

# **Fetishism Towards The Visual Appearance Of The Character's Avatar In The Online Mobile Game Of Ragnarok: Eternal Love**

## **A Study On The Correlation Between Visual Asset Design And Mobile Game Marketing Toward Fetishism**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Advances in communication technology and the internet, video games developed into games that can not only be played by two people, but many people at once, even up to millions of people. Massive multiplayer online role-playing game or abbreviated as MMORPG is a video game that is played by many people at once and is set in a virtual world. MMORPG generally gives players the freedom to create their own avatars, ranging from race, skin color, hair color, to costumes. In Ragnarok Online Mobile: Eternal Love or usually likened to RoM: Eternal Love, players must pay a sum of virtual money to get (randomly) unique costumes to enhance their character's visual appearance. Players are willing to spend up to millions of rupiah to buy the desired costume. Commodity fetishism is now no longer limited to material objects such as luxury cars, expensive watches and branded bags, but also to virtual commodities and video games. As in the phenomenon of RoM: Eternal Love, fetishism is a virtual commodity.

Keywords: game online, fetishism, avatar, Ragnarok Online Mobile

### **INTRODUCTION**

The development of video game entertainment technology continues to grow. Video games have become an entertainment product that is popular with modern society today. The video game industry began with the introduction of the ATARI console in 1975 to the present time developing video game console products such as Playstation from Sony, XBOX from Microsoft and Wii from Nintendo.

With the development of technology and also the internet, video games not only through computers or laptops, but can be enjoyed online from anywhere and can be played using gadgets. Online games are very popular with modern society because of the multiplayer

feature that can connect between players so they can play games together and communicate with each other in the game world. And many online games that we can enjoy for free, just download it and install it on the gadget. Online games are games that can be accessed using a computer network and have developed rapidly throughout the world in recent years (Jin, 2010)

Video games continue to develop and the features in them also experience very rapid development. From the simplest for kids to complex, sophisticated video games and players can set the avatar they want. Not only that, competition between video game developers is very tight, to reach as many players as possible. How players can spend money on video games. In this research, we will examine fetishism on the visual appearance of character avatars in the Ragnarok Online Mobile: Eternal Love game. Study on the relationship between visual asset design and mobile game marketing to fetishism

### **Brief History of Video Games**

Video games have been existed since 1962. The first video game was designed by Steve Russel, Martin Graets, Wayne Wiitanen, and Alan Kotok from MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) Using MIT's super computer, Steve and his colleagues created the first video game, namely Spacewar!, Spacewar! game played by two people, where each player controls a spaceship. The player then tries to shoot the opponent's ship which is represented by white dots on the screen.

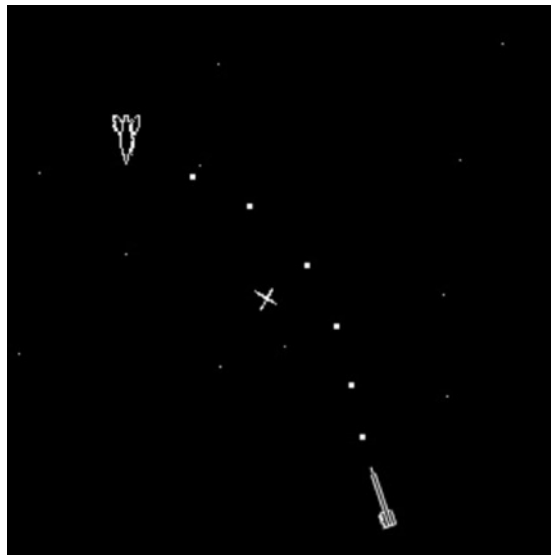


Figure 1. Spacewar!

Source: <https://wuwomedia.com/history-esports/>

Nowadays five decades have passed since Spacewar! Initially created, video games have become a major industry that continues to evolve as the technology advances. When in

the past the game can only be played on a computer at home, now the game can be played on various special game consoles such as Nintendo, Playstation, and Xbox. Even today, to play video games, players do not need special computer or console, simply by using an adequate tablet or smartphone.



