

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

In the era of mainstreaming digital medium, body (superficial look) and image (persona) become the currency of promotional value, notably, for celebrity as the intermediary of brand-marketing. Indeed, eschewing from the historical foundation of celebrity that has been an entertainer in social media to the greater extent of internet, the notion of the importance of celebrity now is forcefully pushed into a celebrity system that attempts to “*expanding its enterprise beyond its original goals*” (Boileau to Choi and Berger, 2017) whereby body with its attribute still be the part of management that is commodified in celebrity labor practice (Boileau, 2017, p.3). In alignment with Hyland’s (2015), writer for New York magazine’s ‘*The Cut*’, in her observation of the looks of celebrities for Met Costume Institute Gala (known as the “*Oscar of Fashion*”), she concludes that celebrities have to shape their bodies to look like the product of work because fashion couture that is invented by the fast-fashion purveyors is already embedded as body couture (a practice in which celebrity is also capable to wear body as the form of couture or complying to the client and spectacle’s requirements).

Celebrity in that case has a role as a commodity, particularly, a commercial product that P. David Marshall (1997) said can be manufactured and traded by promotions and publicities in media industries. At the most pragmatic level, Graeme Turner (2010) added that “*for individual, celebrity is a commercial*

*property which is fundamental to their career and must be maintained and strategized if they are to continue to benefit from it*” (p.14). Elaborating Turner’s statement, Boileau (2017) through his survey on celebrity, explains that the idea of the works of celebrity is indeed closely related to self-branding that results on the dependency to maintain the celebrity status or fame by personalizing body (look) in two aims; keeping the cultivated brand upon particular individual and to become the media coverage (p.6). Being media coverage is needed in achieving celebrity status because one will be considered as celebrity if they are the subject of excessive talks on media (Penfold-Mounced to Ibid, 2009. p.13).

In making their debut as media coverage (read also: searching for publicity), celebrities would construct an image or persona of themselves, particularly, two selves in one body. The notion of persona performed the duality between “*myself*” or “*being for itself*” and “*my self in the eyes of others*” or “*the being for others*” (Morrison, 2014). For example, an American popular singer who is born with the name Stephanie has turned into or came up with ‘Lady Gaga’ persona as she was facing her fans. Then she leaves her authentic self as Stephanie persona in the back seat because Gaga is more identical to be remembered in the entertainment/cultural industry, rather than the casual ordinary Stephanie. The exemplification of Gaga demonstrates that celebrity lives in their duality which is as celebrity (“*the being for others*”) and person (“*the being for itself*”). This controlling and marketing of the celebrity persona is considered by Wernick as the ‘*culture of universal proportion*’, a condition where a person is constantly

motivated to present the '*branded self*' as a staple to be worked on and also as a persona produced for public consumption (Boileau to Jerslev, 2017, p.8).

Besides self, the embodiment of the notion persona could be seen through the individual appearance in terms of their body management and fashion couture. For example, according to her representation on Instagram, Kim Kardashian typically dresses up in a more revealing way for the purpose of advertisement rather than in the moment of her exposing motherhood (Pasenen, 2018). This case shows that Kim Kardashian who is identically normalizing sexual freedom by dominantly using revealing clothes (Pasanen, 2018, p.26), differentiates her persona by being personal for her close relatives (such as family) and being professional for her clients (including fans) when it comes to body-exposing and body-personalizing. It could be shown through the way she displays herself in Instagram and reality show.

Steering the focus on Kim Kardashian as the perfect example of body personalizing, one could notice that she understands how to locates her body in a various certain manner to creates proper persona that is required by clients in each places. Thus, she exemplifies Merleau-Ponty's (1976, 1981) concept of body that considered body as a visible vehicle of self. Kim turns her body into the object in time and space by involving the body in a particular environment to identify self with commitments to certain projects (Entwistle & Wissinger, 2006, p.12). With mind and consciousness, Kim performed labor on her body as she was locating her body in a 'definitive environment' such as workplace, and then leads her to set the context whereby body is objectified and commodified.



According to professors of fashion study and sociology, Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wissinger (2006), the notion of body-objectification has become some of researchers' focuses, for their attentions are drawn upon the body management in contemporary labor practices. Within that broad research, the analysis has been directed towards '*aesthetic labor*' to represents current trends in work practice. Aesthetic labor is usually used to promotes products and services (Wissinger, 2006. p.6). It refers to '*embodied capacities and attributes*' (Warhurst & Nickson, 2001: 13) that enable employees to '*look good and sound right*' for the job (Entwistle & Wissinger to ibid, 2006, p.2) because producing attractive look is considered as 'professional' attitude in a style labor market.

