CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

With the rise of internet, especially social media and supported by the recent telecommunication technology, internet celebrity has become an engaging phenomenon in today's digital era. Internet celebrities are usually marked with their high visibility on the internet. Holmes (2005, pp.104-105) considered that high visibility appears when people have received large amounts of attention, yet it must be still beamed by the media to become the popular and famous internet personalities. In addition, Abidin (2018, pp.15-16) also viewed internet celebrities as people who 'attain prominence and popularity to the internet', and she has set a barometer for internet celebrities' success when they are received, watched, and acknowledged by the audiences. Furthermore, Abidin (2018, p.14) has argued that even though internet celebrity is emerged into several different forms, such as Instagrammers, YouTubers, bloggers, and Tweeters, traditional celebrities can also become internet celebrities as long as the intended audiences have known their visibility.

For traditional celebrities who has gotten their fame through traditional media beforehand, e.g television or newspapers, the transition from being traditional celebrities into internet celebrities is regularly done because they need to maintain follower interest and to expand a wider scope of the audiences (Abidin, 2018, p.17-18). In alignment with internet celebrity phenomena, traditional celebrities

who have gained their fame more through being an internet celebrity are the worldwide famous stars, Kim Kardashian and Kylie Jenner.

Kim Kardashian and Kylie Jenner, half-sisters from The Kardashians family, are reportedly by Cosmopolitan Magazine (2018) becoming the world's controversial individuals yet they are also under the list of the most influential figures in millennial era. Kim, who is also referred as the Marilyn Monroe of our generation, has been named as a winner for the *CFDA's Influencer Award 2018* and Kylie has been included as the most influential celebrity in *Lyst's 2018 Year in Fashion Report* (The Council of Fashion Designers of America, 2018; Lyst, 2018). They also had over 287 million followers on Instagram as per August 2019, with 145 million of Kim Kardashian's followers and 142 million of Kylie Jenner's followers (Instagram, 2019).

Starting their career as the reality television stars, Kim and Kylie's fame was beamed when they were getting their multiple cosmetic surgeries for their lips, breasts, buttocks, hips, and thighs. Kylie has admitted its truth of her cosmetic treatments on the Season 10, 9th episode of *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*. Celebrity dermatologist Dr. Tabasum Mir and plastic surgeon Dr. Andrea Giannitrapani, according to Dailymail (2015) and Elle Magazine (2018), have given their professional opinion that Kim and Kylie have undergone numerous surgeries to their faces and bodies. Because of these surgical helps, Kim and Kylie were getting people's attention through online hate as well as body positive support, and their names were instantly dispersed and flooded to the media. Kim and Kylie continue to maintain the opportunity handed to them – as the famous,

influential individuals, by taking another occupation as businesswomen besides being reality television stars; they have built their successful business ventures in clothing, cosmetics, perfume, and app brands. They have been shifting their role to a wider platform, social media, since it has been reported by US Weekly (2017) that their valuable money-maker comes from social media posts for promoting products they endorse, in which Kim earns up to $500.000 a post and Kylie is paid up to $400.000 a post.

Driven by the depiction of Kim and Kylie's success, the audiences begin to enter the phase where they wish to become as success as the portrayal of the successful internet celebrities. Depicted as the role models, the celebrities will 'behaviourally dictate and domesticate' their audiences by bringing out the depiction of idealized appearances and body images (Juntiwasarakij, 2018, p.5). Kim and Kylie, as public figures who have more power in guiding the viewers' perceptions toward them, will manage to normalize their identity, including the body and sexuality, and social practices shown off on the social media as being 'more accessible, common, and traditional', so the target audiences will feel as if they have gained emotional attachment with those internet celebrities (Abidin, 2018, p.8; Milner, 2010, p.387). The process of normalizing internet celebrities' identity into gaining emotional attachment from the audiences went through the concept of media equation by Reeves and Nass (1996, p.28), as they argued that social response automatically emerges when it is related to human characteristics, e.g. human appearance on the screen, and the audiences respond to the communication media as if it is real social actors. When emotional attachment has

come with the trust from the audiences, they will later be struggling for being liked or shared in the connected society through sharing their intimate personal information on social media (Juntiwasarakij, 2018, p.1; Milner, 2010, p.383).

Moreover, the process leads to the concept of self-representation (Goffman, 1959, p.3; Hogan, 2010, pp.377-386; Rettberg, 2017, p.3; Hall, 1997, pp.17-19). Self-representation deals with a situation where people can employ themselves through language systems, e.g. writing, speech, or images – through photo sharing on social media, to control others' impression and to express the scenario-based ideal self by reflecting the condition of which the standardization prevails in the society (Cartwright and Sturken, 2001, p.13; Van Dijck J, 2013, p.200; Rettberg, 2017, p.3).