Figure 2. Playing video games using a smartphone  
Source: GeekInsider.com

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research is a descriptive qualitative research that focuses on the describing a phenomenon. This research is expected to give new point of view in analyzing a discourse, especially in describing how the visual language in meme, both verbal and non-verbal, to be able to convey meaning. To make contributions in visual communication design sector, especially in active campaigns that use online media. This research can also be considered for further research, in addition, this research is also expected to be one of the guidelines for graphic designers about how messages are constructed in campaigns and the use of online media for sharing.

### Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game (MMORPG)

As communication and Internet technology advances, video games evolved into games that not only two people can play, but many people at once, ranging hundreds, to thousands, and even millions of people.

Massive multiplayer online role-playing game or abbreviated as MMORPG is a video game that is played by many people at once and it is set in a dynamic virtual world. In contrast with the traditional games like Spacewar! where the player's goal is only to destroy the opponent's spaceship, MMORPG usually has many goals, ranging from adventure, strengthening characters, collecting treasures, collecting various objects, cooking, etc. MMORPG has a unique economic system, where players can use virtual currencies that they can get in the game, either by defeating enemies or trading. In

addition, some MMORPGs now offer virtual money that can be bought by players using the real currency.

This virtual money can be spent again later on by players to buy various needs and equipment either to strengthen their characters or beautify the visual appearance of their character avatars.

### Character Avatars

Avatar is derived from the Sanskrit word Avatara which means incarnation or physical manifestation of a gods. In Hindu belief, gods and goddesses use avatars as physical manifestations if they want to communicate with humans. But as the advancement of videogames and MMORPGs, the term avatar have change in meaning.

In the traditional video game avatar is a visual icon representing and managed by the player. For example, the spacecraft in the Spacewar! game is an avatar for its players. Whereas in MMORPG Avatar is a manifestation of its players in the Virtual world. What distinguishes player avatars in traditional video games and MMORPG is the ability for players to customize their avatar. For example, in traditional video games like Spacewar! or Super Mario Bros, the player's avatar is already provided in-game, and the player only use this avatar to win the game.

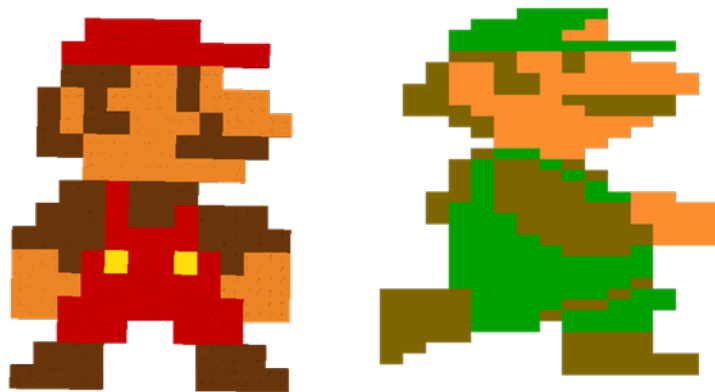


Figure 3. Avatar Selection on Super Mario Bros  
Source: dorkly.com

MMORPG generally gives the player the freedom to create their own avatar, ranging from race, skin color, hair color, to costumes. It is because the MMORPG is simultaneously played by thousands to millions of players at the same time. Therefore each player wants their physical manifestations differently from other players and represents their personality, many MMORPG players are willing to spend hours to create their own avatar.



Figure 4. Character Creation Menu on Aion MMORPG  
Source: MMORPG.com

### Ragnarok Online Mobile: Eternal Love

Ragnarok Online Mobile: Eternal Love or commonly abbreviated as RoM: Eternal Love, is an MMORPG released by South Korean game developer Gravity Co., Ltd. This MMORPG, which can be played via a smartphone, was released for the Southeast Asia region (including Indonesia) in October 2018 and nowadays become one of the top applications on the Google Play Store and Apple App Store. In RoM: Eternal Love millions of players from across South East Asia (Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Philippines, Vietnam) can play and interact together.