In their study of aesthetic labor, Entwistle and Wissinger (2006), focus on the case of fashion modelling in New York and London. They argue that models have similar condition of working within the so-called '*culture industries*' such as film, media, advertising and so on. In these industries, one should strive for their careers because the patterns of culture industries are highly individual and idiosyncratic which forced them to depend upon luck and the ability of creating and using the social networking and encounters (McRobbie, 2003) or 'social capital' in Bourdieueian lens. Besides social capital, in order to gain entry tickets to the competitive industry and stay within it, fashion models must adhere to the strict standards. They have to be thin or muscular, slacken the aging process, and adjustable to the whims of fashion trends, as demanded by performance work standard of modeling, television, film, and dancing industries. As a result, constantly having commitments to body maintenance and style customization

outside normal working hours (looking great every time) is a must for them (Entwisle & Wissinger, 2006, p.12).

Kim Kardashian, who is the role model with the talent of “looking great”, once said “*There’s nothing we can do that’s not documented, so why not look your best, and amazing?*” in her interview for *Paper Magazine* (2014). She implies that the works in culture industries (along with its requirements) involve in the daily lives of the related laborer, and she begins to normalize it by patently declaring that those who do not subscribe the tenets of glamour means they are unacceptable to be part of the industry. Through the writer’s observation of Kardashian’s reality tv show ‘*Keeping Up with the Kardashians*’ per seasons, Kim with other Kardashians clan indeed tirelessly working on her body and image either in workplace which value her as aesthetic laborer, and in digital media which embroils her to the realm of ‘glamour’ in Wissinger’s sense (2014).

Extending her study of labor practices, Elizabeth Wissinger returns individually in 2016 with her analysis that viewed through the lens of Kardashians. The attempt of Kim Kardashian personalizing her body is taken into account by Wissinger. She examines Kardashians as the phenomenon where labor market is now centered on the activity of body and style customization and it is defined as ‘*glamour labor*’. Kardashians exemplify the glamour laborers, for investing time and effort into editing the body and self to appear as fascinating in highly filtered and manipulated online life for the sake of achieving social legitimacy such as “likes” in digital world (p.2). As a result the ‘glamour labor’ in the case of Kardashians becomes common desire (Wissinger, 2016, p.8).

In contrast with Wissinger's glamour labor concept which is described as the speculative labor of managing a body and personality to optimize its impact in hopes getting possible future reward (such as pleasure, satisfaction, profit or social legitimacy), a sociologist Kathleen Barry is taken her idea of the '*wages of glamour*' to a new level as a response of Kardashians phenomenon. The '*wages of glamour*' refers to wages earned by crafting bodies and personalities to meet the expectations of femininity in which it is culturally approved (Barry, 2007). Indeed, femininity becomes a brand that is wrapped up to young women and traded through the genre of celebrity, which commercializes and categorizes the bodies of women and girls with their consent for their own earning (Coy and Garner, 2010, p.664, p.671).

By revealing the effort to be glamour, the Kardashians (notably Kim Kardashian as the pioneer of raising fame), show the young women (who are in productive ages to have a career) that she is merely ordinary American girl with all American work ethic. This means by working hard (work the body out), all young women are capable to develop successful career like she did. In this frame, Kim Kardashian implicates glamour labor as the route of fame for female, and many women have adopted her techniques (Wissinger, 2016, p.6). As they investigate Glamour Girls reality show, Coy and Garner (2010) once stated that celebrity lifestyle which facilitated by money (such as celebrity parties, branded clothes, holidays, bodily beauty treatment and other leisure time with VIP treatment) are the prominent associations of young women's dreams (p.667).



Then, the success of Kim Kardashian as one of the most famous women in the world with a beauty empire, the status of worldwide fashion icon, global travelling opportunities, and millions of loyal fans following every move of her on social media, has become one of the groundbreaking that value the work of celebrity even more. The CEO of Glu Mobile, Niccolo de Masi, even admitted to Forbes (2016) that Kim Kardashian is the perfect brand-power that fits to his marketing product of celebrity role-playing game. Referring back to the current digital phenomenon, the urge of young women to seek interesting/exciting/different work beyond domestic routines in Sherrat's sense (1983) has been portrayed clearly throughout the casual game especially in a form of celebrity role-playing mobile games (such as *Demi Lovato : Path to Fame*, *Katy Perry Pop*, *Covet Fashion with Gabrielle Union*, *Britney Spears American Dream*, *Nicki Minaj: The Empire*, etc.).

