

# SIGN CONSUMPTION AND FETISHISM BEHIND THE HYPERREALITY OF PLANT COLLECTION TRENDS DURING A PANDEMIC

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## ABSTRACT

*The research aimed to understand the process of sign consumption behind ornamental plant collection activities, fetishism towards plant aesthetics, and the hyperreality of ornamental plant collection lifestyle mediated by social media. The nurturing plants' activity initially aimed to improve the fresh air quality and create a more beautiful environment that had now shifted to showing social status due to the emerging trend during the pandemic. A qualitative approach with multimodal analysis, purposive sampling, and constructivism paradigm was implemented. Three Instagram accounts of ornamental plant collectors were analyzed and interpreted through text, images, and videos. After that, the researcher constructed the finding into themes by comparing selected Instagram accounts to ensure reliability and validity. The results show that the value of plants is now shifting into a lifestyle where they are used as objects that should be shown to others. Social media boosts this ornamental plant collection trend widespread, creating hyperreality and making collectors trapped in fetishism. Academically, this research emphasizes Instagram's role in spreading sign consumption, fetishism, hyperreality, and consumerism massively. Further research can be done by using the interview method with plant collectors to find out their direct experience. The practical implication of the research is to open the horizon of Indonesian people to avoid the trap of lifestyle trends. Another practical implication is for Financial Consultants/Advisors/Planners and Social Movement organizations to educate the public to spend money wisely and create new programs to avoid the consumerism trap even more.*

**Keywords:** sign consumption, fetishism, hyperreality, plant collection trend, social media

## INTRODUCTION

The pandemic that has occurred since March 2020 has limited people's mobility. Staying at home during this pandemic situation gives people have more free time. Therefore, most people explore new activities or hobbies at home to reduce fatigue; one of those is collecting and nurturing ornamental plants (Kompas, 2020).

The activity of nurturing plants or gardening is not something new. Plants are generally nurtured because of the benefits; for example, they produce oxygen and absorb carbon dioxide, so the air quality

is clean and fresh. In addition to these benefits, recent research has found that planting is also considered to affect individuals' health and well-being positively. More specifically, Chalmin-Pui et al. (2021) have stated that the higher frequency of gardening is correlated with health benefits. The research has also found that the main motivators of gardening for most individuals are the pleasure of nurturing plants and the feeling of satisfaction in seeing a plant grow. Gardening is also considered as a form of self-expression and identity, as well as providing calm and relaxation. Furthermore, De Bell et al. (2020) found that people who had access to a private garden felt more likely to have better

health and well-being.

The function of a plant and the planting activity seems to have shifted in Indonesia, especially during the pandemic when plants are treated as collections and showed these off through social media, especially Instagram. The trend of collecting plants which is eventually followed by many people, especially influencers and celebrities, makes the plants viral mediated by mass media. The demand for plants becomes higher, and so does the price, which becomes significantly higher. For example, the *Monstera*, which initially cost hundreds of thousands of rupiah, has now reached millions, as reported by Kompas (2020). Collectors' motive to buy these plants is no longer out of necessity but because they want to follow the new lifestyle that has emerged from this trend. Interestingly, the collected plants are not plants that look ordinary in terms of appearance. The collectors focus on ornamental plants that look aesthetic, luxurious, and rare. In fact, mainstream plants, in general, are not always perfect (they have defects, do not always grow beautifully and symmetrically), do not have to be placed in aesthetic pots, and can be placed anywhere according to the sunlight's needs. However, the collectors focus on uploading the plant's content that looks harmonious and beautiful, which makes the perception of plants no longer natural on Instagram. Plants that are considered good are plants that are beautiful, unique, and expensive. Not only that, but these ornamental plants also need to be placed in elegant pots. Having own garden is also considered ideal for placing these plants. This influences followers and potential collectors to do the same and desire to collect and buy many variants of ornamental plants shown on Instagram.

This phenomenon indicates three indications: consumption of signs, hyperreality, and fetishism that occur in ornamental plant collectors' activities through social media during the pandemic. Sign consumption basically occurs when a person no longer uses or consumes an object because of its function or utility but more on the symbols or other meanings contained in the object. Previous studies have shown that sign consumption can occur in many contexts. Paraskevaidis and Weidenfeld's (2019) research on the Titanic Belfast museum in Northern Ireland (inspired by the story of the Titanic) has shown that Titanic Belfast is a marker of the Titanic Saga. The sign value is used to promote tourist attractions, so sign consumption occurs when visitors perceive their experience can add prestige to their identity or social status. Another research by Craciunescu (2020) has explored drug consumption from a cultural perspective and within the context of consumer culture. The results show that through a branding process and with the help of media representations, crypto market vendors have succeeded in attaching a mark value to their products to make consumers recognize and appreciate the product.