Figure 5. Character avatars on RoM: Eternal Love  
Source: ragnaroketernallove.com

As seen in the image above, the avatar design in RoM: Eternal Love is very simple when compared to MMORPG like Aion (Figure 4). The character avatar in RoM: Eternal Love is categorized as very minimalist because the overall appearance of the game's graphics tends to resemble two-dimensional animation with simple graphics. Therefore, the character creation menu presented by RoM: Eternal Love is not as complex as Aion where the player has a lot of freedom when creating their avatars. In RoM: Eternal Love, the player can only do the initial customization by choosing the gender, model and hair color only. Even the costumes of each player have already been determined according to the role they choose in the world of RoM: Eternal Love.



Figure 6. The character avatar creation menu on RoM: Eternal Love  
Source: ragnaroketernallove.com

In this figure 6 for example, if the player chooses to be a Knight, then the costume to be worn throughout the game is the costume as seen in the figure above. Because of the limitations on this customization menu, most likely the player's avatar will appear to be like those of other players in the game.

Therefore, the game developer gives players the freedom that enable to change their avatar costumes after they start the game. Players can use special costumes that can only be obtained through the Gashapon machine in the game.

Gashapon or commonly called gacha is a Japanese term referring to capsule machine games. On a real gashapon machine, the player inserts several coins and then turns the lever or press a button, the gashapon machine will then put out a capsule (randomly) where the capsules contain various kinds of toys.





Figure 7. Gashapon Engine  
Source: fromjapan.co.jp

The Gashapon system is then adapted into a variety of MMORPGS, one of which is RoM: Eternal Love, where players have to pay a certain amount of virtual money to get (randomly) unique costumes to beautify the visual appearance of their character.



Gambar 8. Mesin Gashapon di RoM:Eternal Love  
Sumber: GridGames.id

To play Gacha, players must pay thirty (30) in-game vouchers that can be done by completing various missions. Developer of RoM: Eternal Love provides a maximum of one type of voucher each day, therefore, to do one-time Gacha the player must collect the voucher for one month. Playing Gacha also will not guarantee that the player will get the desired costume. Sometimes the gacha machine can pull out items other than the

costume desired by the player, or even costumes from last month because each month the developer of RoM: Eternal Love brought out a new costume theme.

In order to increase the chances of obtaining the desired costume, many players are willing to spend Rupiah to buy Big Cat Coin. Big Cat Coin is one of the virtual currency in the game RoM: Eternal Love, unlike Zenny (the main currency in RoM) Big Cat Coin can only be obtained through transactions on the Google Play Store and Apple App Store or other developer partners such as Tokopedia and codashop.com. The price of a single Big Cat Coin is two thousand and five hundred rupiah and to play Gacha once, players need 30 Big Cat Coins or equivalent to seventy-five thousand rupiahs.