However, the act of expressing the self in social media through photos – especially on Instagram, does not always successful for making themselves socially visible. Hall and du Gay (1996, p.6) argued that their identities will always be based on how they represent their presence in the society and how they are put in the society. Some women chose to engage with the audiences and represent themselves by showing more sexually appealing images or showing off their bodies because it is believed in giving a sense of empowerment for women through being appreciated and admired sexually (Liss et al., 2010, p.65). Therefore, women who believe that exposing sexually appealing images would empower them are now using their bodies and sexuality as their most effective power to indirectly control the society (Foucault, 1978, p.147; Foucault, 1995, p.185). Nevertheless, these women actually do not fully recognize the

functionality of their bodies and sexuality since social media now puts more emphasis in utilizing its power to urge this kind of women to become sexy (Tolman, 2002, p.7). Social media seems to only have its focus on women's physical appearance and sexual appeal (American Psychological Association [APA], 2007).

In controlling the society through the medium of the body and sexuality, the process of normalizing the body and sexuality occurs since they both have become the powerful platforms to experience the world and to express the existence of the self in society (Ryan, 2012, pp.16-19). According to Foucault, the process of normalizing the body and sexuality went through the process of disciplining the corporeal body or material body; the body is monitored through what Foucault called as disciplinary power (Foucault, 1977, p.8). The corporeal body will be under the norms and rules of the society which seek to regularize (Foucault, 1977, p.8). These norms and rules urge the body to become docile (docile body), as if the body belongs to the system of prison or is called the concept of *panopticon* adopted by Foucault (Foucault, 1977, p.8). Panopticon concept plays its role as a constant observation and control to the body, so the body will always be under constant surveillance until the body becomes docile (docile body).

On the other hand, revealing the bodies or showing sexual attractiveness through images as a result of body surveillance can also be addressed as sexual exploitation in which women are used as sexual properties to become the audiences' consumption and to deliver sensual pleasure to the audiences (Sarkar,

2014, p.48; Rudman and Hagiwara, 1992, p.87). This process will lead to a concept named sexualization, and sexualization happens where women are intentionally showcasing their body and sexuality (e.g. showing off women's sexually attractive images and sexual appeal) to the public (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016, p.6; Souza, 2016, p.9). Some of these women have believed that wearing revealing clothing will boost up their confidence as well as is considered successful in taking control of their body and sexuality (Baumgardner & Richards, 2004).

However, projecting women image and body could also dehumanize women if they are functioned only to be looked at and evaluated by the audiences since their representation on the images is becoming more important rather than their value as a person (Sarkar, 2014, p.55), and this also reconfirms the process to the concept of self-objectification (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997, p.5). The audiences will see these women as sexual objects because of their sexual appeal, and when at the same time it creates pleasure to the audiences, it is when they become objectified (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997, pp.3-5). When the audiences only focus to the sexual attractiveness on images, it is where women's body parts and sexual functions are separated over its entire functionality and value as a person (Ward et al., 2017, p.3; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, p.3).

When the popularity of these women is already proven by the broader scope of people, they will later also be turned into a marketing mechanism. Abidin (2018, p.8) argued that the boundaries between daily contents (daily Instagram posts) and commercial messages (sponsored Instagram posts) will be blurred.

However, some women are now competing to normalize their bodies and sexuality since there is an opportunity which offers them an exchange of some personal profits (Foucault, 1977, p.8; Marx, 1978). Thus, they are later becoming the commodities in economic and social use (Marx, 1978). In this regard, the name, persona, image, and reputation of these internet celebrities has been wrapped up, commodified, and transferred to be a particular product. At this phase, commodification appears when the body and sexuality are turning into the abstract objects that can change human's functionality to be a commodity (Marx, 1978).

In the light of Kim Kardashian and Kylie Jenner's case, Kim and Kylie do their major marketing for their businesses related to their body and sexuality through social media – Instagram. They make promotional content to be posted on their personal Instagram accounts, and they often use the strategy through creating the image of them as a celebrity model who is capable in 'bringing new trends and who can fit well with the brand' (Thomas & Johnson, 2017, p.372). Kim and Kylie are trying to normalize their identities, especially their bodies and sexuality, through their Instagram posts which are often showing revealing bodies or using sexually arousing gestures. The action of normalizing their bodies and sexuality is reflected on how they are wearing the tight, revealing fashion style as well as wearing some seductive attributes and sexually stimulating gestures. Subsequently, they link their sexually attractive images – as a result of the process of normalization, with promotional captions related to their businesses on their Instagram posts. Their high visibility on Instagram caused by these images has

also impressed the companies to have a partnership with them, perceiving Kim and Kylie's influence can enlarge the companies' market income.