Continuous consumption of signs that ignore the original function or the original state of an object

will eventually simulate reality, thereby shifting the object's real value, which is called hyperreality. In the era of technological developments like today, the shape of hyperreality is manifested by social media. This is revealed in the research by Damayanti and Hidayat (2019), which states that hyperreality occurs and is shaped by the existence of social media for housewives to get self-recognition through Facebook. Self-recognition occurs through uploading content that explains their daily life from both status and photos with a good quality camera so that the results look perfect from reality and expect appreciation from other Facebook users. Angeliqa and Andriani (2020) have also found that the representation of celebrities in social media gives a hyperreality effect to their followers. The representation produced by Instagram celebrities (*celebgram*) successfully communicates the hijab fashion brand. In addition, high appreciation from the followers will generate confidence to make them also become influencers for their followers, even though the stuff promoted by Instagram celebrities (*celebgram*) do not have high quality. The practice of simulation in digital media is a simulation that fulfills all levels of representation, whether it is a reflective reality, includes reality, is not related to reality, or the reality that does not exist at all.

Consumption of signs with hyperreality also occurs related to the creation of excessive relationships between humans and objects. When the object can increase a person's social status, there will be the fulfillment of satisfaction and the creation of attachment or what has usually termed fetishism, where the fetish object is considered to represent the social status of its owner. That consumer attachment with the object is generally termed as consumption fetishism. An example of fetishism is expressed in Borgerson and Schroeder (2018), which describe skin fetishism. The skin becomes a reflection of who that person is and becomes a tool for expressing and communicating the self and shaping one's identity. The obsession with white, smooth, and glowing skin encourages skin commodification which is used by marketers to communicate products that can brighten the skin. Photographic techniques used in marketing communications in changing the appearance of the skin, such as manipulation of focus, light, and texture techniques that give the impression of flawless-smooth skin, also accelerate the process of fetishism.

These explanations regarding sign consumption, hyperreality, and fetishism are some concepts from Jean Baudrillard related to the consumption society perspective. It states that objects will be consumed not as utility anymore but as a sign when they become commodities (Baudrillard, 2017a). The mechanism of the sign system makes the end of production and turns into a continuous reproduction of signs that simulate reality. The growth society is engaged in someone's life has no direct reference to empirical reality. Modern capitalism saturates the world with a compilation of signs that are not authentically meaningful, a pure simulation that produces hyperreality. Pure

simulation occurs as the result of the constant creation of representations. However, simulation is more than just a representation because the sign created is disconnected from the mental construction of what is being signified. The meaning of the mental construction of a sign is present because of its relation to other signs, not to its reference to reality because reality itself no longer exists (Baudrillard, 2017b). For example, the meaning of the brand Adidas is now shaped by the existence of other brands such as Nike, New Balance, Converse, and so on.

In addition, Baudrillard (2017b) has combined and developed Freud's and Marx's ideas about the relationship between the individual and the object. Needs are the product of the circulation of signs and objects at the ideological level, not the economic level. This can explain a way to understand how fetishism works as an object in everyday life. Dant (1996) has explained that fetishism occurs when there is excessive attachment to the object. Baudrillard considers that fetishism is a social value, and the object of the fetish is considered to represent the social status of its owner. Here the fetish is no longer an unreal object, but it is believed to have a property that it does not actually have, as a means of intermediary social values through material culture. Fetishism can happen towards various objects that fit the consumer aspirations, such as clothes, jewelry, photos, accessories, or even materials from nature. Fetish is originally a product (commodity integrated with the economic system) with abstractions: a person's soul or experience, ideas of performance, protection or family values, important memories, and others (Guelmami, 2019).

Changes in the concept and logic of public consumption occur because of globalization which makes urban communities more "uniform". This uniformity is caused by the influence of the media, and the media play a role in spreading every symbol of life. In terms of consumption, a person thinks that their consumption is unique compared to others, but in fact, the person is the same as everyone else in the social group. This is what Baudrillard calls the concept of demand deconstruction. People do not have to buy, but the code or tag tells that it must be bought. A person's own needs are determined by the code so that the reality that is carried out seems artificial (Baudrillard, 2017a).

From Baudrillard's perspective, the relationship between sign consumption, hyperreality, and fetishism that occurs through social media is clearly seen toward inanimate objects or products. However, the research related to the phenomenon of ornamental plant collection, which are objects of living things that require maintenance, is still limited. This phenomenon is also suddenly viral during a pandemic in Indonesia, which may only occur during a certain period among people who previously do not have an interest in plants. This will be a part of the novelty of this research. Therefore, the research problem is to gain a richer understanding and provide additional cases in exploring the spread of a new lifestyle in Indonesia,

ornamental plant collection activities through social media. The purpose of the research is to see the process of sign consumption for collecting plants, the shape of fetishes on aesthetic plants, as well as the hyperreality that is shaped related to the lifestyle of taking care of ornamental plants through social media.

## METHODS

The research focuses on a multimodal analysis research strategy using a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is useful for understanding the meaning of social problems (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The procedures of multimodal analysis are started by determining the area of interest that focuses on understanding a new consumerism pattern through social media.