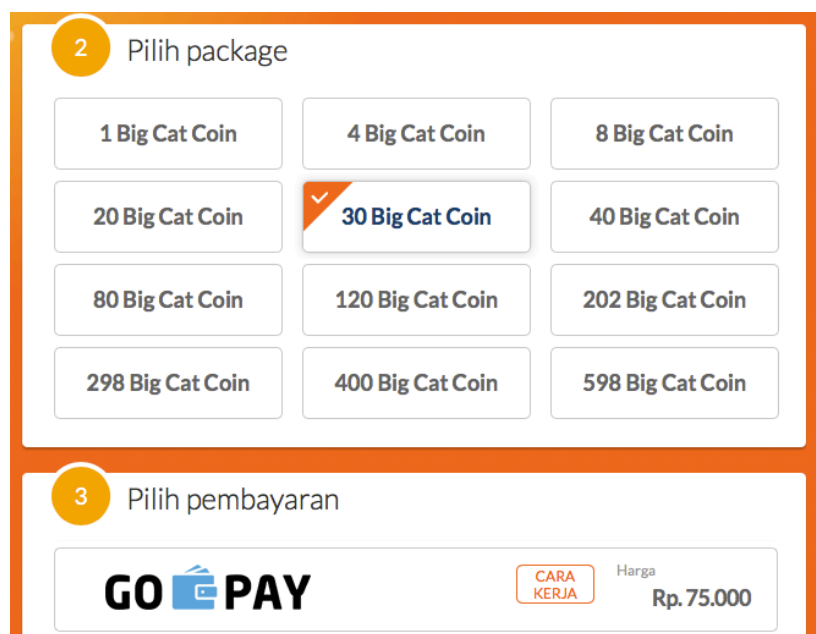


Figure 9. Big Cat Coin Shop  
Source: codashop.com

Through simple observation on official forums of RoM: Eternal Love, it can be found that players are generally willing to spend up to millions of rupiah in order to buy thousands of BCC to increase their chances of getting the desired gacha costume. The extreme case of fetishism toward character's avatar can be seen through an official auction conducted by the RoM developer in January 2019. An Indonesian player is willing to pay 360,000 BCC or seven hundred million rupiah to buy a rare 'costume' namely Pegasus Horse that can be ridden by the Avatar.





Figure 10. Key of Heaven Auction in RoM: Eternal Love  
Source: duniagames.co.id

## DISCUSSION

### Fetishism Towards Avatars

Fetishism, based on its literal terminology, refers to a fetish. Fetishism is the worship of an object (product, commodity, and brand) with an excessive level of respect or adoration (Dormer, 2008). Fetishism is closely related to consumerism, or the condition in which an individual, as a consumer, consumes goods beyond his real needs.

Fetishism occurs when an individual's consumption of a product is not at the level needed, but at the level where the individual does not even know the main function of the product. In commodity fetishism, an individual's needs are dominated and obscured by an apparent object of pleasure or satisfaction obtained from that commodity. The aestheticisation of everyday life occurs, namely the process by which "good style" standards (good style, good taste, good design) form the basis of every aspect of community life (Soedjatmiko, 2008). Commodity fetishism is a series of processes of consumption on products after consumption behavior becomes consumptive and develops into a lifestyle.

The phenomenon in which players are willing to spend tens to hundreds of millions for the visual appearance of video game avatars can be described through the theory of fetishism. The terms fetishism or *fétiche* in French and *Fetish* in English is derived from the Portuguese *feitiço*, which means magic charm or magic spells. In broad, the meaning of fetishism is supernatural characteristic, magical powers, or charms of power contained within objects.

There are three contexts of using the term fetishism: anthropology, sexuality, and commodity therefore in this discussion that will be used is the context of fetishism within

the commodity which explains the system of capitalism, in which a commodity or an object is not merely considered as an object with a use value, but as an object that has a certain charm, which gives a certain status to the person who wears it (Cardoso, 2003).

Commodity fetishists value an object based on spiritual, ideological and psychological meaning rather than its true material value. In this case the MMORPG players interpret a visual asset in a video game that has no beneficial value besides as an aesthetic avatar with the money.

Human fetishism towards an object based on the value given by the object, including:

1. Personification. Where an object can improve its user persona, for example women wearing high heels to feel 'sexy' or men wearing sports shoes to feel 'macho'.
2. Function. Objects can improve the performance of the user, for example a car can deliver us to our destination quickly.
3. Black Magic. An object that signifies social status and the prestige of its users. For example, branded bags.
4. White Magic. An object that gives the illusion of control over nature to its users. For example, the air conditioner provides natural freshness.
5. Self-Transformation. Objects that give user the ability to do self-change (perfect man, ideal girl, idol girl)
6. Emotional Satisfaction. Objects that provide pleasure and happiness for its user.