Therefore, this study will deeply analyse 3 Instagram posts of Kim Kardashian (September 15th, 2018; October 10th, 2018; March 28th, 2019) and 3 Instagram posts of Kylie Jenner (July 11th, 2018; March 22nd, 2019; April 8th, 2019).

Previous research specifically investigating the process of normalizing the body and sexuality is scarce. However, several relevant studies are found. Salomon & Brown (2018, pp.14-16) investigated the seventh-grade students who actively use Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook. They found out that these students who spent more than four hours a day in using social media had greater body surveillance since they had longer time to compare themselves with the ideal body images portrayed in social media. Salomon & Brown also showed that an excess of body surveillance led to body dissatisfaction since they tend to unconsciously trap themselves in an objectifying manner.

In tune with Salomon and Brown, Kleemans et al. (2016, p.103) added that teenage girls had their body surveillance through manipulating themselves (e.g. using photo filters) on Instagram. These teenage girls considered that manipulating themselves is equal to represent their true selves or their existence in society. However, the process of manipulating themselves, at the same time, led them to have greater dissatisfaction – not only to their bodies, but also to their overall images as a person.

In accordance with Salomon & Brown and Kleemans et.al, Fox et al. (2014, pp.356-357), explored women's sexuality in the video game. He found out that

women who are often sexualizing themselves through avatar of video game had greater self-objectification. Avatar is a personalized character in video game to represent the 'image' of the user, or in other words, what kind of character that the user wants to portray in the video game (the user is later called as gamer). Self-sexualizing through the avatar of video game was done by putting on revealing clothes to its avatar – especially emphasizing some specific body parts where the users are possible to be objectified by others (read: specific areas in which these women intentionally want to become objectified, certain areas in which these women want to express their sexuality, or some areas in which these women want to show people their control towards their bodies and sexuality). A woman video gamer can later have her conversation with another gamer through a message feature. The focus of this conversation is usually on the comments toward the character's appearance in the avatar of video game. Fox et al. viewed that this activity created greater self-objectification and will potentially give negative implications to other women gamers.

Bratić & Vukovic (2016), on the other hand, offers a closer examination to the issue of women and commodification. Bratić & Vukovic (2016, pp.70-71) found out that the metaphor of "WOMAN IS A CAR" signified as if women only become the property which can be bought, owned, or sold (through advertisement). In other words, women play the role (read: women's functionality is reduced) as a commodity. Wani (2016) later investigated the commodification phenomenon of women's bodies. These women's bodies were not only becoming the property, but this process of commodification also changed the functionality

of women's bodies to become not only sexual stimulant, but also to become the docile bodies.

Furthermore, this study will discuss 3 Instagram posts of Kim Kardashian and 3 Instagram posts of Kylie Jenner through Kress & van Leeuwen social semiotics for visual texts (photos), Halliday's Systemic-Functional Linguistics for written texts (captions), Michel Foucault's *panopticism* in post-structuralism as well as Jean Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality to dismantle the process of normalization of the body and sexuality. These analyses of both visual and written texts will be integrated to show the process of normalization of the body and sexuality reflected in Kim Kardashian and Kylie Jenner's Instagram posts. Descriptive analytical method and text-based qualitative research design were used to analyse both the visual and written texts.

1.2 Research Question

- How do Kim Kardashian and Kylie Jenner's 6 Instagram posts (photos and captions) carry out the process of normalizing the body and sexuality?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The study purposes to dismantle how the languages used in Kim Kardashian and Kylie Jenner's Instagram photos and captions (visual and written languages) reveal the process of normalizing the body and sexuality.

1.4 Scope of the Study

The coverage of the study comes from 3 Instagram posts of Kim Kardashian (September 15th, 2018; October 10th, 2018; March 28th, 2019) and 3 Instagram posts of Kylie Jenner (July 11th, 2018; March 22nd, 2019; April 8th, 2019).

This study is conducted through descriptive analytical method in text-based qualitative research design, and the data of the study are employed through stratified purposive sampling technique since the study focuses on special cases which are related to the issue of normalization of the body and sexuality.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The researcher wishes that the study could be used for an additional reference related to the issue of normalization of the body and sexuality for future researchers. This study aims to give new lens to the the readers in dismantling the process of normalizing the body and sexuality in the media, especially on Instagram, so the readers could be more critical about the intended purposes of others' Instagram posts, especially influential people on Instagram.