The second step is the initial research question and objective development. Based on observation trends in social media, the research aims to understand the ornamental plant trends during the pandemic. Using the constructivism paradigm, the research aims to describe how ornamental plant trends produce sign consumption, fetishism, and hyperreality in ornamental plant collectors. The research also aims to reveal the communicative actions taken by ornamental plant collectors and the importance of social interaction through social media platforms in creating sign consumption, fetishism, and hyperreality.

The next step is to determine the social media platform. Instagram is chosen because it is the main platform to communicate people's daily activities and spread a new lifestyle. The content on Instagram conveys symbolic and literal messages that are interesting to investigate further. The secondary data is supporting data from media platforms (news sites) related to the phenomenon of collecting ornamental plants during the pandemic, as well as previous research articles and literature.

The object analysis is later determined in a purposive way to understand the problems and research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The selection of Instagram accounts is chosen based on relevance to the research objectives to describe the phenomenon of ornamental plant collectors. At the beginning of the research, seven Instagram accounts were used during the observation phase to capture and understand the whole phenomenon. After that, the number of Instagram accounts was filtered and narrowed down to three, which were considered the most representative of the phenomena of sign consumption, hyperreality, and fetishism on social media. Those accounts actively uploaded the viral ornamental plant content during the pandemic, having many followers, and interacting with them regarding ornamental plant content.

The three Instagram accounts are two women: @yukianggia, @morisaarizona, and one man: @anjasmara. These three account owners have different professions with different levels of popularity. @morisaarizona is a general practitioner who is also a

socialite and is a good friend of Titi Kamal (one of Indonesia celebrities), but she is not a celebrity and has no verified account because her followers only reach 8.557 (the least among the other two accounts). Meanwhile, @yukianggia is a travel blogger with 33,2k followers and a verified account. The last one is @anjasmara, an actor and yoga instructor with 1,3 billion followers (the most among the other two accounts). This criteria selection shows that the trend of collecting ornamental plants occurs not only in women but also in men. Another purpose is to show that the consumption of signs, the fetishism behind hyperreality through social media, happens as a phenomenon on Instagram accounts with different levels of popularity. The research doesn't not ask for the consent of those three Instagram account owners to be observed. This is because their account is open and can be accessed freely by anyone (not in private mode), so the content is considered public consumption.

The primary data were collected during the pandemic (April 2020-May 2021) because the trend of ornamental plants began to rise and go viral during the pandemic. After setting the time boundary, the visual images, design elements, and textual elements are categorized to cover all multimodal analysis strategies formed by linguistic and visual modals. Speech is combined with other aspects (non-linguistics) and contextual features to create multimodal communicative actions (Leeuwen, 2005). The research uses some elements in conducting a multimodal analysis: linguistics (vocabulary, generic structure, spoken and written grammar), visual (colors, vectors, static and moving images), audio (aspects such as volume, tone, music rhythm, sound effects), gesture (movement, speed, facial expressions, and body language), spatial (aspects of proximity, direction, position, layout, and arrangement of objects in space). All the elements have analyzed through IG Feed and Stories include captions, hashtags, comments, interactions between the account owners and followers, content themes (the content history starting from before the pandemic to the pandemic period, objects or people who become the object of the photo).

The main unit of analysis of the research is 84 IG feeds and 136 IG stories with the following details: @morisaarizona (34 feeds, 85 stories), @yukianggia (30 feeds, 51 stories), @anjasmara (20 feeds). The meaning of each unit is later analyzed to see the different meanings that appear in each message within social interaction and how these meanings give an impact on the followers of their social media accounts.

The result of the unit analysis that has been observed is then collected and divided into three themes (sign consumption, hyperreality, fetishism) and further divided into several sub-themes. Some photos, videos, captions, and hashtags can fit into more than one theme if they are relevant to multiple themes. Theoretical memos are recorded to stay on track that could potentially match the pattern or theme when categorizing it. When categorizing the unit, the whole

checking across the feed and stories in one account are also made to ensure reliability. The comparison between selected Instagram accounts is also made to ensure validity, expand the conceptualization, and maintain the authenticity and trustworthiness of the qualitative research.

In the final stage, the theme is linked with concept literature and previous research to draw the result and discussion that are considered from the analysis results that have emerged. Data are organized in such a way that it is possible to draw conclusions and make implications visible to a broader audience. The important things considered are how to make meaning from multimodal texts, how to choose what to see, and how the ideological basis moves towards a valid interpretation. Legitimate analyzes in multimodal research cannot be drawn from a neutral position but a shared interpretation of a self-reflexive position (Low & Pandya, 2019).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Sign consumption, hyperreality, and fetishism in the trend of ornamental plants are interrelated, mediated by social media on the Instagram account. A single photo can even reveal more than one category and theme.

The sign consumption is observed through some themes. The first theme is that the collector is not a plant enthusiast before the pandemic. The three ornamental plant collectors are individuals who actively show off their activities and hobbies on their Instagram account pages, but there has never been any plant content before the pandemic since the first upload until before the pandemic. Based on observations, @yukianggia shows a lot of travel content, both domestic and abroad; @morisaarizona contains activities with socialite friends and family; @anjasmara contains yoga, meditation, and family activities. This shows that they were not the plant enthusiasts before the pandemic. It is unlikely that content about plants will be missed in their content if they were plant enthusiasts before the pandemic. They are seen spending more time at home and doing new routine activities, which is collecting ornamental plants during a pandemic. They started uploading the first content of plants during the pandemic. The period of uploading the first plant's content varies from April to September 2020.

