal music concerts as the background. Furthermore, there is the second dominant type of post, "regular selfie by wearing other brands' products, with 17 posts or 25%. The third position is occupied by "Group or wefie" with six posts or 9%. Similar to the dominant type, in this type, there are some pictures of the subject taking wefie photos with other people at the metal community gathering and also at metal music concerts. The other types, "Pictures of shoes and stuff" and "Other people without user," have the same number with three posts or 4%. For "Pictures of shoes and stuff," ari_fajari's posts are mostly pictures of Vans shoes rather than other brands, and for "Other people without user," all his posts in this type are about the foreign metal bands in metal music festivals. For the last type, "Places and views," he only has three posts or 2%. Despite having only a few posts of this type, ari_fajari's posts still have a similar context to others, such as the metal music events.

Table 5
Dirtycoca's type of posts and numbers

No	Categories	dirtycoca							To tal	%
		2014	2015	2016	Year					
					2017	2018	2019	2020		
1	Selfie and Self-Potrait by wearing Vans products					2	4	2	8	17
2	Regular selfie by wearing other brands' products					2	4	4	10	22
3	Pictures of shoes and stuffs						1		1	2
4	Places and views					1	15		16	35
5	Group or wefie						1		1	2
6	Other people without the users						3		3	7
7	Events and posters									
8	Skateboarding						3	4	7	15
9	Arts and Collaboration									
Total									46	100

The last subject, dirtycoca, has various post percentages and has only two unfilled percentages, "Arts and collaborations" and "Events and posters." Unlike previous subjects, the highest percentage in dirtycoca's Instagram posts is positioned by "Places and View", with 16 posts or 35% of the total posts. In that type, the pictures are mostly about the common views or places like buildings and nature, yet there are also related pictures of Vans events. Based on the finding above, Dirtycoca has a higher "Regular selfie by wearing other brands' product" percentage with ten posts, or 22%, than "Selfie and self-portrait by wearing Vans' products," which has eight posts, or 17%. Uniquely, he has the highest "Skateboarding" type percentage on his Instagram, with seven posts or 15%. Those skateboarding posts consist of pictures and videos of his skateboarding activities. The next type is "Other people without users," with three posts or 7%. Different from ari_fajari that who tends to upload photos of famous people like musicians, on the contrary, dirtycoca tends to upload photographs of his friends. For the rest of the types, "group or wefie" and "pictures of shoes and stuff" have the same number of posts, with 1 or 2% of each type.

3.2. Self-Representation of Vans Solo Members on Instagram

Rettberg (2017) has contended that social media such as Instagram becomes a new medium for people to represent themselves as portrait paintings and diaries in the past when web blogging and social media are not as advanced as today. Rettberg has also explained three modes of self-representation in social media: visual, written, and quantified. Taking Rettberg's contention, this research maps out the themes from the visual, written, and quantified posts to identify the variation of usage of Vans. Based on mapping out the posts, this research found five different themes which show how the Vans Solo members make meaning the shoes to develop their online identity.

Fura26's posts on December 21, 2017, are the posts that gain the greatest number of likes, reaching 148. From 142 posts, this research finds that fura26's dominant post type is "Art & Collaboration," with 97 posts or 60% of the total post. These posts are quite different from other posts since the posts are mostly dominated by art-related activities, especially visual art. Uniquely, his art was mostly about sneakers, and he also often made shoe painting artworks for competitions held by Vans Asia. Those posts are categorized into the theme of art and creativity, specially coded with shoe painting. This research also scrutinizes pictures/videos, captions, and hashtags to discover how he has internalized the Off the Wall identity on his Instagram. It is found that Fura26 has tried to show off his creativity in making artwork using the Vans shoes as a medium. For Fura26, Vans is not just branded shoes that most people show off wearing as branded shoes; he uses it as his canvas for drawing leyak, a Balinese mythology known as the evil witch and wayang, a Javanese puppet show character.



Figure 1. Vans with Leyak Drawing

He tried to show his creativity and identity as Indonesian through that artwork in Vans Custom Culture event. His self-expression reflects his individual creativity as a member of the community. Fura26's also paints Indonesian icons, flags, and batik on the Vans shoes. His artworks are involved in the competition to channel the uniqueness of the Vans, to show the combination of the modern informal values of streetwear and the traditionally aesthetic painting. Through that artwork, Fura26 negotiates the modernity of sports shoes into flexible-occasion shoes, giving higher streetwear values. His creativity becomes iconic since he changes the meaning of shoes into a canvas. Besides, with his taking of traditional arts, he presents his online identity as an Indonesian Vans member, differentiating him from other global members.

Unlike Fura26, Afrizalfirmada expressed his self-presentation on Instagram posts through his selfie of wearing Vans on some destinations. One of the posts which gains many responses is his self-portrait in front of

Hajj Shelter, Medina, Saudi Arabia, with hashtags such as #afirzalfirmanda #madinah #uea #saudiarabia #houseofallah # Islam #moeslimwear #islamituindah #indonesia and #umroh and the caption 'Hi Bitch'. The contradiction between the caption and the hashtags can produce many interpretations. The picture and the hashtags represent Islam's tradition and sacred values as a religion. In contrast, the caption represents the rebellious attitude which could be referred to as the shoes he is wearing. It could mean that Vans can shift from streetwear into formal wear, although most people could not accept wearing Vans for formal situations, especially regarding religious circumstances.

Meanwhile, Okidwiyanto29's Instagram posts are mostly about shoes, which shows that he is a shoe enthusiast or sneakerhead. Yet, unlike the other members' posts, his posts on his Instagram are dominated by selfies and self-portraits wearing Vans products. They show his huge interest in collecting and wearing Vans shoes.