With the rise of celebrity games as the nascent evolution of games target market which is no longer towards male but female as well (Chess, 2016, p.2), the young women's dreams could be realized, at least in different dimension. In 2014, the aforementioned American developer and publisher mobile game, *Glu*, has successfully released the celebrity game that they develop after 6 months approaches Kim Kardashian to signed contracts. Kim Kardashian took the offer to enact her stardom/journey to fame in a form of role-playing mobile game named '*Kim Kardashian : Hollywood*' (abbreviated into KK:H). Together with Glu, Kim and her siblings persuade the player to create digital journey with the motive that they can achieve fame within the game world. The concept of the game is simple:

The players need to work their way up the chart of Hollywood to become an A List celebrity, and Kim Kardashian who appears as the non-playable character of mentor will shows the player path to fame and cheering on the player's gameplay and choice.

Moreover, the game is much like a manifestation of Kardashians' world in which it offers player to live like them. The game adapts Kardashians' personal life (e.g. socialize, dating, married and having kids) and professional life (e.g. shoot for reality show, advertisements or campaign, do the photo-shoot, modeling, talk-show and interview, held and attend party, attend award and fashion show, and many more) that will be possessed by the player once they occupy the realm of KK:H. In living the life of Kardashians which is celebrity-based life, the acts of aesthetic and glamour labors are entangled to the players in their virtual world. It could be seen through the game practices/movements/activities that are conducted by the discourses that appear through in-game written text (such as narrative dialogue box and text box) and in-game visual features (such as wardrobe, 'show your style event', and etc.).

Regardless of large number of their minutes in reality are wasted, the players has shown their commitment to constantly do the activities/practices within their virtual journeys in a game world. By June 2020, Google Playstore record more than 10 million people download the game Kim Kardashian: Hollywood since it is launched in 2014, and it has more than 45 million downloads in two years according to Wire (2016). The aforementioned huge number of



people in a long period shows that the players are docile enough to constantly undertake the progressive game activities even with several forcing rules.

Thus for deeper analysis, this study aims to examine the act of aesthetic and glamour labors (as the predicted engagement of playing KK: H) within *Kim Kardashian : Hollywood*, primarily, through the digital experiences of female in-game character. The female character is chosen as the main analyzed character in order to achieve greater extent of aesthetic and glamour labor practices that are closely related to femininity. Even though the in-game male character is not the center, the game is predicted shares the same value of femininity to the male character due to KK: H is feminized gaming style (Chess and Maddox, 2018, p.2).

Additionally, the activities of KK: H game players as online communities in Facebook groups would be taken into consideration (as additional data) to dismantle fatherly the performance of digital aesthetic and glamor labours beyond the game. The additional data is utilized due to KK: H is designed to be sensed as a social network, and it is confirmed by its developer, De Masi (2016), who tries to build “communities” within the game. The players of KK: H are capable to take ‘selfies’ / photo-shoots of their game characters through the ‘wardrobe’ feature (that functions to makeover game characters) and then can directly post them on Facebook. Facebook public group is the only remained platform (after Google+ is shut down) that can KK: H players use to share their game experiences and problems in large scale, and also creating events for other fun.

Moreover, previous studies have drawn the similar game into discussion, but only a few of them relate it to the player’s intuition through the examination of

labor practices. One of them is Alison Harvey's (2018) game and culture study "*The Fame Game: Working Your Way Up the Celebrity Ladder in Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*" that investigates how mobile celebrity game *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* (KK:H) makes celebrity labor, and the work of self-branding, intimacy, and engagement in the attentional economy of social media are visible. She examines three aspects of the game content (celebrity culture), economics (free-to-play within game purchases), and mechanics (affective engagement) to understand how the game gain receptions by functioning links. The examination results on conclusion that KK:H is not merely a mobile game but also a cultural object intertwining a range of issues in celebrity, social media, and new models of feminine labor. To specify the notion of celebrity labor or feminine labor in Harvey's examinations result, this study will examine the precise coverage of feminine labor in a way the focus of analysis will be relayed on its aesthetic and glamour labors.