Yuki uploaded her first ornamental plant on April 22, 2020 (Figure 1), during the Earth Day moment. She displayed a photo of herself lifting a large Monstera plant in front of his house. She then wrote a caption that plants were one of the stress relievers she felt during the pandemic. She tried to calm herself by doing the planting process. It indicated that Yuki was not a plant enthusiast from the following sentence, "So I try to calm myself down when planting and scrape the ground (although I still scream and scream every time I meet worms!)." Meanwhile, Morisa uploaded

the plant content for the first time on June 30, 2020. In some of the first content uploads related to the plants, it appeared that the size of the plants was already enormous. This indicated that she did not grow her plant at that time but bought the lush plants. This indication is supported by the fact that she often writes captions about plants that end with the words “adopted by (name of other fellow plant lover)”. Anjasmara also just uploaded his first plant content on November 10, 2020, which was a gift from one of the ornamental plant account users. Anjasmara wrote the caption “to follow the trends” in December 2020. This also indicated that he was not a plant enthusiast before the pandemic. The lifestyle of ornamental plant collection happened suddenly and followed the trend that was viral in the mass media. They consume a sign of the ornamental plant trend that is currently hype.



Figure 1 Yuki Uploads the Plant Photos for the First Time (Source: @yukianggia)

The second theme of sign consumption is that the collector only collects the expensive, aesthetic, rare, and viral plants. “There is no poverty impression in this photo” is one type of follower comment on the plant’s content on the @yukianggia Instagram account. Yuki replies that the traveling budget that should have been spent during the pandemic is used to buy plants like Monstera. This indicates that the plant collection owned by Yuki is expensive. Yuki also uploads a story indicating that her collection will be more expensive, as expressed in this caption, “Love it even more, and the price is also becoming more expensive.” Indications of expensive ornamental plants can also be seen from the variety of Variegata plant species uploaded by @morisaarizona. This type of plant is known as beautiful, unique, expensive, and rare because it has different color combinations across plants. This indication is also supported by one of Anjasmara’s captions, “These kinds of plants like this used to be at Grandpa’s house in Bandung and were thrown away because they were too big. But why is it now becoming an expensive plant?” This confirms the sign-value behind the collection of these ornamental plants. It can be seen in Figure 2.



Figure 2 Expensive, Unique, Aesthetic, and Rare Types of Plants (Source: @morisaarizona, @anjasmara, @yukianggia)

The third theme of sign consumption is that the plants represent the upper socioeconomic class status and emphasize differentiation. Consumerism encourages upper-class society to assert their status through the ownership of objects. This can also be seen from the collection of ornamental plants as well as expensive accessories such as pots, garden tools, plant sprinklers, and even the clothes they wear when posed with the plants. Figure 3 shows that outfits, make-up, plants, garden accessories, and garden tools emphasize social status.



Figure 3 The Outfits, Make-up, Plants, Garden Accessories, and Garden Tools (Source: @morisaarizona, @anjasmara)

The other category observed is hyperreality. The first theme in hyperreality in the plant collection trend is the important factor of visual appeal. The followers love the visual beauty and may decide to hit the follow button because of it. Therefore, Instagram user also generally tries to maintain the visual beauty on their account page. The similarities between Yuki and Morisa are that they maintain a cohesive visual theme and color tones. The photo sessions are always conceptual and harmonious between the plant, background, and furniture. They also carry out the editing process to improve the Instagram feed appearance.

Morisa is also consistent with a certain pose, which is tilting the pot towards the camera so that the plant’s leaves look big. The shape and motif of her plant pot also look unique and cute. Meanwhile, Anjasmara’s content is slightly different, he does not put too much emphasis on visual techniques, but he uses his body to attract followers’ attention when posing with plants, thereby causing increased admiration for the content. The high visual appeal in the rise of consumerism culture supports the occurrence of hyperreality when they put a lot of emphasis on aesthetics, leading to

excessive behavior when displaying their ownership and experiences. All of these can be seen in Figure 4.

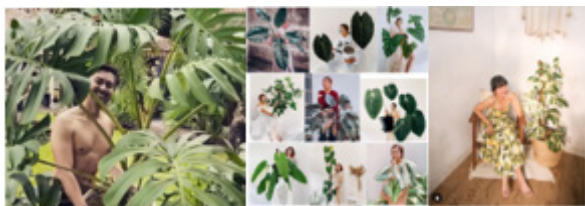


Figure 4 Ornamental Plant Collectors Pose to Attract Attention

(Source: @anjasmara, @morisaarizona, @yukianggia)

Basically, people upload content on Instagram to get the attention of other users. The more praise from followers, the more often it will be uploaded. This can be seen from the many praises received by Yuki, Morisa, and Anjasmara when they upload beautiful photos, including when they upload content with plants in both Instagram Stories and Feeds, which show their home garden, plant beauty, and the growth process of each plant collection.