Figure 2. Limited Edition Vans SK8-Hi Decon

The post shows Okidwiyanto29's photo wearing Vans SK8-Hi Decon, which is one of Vans' limited edition shoes. One thing that makes this shoe edition rare, authentic, and different from other editions is its Jazz strips that look like the silhouette of human bones, while the other editions only have plain white stripes. Uniquely, in that picture, there are also tagged some accounts related to Vans, such as @waffleheadid, @underthepalms, @strictlywaffles, @offthewalldaily, @vansheadid, @blendscm. Moreover, his Instagram picture is also explained with a caption written "Decon" and some hashtags such as #myvans, #vansblends, #dailyvansindonesia, #vansheadid, #aw_onfeet, #underthepalms, #strictlywaffles, #waffleheads, #offthewalldaily. Thus, it is unsurprising that this post has got so many likes because of the authenticity of the shoe picture, the broad accessibility of its hashtags, and the accounts tagged in it. The selfie of the shoes indicates how Okidwiyanto29 shows off his having and wearing the rare and unique Vans shoes collection. Compared to Fura26, who is proud of his creativity in using Vans, Okidwiyanto29's pride is more categorized as part of consumer culture: he is special because he can buy and get the special edition. Compared to Fura26 and Afrizalfirmanda, his self-presentation indicates his dominant acceptance of Vans as prestigious streetwear.

Similar with Okidwiyanto29, Ari_fajary's Instagram posts are also dominated by his 'selfies and self-portraits wearing Vans products, which count into 38 posts, or 56% of the total posts on his Instagram. One of the posts that has gained 161 likes is the one taken on June 27, 2016, and reached 161.



Figure 3. Limited Edition Vans Old Skool X Patta

The post shows Ari_fajari wearing Vans Old Skool X Patta limited edition, the collaboration shoes between Vans Old and Patta, an Amsterdam streetwear brand that often collaborates with other fashion brands, especially streetwear. The Written caption is 'Team Patta' (with fire, Japanese Flag, and money emoticons). However, he does not give a hashtag in this post. It only provides a beautiful shot, showing the good skill of the person behind the camera. Such self-representation refers to the congruence between the post and the Vans' value, the non-conformity or the value which is not resistance or rebellion (see Beal & Weidman, 2003). It is just self-expression that can be meant as his pride in having the limited edition. However, this post gives added value. Although it is only a photo of a pair of shoes, the photographer's skill in choosing the background and taking the shot produces an aesthetic impression.

Dirtycoca is also Vanshead Solo's Member who has Instagram account. Compared to the posts uploaded by other members, his posts rarely present his wearing Vans. The most dominant posts are places and views that he has visited. The total of such posts is 16 or 35% of the total of his posts. Most pictures uploaded are tourist sites, buildings, and views of nature.

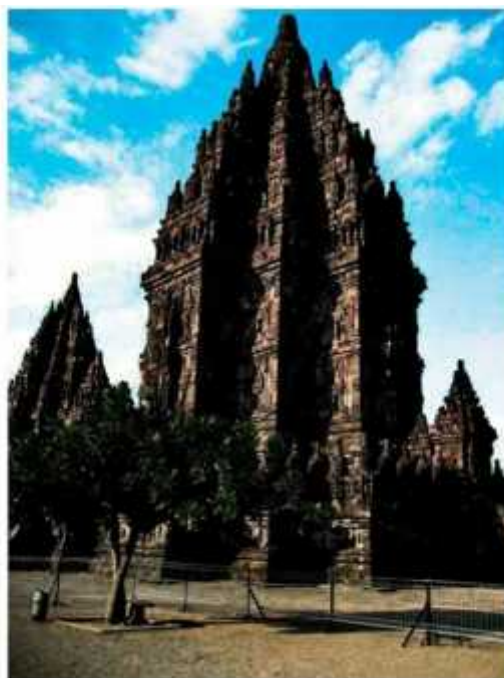


Figure 4. Candi

It looks like Dirtycoca wants to show off his skill of taking and editing photos. Like Fura26, Dirtycoca's can also be categorized as artistic work. He is also considered a Vans enthusiast who develops creativity using a camera (see Wong, 2016). His skill is not in using a paintbrush. He seems to try to attract global Vanshead members to visit tourist sites in Indonesia. It can be seen from the hashtags #indonesia, #lightroom, #candi, #photography, and #nelakarisma and the caption of "*Candi: Cantik cantik ngga punya hati.*" Dirtycoca could attract audiences to respond to his post by playing with the words. His beautiful photo of the site could promote tourists to the destination since he also provides a hashtag with the link of the information.

4. CONCLUSION

Vans is an American streetwear brand strongly related to the skateboarding subculture, yet it has many enthusiasts in Indonesia. Scrutinizing the posts of the Vanshead Solo members, the research finds five different themes after mapping out the posts of the selected members. All of the posts are the self-presentations of the members. However, not all posts can be categorized into enthusiasts. After selecting the five posts gaining the most likes, the research finds that there are three different kinds of themes in the posts. The three chosen posts are categorized into enthusiasts since the posts provide the creative and artistic skills of the persons, either using a camera to take photos or drawing with a paintbrush. The two posts show their online identity as Indonesian Vanshead. One post can be interpreted as the account's attempt to shift the meaning of Vans as streetwear into formal wear despite its possibility of getting a rejection. Meanwhile, the other two posts. And the last post is only the pride of the member of having a limited edition.

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