Despite Harvey, Shira Chess and Jessica Maddox (2018) also shed the light on issue within KK:H. In their study "*Kim Kardashian is my New BFF: Video Games and the Looking Glass Celebrity*", they use several celebrity-games which considered as feminized product to examine the engagement between players and the related celebrities with celebrity culture. The concept of looking-glass celebrity is demonstrated in their study, for it includes the idea that players' actions are depending on how their game avatars are viewed. The idea is drawn through game dyadic interaction between player and celebrity digital representation that construct player to play as celebrity in an inevitable virtual

fame. Chess and Maddox's study has relation to this study in uncovering blurry barrier between reality and game by examining the way particular social practice is infused as game practice. It could be proven as it implies that the embodiment of celebrity labor in a game could give enjoyment for player to walk on virtual unprofitable fame although they see themselves as Kim Kardashian's back.

Differing from Chess and Maddox's study which uses the concept of looking-glass celebrity and other previous related studies, my study uses Michel Foucault's concept of *Docile Body* that derives from the science field of post-structuralism and has been discussed in his influenced book *Discipline and Punish* (1975). Since it is commonly viewed as most useful to analyze the role of the body in articulating social practice through discourse, Foucault's concept of *Docile Body* is adopted to dismantle the manifestation of aesthetic and glamour labors in a role-playing mobile game Kim Kardashian : Hollywood by exploring multiple in-game written and visual discourses (that indicates the issue) based on four stages (power, system, surveillance, and normalization). The theory of Docile Body is also taken into consideration because it provides systematic tool to examine the way body is conducted to do any activities that requires constant 'Docility' such as *labors*, and that can also dismantle the way the manifestation of in-game aesthetic and glamour labors engage players to the game.

Furthermore, Jean Baudrillard's concept of *Hyper-reality* is further independently taken a part to illuminates the engagement of in-game aesthetic and glamour labors from player's point of view (in form of game experiences that they shared in Facebook public groups) – amplifying the revealed in-game engagement



from preceded analysis with *Docile Body*. Through the concept of Hyperreality, Baudrillard also leaves traces on game study by accumulating thought concerning people's passions for games and gamers' experimental role that performed in people's culture (Coulter, 2007, p.3). In other words, critics to Baudrillard's conceptual work in game studies relies on his simulation concept, which is considered as a cultural phenomenon, not a computational one that rests a specific form (Crogan, 2007, p.406). A researcher such as Aarseth (2004) argues that one cannot think about simulational cultural phenomena "in general" without thinking about the rise of computer-based simulation techniques from the Cold War onward (Crogan, 2007, 407). It is due to the simulation flow is led by "computational" culture into everyday life (p. 408).

Therefore in chapter 2, this study accumulates insights about video game culture to understand the general and basic techniques in creating the simulation of real social world in a form of "computational" object (such mobile game KK: H). With the knowledge about video game culture, this study could be more comprehensible especially in understanding the way social practice and game practice intertwine to one another.

## **1.2 Research Question of the Study**

Based on the background study and issue, this research tries to answer these following questions:

1. How Kim Kardashian's aesthetic and glamour labors are manifested in the game '*Kim Kardashian : Hollywood?*'

2. How does the manifestation of Kim Kardashian's aesthetic and glamour labors engage the players to the role-playing game 'Kim Kardashian : Hollywood'?

### **1.3 Scope of the study**

This study focuses on examining the existence of aesthetic and glamour labors in role-playing game '*Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*' through the in-game visual features such as wardrobes, in-game dialogue box and text box, in-game promotional tags, and events. These elements have become the devices that motivate player to customizing their game character's body and fashion style which share the values of aesthetic and glamour labors.

### **1.4 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate:

1. The manifestation concept of Kim Kardashian's aesthetic and glamour labors in her role-playing game 'Kim Kardashian : Hollywood'.
2. The way of the manifestation of Kim Kardashian's aesthetic and glamour labors engage the players to role-playing game 'Kim Kardashian: Hollywood'.

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This study is expected to be helpful as the reference for celebrity game study through cultural study perspective. The result of this study is aimed to enrich the academic input on casual game study that has relation to particular social issues outside the virtual game world. By connecting game play to social issues in reality, this study is also expected to represents such examination with objective to prove that playing could also be the material to be studied or lesson to be learnt from. Through this study, the readers who interest in investigating game culture as the manifestation of social culture of physical world is hopefully assisted.