The attractiveness of their Instagram account is not only on the specific plant: beautiful, unique, and flawless plants are also supported by cute accessories such as pots, garden backgrounds, or furniture. They also maintain the attractiveness of their clothes, make-up, beauty, body, accessories, and attractive poses. They will get more likes and comments when they post the plant with attractive poses and cute clothes. Figure 5 shows the posing as if in a “fairy tale” by wearing a beautiful dress and posing with plants or in the middle of the garden to attract other Instagram users.

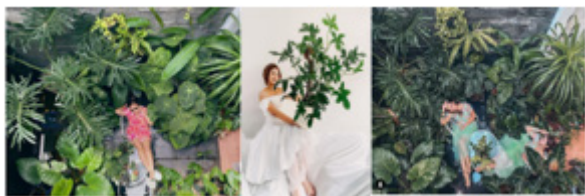


Figure 5 The Example of Posing to Attract other Instagram Users

(Source: @morisaarizona)

The second theme of hyperreality in the plant collection trend is that the collectors consider themselves as true collector of ornamental plants and get recognition from others. Hyperreality also occurs when the collectors put hashtags and captions that personalize their persona and show different types of plants in each content so that they are perceived as plant enthusiasts and get acknowledgment from others which encourages the collectors to upload more content.

In the early days of uploading content about plants, Yuki has inserted hashtags that seem to show

that she is a big fan of plants, such as #crazyplantlady, #crazyplantrichasian, and #PetaniMonvar. This is also supported by one of her captions, “Ignore my legs that are like farmers, I squatted and scratched the ground.” This indicates that Yuki is trying to give the impression that she is very involved in this planting activity. Although the word ‘farmer’ sounds exaggerated for the activity she just started.

This can also be seen from the hashtag #PlantMama in Morisa’s content. She also repeatedly mentions ‘my jungle’ for her mini garden, or ‘my new boyfriend Alocasia Bisma’ and ‘My pretty big baby’, which seems to show her deep love for her plants. In addition, Morisa’s consistency in displaying ornamental plants makes her friends give her various unique nicknames in the comments column, such as Ornamental Plant Ambassador 2020, Miss Horticulture, Goddess of Earth, Plantastic Plant Lady, Diva Daon Daon, 2020 Plant Ambassador, The Philodendron Goddess, Miss Flora 2021, Miss Foliage 2022, Queen of Aroid, Miss Daun 2020, Miss Plantation Couture Ohlala Amazing Taratekdung 2020. Likewise, Anjasmara repeatedly personifies his plants as boyfriends or children. He also makes captions such as: “Am I looking like a gardener?” to show that he is a true planter (Figure 6).

When people start trying new activities or hobbies, they will have a high enthusiasm to explore these new hobbies. This sometimes creates a feeling that they are an expert on these matters, so sometimes it seems exaggerated and encourages the occurrence of hyperreality.



Figure 6 Personifying Plants and Accentuating the Planter Persona

(Source: @anjasmara)

The fetishism also happens in the ornamental plant collection trend. One of the themes is that the collectors get addicted to the hype of ornamental

plants collection and influence others to do the same thing. Yuki's interest in plants cannot be separated from the influence of other people's Instagram users, which makes her decide to collect plants. Yuki's plant content also finally influences other people to also do the same activity. The addiction to trends like this works like a never-ending circle. Yuki looks very interested in hunting and buying currently viral plants, as expressed in her caption, "Here, there is a new plant on the shelves, the pink stripe a.k.a Philodendron Pink Princess. I finally got it after last year being influenced by Philo Pink Congo, which was also viral in Indonesia." This is also supported by her statement, "I have a new Monstera every Monday", "This is the third one, I'm crazy like an addict," when she replies in the comment column. The fetishism towards plants is also seen in Morisa's account, which uploads many plant variants. She always gives hashtags and captions for each of her plant names. Those indicate that there is fetishism towards the Monstera plant species.

Yuki's plant content that looks beautiful makes her followers give a lot of praise to her beautiful plant collection in the comments column, especially if she manages to find a rare plant that will increase the admiration of her friends, community, and also her followers. Not only that, the content is even able to influence followers to be obsessed with having

the same type of plants uploaded by Yuki. This can be seen from the comments from Yuki's followers, "The pink princesses are so beautiful, it will be my next target" or "my goal is to collect Monstera as well, feel addicted to Monstera & Philo." Also, comments from Morisa's followers are: "Leaf goals," or "Masha Allah #philogoals, it's really cool." "This is soooooo cute, I want to have it". The 'pass the plants challenge' content also encourages other people to do the same activity so that they can feel the same hype.

The spread of fetishism will be easily done through Instagram. It does not only occur due to the beautiful visual content and interaction with followers but also because Instagrammers use hashtags to make their content easier to find by other plant enthusiasts. This can be seen by the efforts that Morisa put in place by inserting a hashtag for each plant. Other hashtags that are always consistently inserted by Morisa are #plantsofinstagram, which turned out to have generated 10.674.716 posts, and #plantsmakepeoplehappy, which generated 7.607.916 posts as of May 28, 2021, at 21:58 from all Instagram users around the world. Figure 7 shows the captions and comments that indicate the addiction towards plants and influence others to feel the same addiction.

The second theme of fetishism is that the addiction to plants encourages excessive effort to create



Figure 7 Captions and Comments on Instagram about Addiction to Plants (Source: @yukianggia, @morisaarizona)

content about plants on Instagram. Consumerism is increasingly spreading through digital media, which makes other people feel addicted and creates plant fetishism. Every time Yuki and Morisa upload the plant content, the followers are happier because the plants look beautiful and amazing. Yuki and Morisa are willing to spend great effort getting attractive photos to get more likes and positive comments.

As can be seen from Yuki's content, she often mixes and matches the colors of clothes and furniture around the house with the plants to look harmonious and beautiful (Figure 9). Not only that, Yuki mentions that she has to move the plants from one of her gardens on the top floor of her house to her terrace to take some pictures and share them on her Instagram feed. Yuki is willing to pose from various angles and share many photos in one upload. Yuki also joins the plant lover community, namely Geng Ijo. They create the "pass the plant challenge" content (inspired by the "pass the brush challenge" content). Yuki and her Geng Ijo community also make a short video containing humorous satire about the types of plant sellers, which are divided into Part 1 and Part 2. This also caused many responses from followers.

Likewise, Morisa always makes sure that her clothes are fashionable and cool. She also does not hesitate to wear dresses or even semi-kebayas (Indonesian women's traditional costumes) when posing with plants for the sake of aesthetics. She is also willing to lift a heavy pot and tilt it whenever she poses (Figure 8). She even sometimes does tiptoe to get the best pose.



Figure 8 Pose Lifting a Heavy Pot  
(Source: @morisaarizona, @anjasmara)

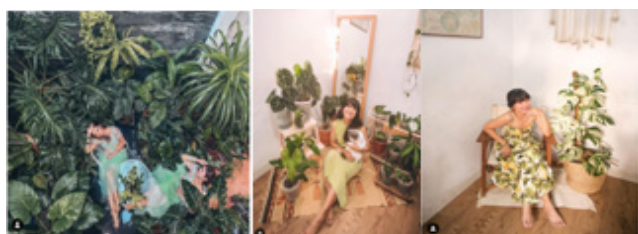


Figure 9. Wearing a Dress in the Middle of the Garden, Having a Special Location for a Photo Session, and Trying to Match the Color of the Clothes with the Plants  
(source: @morisaarizona, @yukianggia)

Morisa's effort does not stop there. She even uploads Instagram stories and collects votes from her followers about what plants they want to see in the

next content with the following caption, "This time, it's really fun to use votes for this Friday's content, thank you for those who have join 🙏, ok here it is.. my Philodendron Gladhands for #philodendronfriday up to 10 leaves now! adopted from @debb369."

Even more surprising is when Morisa also uploads the Behind The Scene (BTS) photo session with the plant in her Instagram stories. The BTS content is also finally awaited by her followers, who several times ask the BTS when Morisa takes a photo with a complicated pose. Another thing that is also interesting is when Morisa uploads a photo with full make-up, but she writes a caption jokingly, "Happy Sunday! I just want to garden at home." It is pretty obvious that the real purpose is just to 'show off' and take selfies. The high effort from Yuki and Morisa is a sign of consumption and becomes their attempt to show their existence. It seems that visual content is the most important thing in this digital age. All these complexities will pay off when Instagram users receive a lot of praise from followers who are not only from Indonesia but also Instagram users from other countries.

The practice of ornamental plant collection is one of the postmodern consumerism forms. This consumption is no longer related to the literal meaning of consumption. It leads to the consumption of symbols or signs. Plants have never been so popular before the pandemic and are showcased on social media. Mass media has an important role in the consumption pattern changes (such as planting) into a media spectacle. In today's postmodern era, the convenience of having a personal camera makes it easier for people to take pictures and post them on their social media accounts. Those visual simulations have been separated from the various meanings of reality (Raad, 2021). The picture is a collection of symbolic metalanguage on certain objects in social and cultural communication; therefore, the picture is becoming even more important (Hu & Mei, 2021).

Ideology is embedded in an image in which it is forced upon us, often subliminally, through representation. Therefore, people are compelled to consume or use something because it is satisfying. Consumerism gives people a sense of satisfaction because they get validation from other people (Murray, 2020). Through the lens of consumerism, then the 'likes' system on Instagram is a validation and perhaps more of a positive assessment of physical appearance or lifestyle. The 'likes' button here is incarnated as an acknowledgment and agreement that someone has acted appropriately, has been well assimilated, and has taken proper consumption (Murray, 2020).

The desire to own an item and consumption is stimulated by popular culture. In addition, ownership of an item can provide value and social status (Kuldova, 2019). Hence, it is not surprising that ornamental plant collectors like to show off their plants to other people, including the accessories such as their mini garden. Having a garden is a symbolic material that can be an expression of social differences, not only



for creativity. It not only symbolizes class and reflects the preferences of high social status groups but also shapes a public image related to the love of nature (Exner & Schützenberger, 2018).

Social media also creates hyperreality, affecting feelings, thoughts, and behavior and resulting in real actions and reactions. People can create content and messages that become subjective representations of reality through signs. Some of the lockdowns imposed by the pandemic have powerful multipliers of the role of social media, achieving between the real and the virtual. People pay attention to reality through words, sentiments, moods, and images. During the lockdown, social media is a fundamental aspect of social cohesion and human relations, a place where the real and the virtual suddenly overlap (Lazzini et al., 2021). Considering every content that is exchanged between users as a simulacrum, the ornamental plant content gives rise to a hyperreality that has characterized and influenced so many people.

Social media offers consumers the possibility to produce content about products, which begins to minimize the boundary between consumers/producers (Reed & Keech, 2019). Social media, which is the place for presumption (where individuals can both produce and consume), can lead to new forms of object exploitation (Roberts & Cremin, 2019), which in this case, are ornamental plants. Word sequencing, visual composition of ornamental plants, and other content creation strategies are combined to create coherence of aesthetic definition. People now have competition with each other to represent the value of each plant type through their social media platforms. This indicates that ornamental plants are classified not only by genus and species but also by their ability to showcase aesthetics and privileges through social media platforms. The ornamental plant collectors seem to be marketing the certain plant and being considered as the most expert and knowledgeable people about the plant.

The activity of the ornamental plants' collection that is currently trending is shaped from pictures of attractive ornamental plants to make plants as a simulation stimulus to buy. The research places hyperreality to highlight the importance of a phenomenon and social interaction. It emphasizes the involvement between an event and simulacra. The act of simulating has changed the authenticity (Roberts & Ponting, 2018), which in this case is a plant, since many photos of unique ornamental plants are displayed on Instagram. Simulations emerge as real and have been abstracted, designed, and technologically reproduced as fully functional. In the simulation, the real effect or reality has been extended beyond all limits. Technology has helped the simulation to reach perfection through higher pixel and higher resolution images (Pawlett, 2018).

Simulation of communication media and mass reproduction has been proven to develop in the digital era. Online communication does not work just for information or finding consensus about something.

Conversations on social media are aimed at promoting things that social media owners like or things they think will entertain their audience. Social media is software in which artificial intelligence makes people famous from the content. In today's digital age, individuals struggle online to get lots of clicks on social media against many other types of content (Morris, 2021).

All content serves to attract attention and status in the social network of users who are part of self-promotion and personalized advertising. A popular Instagram user posts pictures to present a certain lifestyle (Morris, 2021), regardless of whether they really like plants or not. The most important thing is that their followers believe that they do. Instagram users will be encouraged to post content that is proven to get many likes.

Excessive desire for the object leads to excessive consumption and becomes a fetish. The object of the desire is then filled with an imaginary substance from a symbolic order that lies outside the self (Roberts & Cremin, 2019). When the fetishism of an object or activity is exposed, public perception will be affected, although often only for a limited time (Simon, 2019). Ornamental plants exposed on Instagram during the pandemic (which may be only for a certain time and not be permanent) cause the perception of Instagram followers and users to be convinced that ornamental plants are excellent and want to adopt the same thing.

Another finding that has not been included in the result related to sign consumption, fetishism, and hyperreality is that ornamental plant collectors benefit from this activity observed by one of the collectors in this research. The first element of benefit is the popularity they get from their efforts in uploading beautiful content so that their content spreads on the Instagram 'explore' page. Another attempt at gaining popularity is by inserting relevant and attractive hashtags for plants, such as #plantsofinstagram and #plantsmakepeoplehappy. Their consistency in uploading the plant content also increases followers' growth and engagement. This then brings financial benefits because the collector receives endorsements by using plant content to promote the brand from clothing brands, plants, cellphones, toothpaste, pay TV, and mobile lightrooms. The followers are also interested in trying the products of the endorsed brand.

Popularity also makes ornamental plant collectors known as plant enthusiasts, so they have been invited and become speakers on talk shows several times. This is also most likely to happen because the plant content not only influences other people to do the same hobby but also makes them considered as one of the people who are consulted if other people want to buy plants. In addition, plant collectors utilize this new hobby as a business opportunity to sell at auction. This kind of business seems to work to earn income during the challenging situation of this pandemic period.

The phenomenon of the trend of ornamental plants, especially during the pandemic, raises further suspicions: will collectors of ornamental plants stop after the pandemic finishes? Nowadays, more and

more objects are disposable. They are highly valued but only for a short time. Humans no longer seek timelessness in an object.

The use of these objects is not only because of the objective function but also their magical function. Fetish can occur because of a positive influence that is initially felt by someone on something (Guelmami, 2019). In the context of ornamental plants collection, the fetishism towards the ornamental plants is considered able to add value to their Instagram content aesthetically, gain many followers, compliments, and enhance their self-image in public. Collectors who only share their general activities on Instagram seem to have switched to using Instagram for sizable income earning. This becomes an input for future researchers to explore this phenomenon further from the perspective of other concepts.

## CONCLUSIONS

There is a value shift of plants into symbols or signs that are consumed and mediated by social media. Nowadays, plants are perceived as other fashion trends that deserve to be shared with others, like Outfit of the Day (OOTD) through Instagram. Currently, the definition of outfit has expanded, not only clothes but also plants. In the past, plants functioned to produce oxygen and clean the air. Over time, people begin to use plants to reduce stress and balance life. During a pandemic, it turns out that the benefits of plants are shifting again into a lifestyle that makes plants an object of ownership that should be exhibited to others. Not only is the shift a function, but the price of an ornamental plant is also increasing significantly. In the past, Monstera plants were only hundreds of thousands; now, they can be worth tens to hundreds of millions due to little supply and high demand.

Social media then makes the trend of ornamental plant collection widespread among young and middle adults. Ornamental plant collectors are not only women but also men. They generally come from the upper socioeconomic class and are quite mature and financially stable. However, interestingly, the age maturity does not necessarily make these ornamental plant collectors able to control themselves if exposed to trends. They are also sometimes seen to be easily influenced by the trends, so there is a fetishism here where they feel euphoric and excessively enthusiastic about plant trends. They do not measure their needs anymore and have been conquered by irrational desires. Therefore, the high price of ornamental plants does not stop them from buying them.

In fact, all types of plants have the same benefits. There are still many affordable plants that can be purchased at roadside stalls or from farmers. However, plants on roadside stalls are usually not beautiful enough when used for selfies, especially in Instagram content. While the expensive ornamental plants can represent social-economic status. Moreover, the beautiful and unique ornamental plants will look

suitable to be paired with cool clothes and accessories. The home garden also looks more aesthetic with beautiful ornamental plants, so selfies in the home garden can seem exclusive. This creates hyperreality, so the followers no longer see the real plant. The ideal plant is a plant that is beautiful, aesthetic, unique, rare, and expensive, as in the Instagram photos and video content.

The practical implication for the Indonesian consumer from the research is to open the horizon of Indonesian people to realize that the ornamental plant collection trend shapes new consumerism and to avoid the trap of lifestyle trends. The consumption activities caused by a new lifestyle have become a common and normal thing to do. Most of the currently purchased and used objects have passed the level of need and are only fulfilled based on mere desires. People need to realize that this arises from the trap of social media that makes a person feel the need to equate his ownership and lifestyle with others. People need to be aware that those things can reduce authenticity (keep themselves away from their own authenticity), increase consumerism, reduce opportunities to invest in assets, and trapped into debt bondage. The research explores how people tend to easily imitate lifestyles by consuming viral products. The results of the research can help people not easily catch up with trends. The public is expected to be critical and not quickly lulled into excessive consumptive behavior that only favors signs or symbols of the capitalist system that can widen social and economic inequalities.

Another practical implication of the research can also be useful for Financial Consultants/Advisors/Planner Institutions to understand the new phenomenon regarding the middle-upper class consumers in Indonesia so that they can educate the individual to spend money wisely. In addition, the research can also be relevant for Non-Profit/Social Movement Organizations in creating new programs to avoid the consumerism trap even more. For example, the Minimalist Community Indonesia (which focuses on persuading the public to simplify their own stuff and only consume the goods that meet their needs, not only to satisfy their desires) can consider creating new ways to educate the upper class in the context of collecting ornamental plants.

Academically, the research emphasizes Instagram's role as a social media in spreading sign consumption, fetishism, and hyperreality massively that lead to consumerism. Another finding is that certain Instagram content will generate many benefits such as popularity, self-image, endorsement, and business opportunity can become an input for further research that can be studied using the concept of commodification.

However, this research uses a multimodal analysis only through Instagram that observes visuals (text, images, videos) and non-visuals (gestures and expressions). Therefore, the limitation is that this research does not examine the meaning or direct experience of ornamental plant collectors and their

followers to explore whether fetishism and hyperreality really occur in this ornamental plant collection phenomenon. The research also uses the Instagram platform only as the media social representative, which might not fully cover the phenomenon of sign consumption, fetishism, and hyperreality in social media.

As an academic and methodological suggestion, further research can be carried out to reduce the bias by using other data collection methods. The interview method can be done to plant collectors to find out how they interpret their ornamental plants' collection experience. Interviews not only can be conducted with the collector but also with those who may help them to nurture the plants. Interviews can also be conducted with followers who actively comment on the plant's collector content. Non-celebrity followers will support the unique finding of how the non-upper social class is exposed to hyperreality on Instagram and whether sign consumption and fetishism also occur to them. Further research can also expand the different approaches by emphasizing other types of digital platforms, such as YouTube and TikTok. Future research can also apply this framework to the different lifestyle trends in social media to strengthen the understanding of sign consumption, fetishism, and hyperreality through social media.

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