Generally, fetishism objects give at least one value (or more) to the user. The value is not obtained solely from the functional value and object material but rather satisfy the expectations and fantasy of its user. For example, a watch. The watches prized for twenty thousand and twenty million are equally made up of the hour hand and the mechanism of the clock machine, and the function is equally to show the time. A watch that costs twenty million is no more accurate than a watch that costs twenty thousand, however the people who buy a watch for twenty million no longer value the watch based on its function and material. Rather, the values of fetishism given by the watch namely personification, Black Magic, and Self Transformation. Wearing expensive watch gives the fantasy and illusion to its users that they are rich, have prestige, and become part of a higher social group.

Along with the era development, advances in technology and the video game industry continues to grow, commodity fetishism is no longer limited to material objects such as luxury cars, expensive watches, and branded handbags only. As in the phenomenon of RoM: Eternal Love, fetishism is now also happening to virtual commodities.

Why virtual commodities that are nothing more than digital data and assets in the form of images attached to character avatars can be valued so expensive by users? Because these commodities have social value. Like expensive watches that give users the illusion of social status, power, and prestige. The visual appearance of the MMORPG avatar gives users a similar social status (Dant, 2009).

Video game itself is a medium for players to escape from their boring daily life. In the video game, a private employee can act as a witch, or a knight who slays a dragon. But for some players, that merely virtual identity is not enough, they also need social status recognition from their in-game peers or companion.

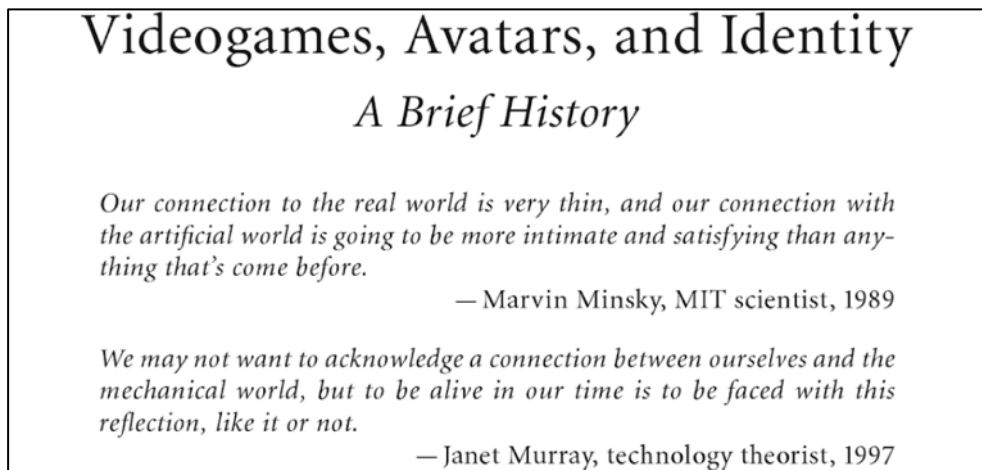


Figure 11. Avatar and Identity in the Virtual World  
 Sources: My Avatar, My Self: Identity in Video Role-Playing Games

Avatars on MMORPG represent the user's identity and social status, through its shape and appearance (Waggoner, 2009 C.E.). In the real world we can show social status through real objects (clothes, watches, shoes, mobile phones, etc.) The visual appearance of an avatar represents the meaning of fetishism on those objects in the virtual world. Moreover, to majority players, identity and social status in the virtual world have more significant meaning when compared to the real world. So that many players are willing to spend real currency to get virtual items that can satisfy their needs for commodity fetishism.

### **The Fetishism Value in Virtual Commodities**

Like the object in the real world, a virtual object does not have commodity fetishism value if it's not given a value by its creator. The values of fetishism such as personification, Black Magic, and others were not simply created, but they were deliberately created to increase the sales of an object. This value was created starting from the design, production, to marketing phases.



Figure 12. Costume Marketing Strategy in RoM: Eternal Love  
Source: ragnaroketernallove.com

Regardless of function, a virtual commodity that marketed with fetishism values promises social status and prestige for its users (Dant, 2009). The appearance of these virtual costumes was designed initially to provide Self Transformation and emotional satisfaction to the players.

By wearing this costume, the players change their appearance which originally mediocre to become exceptional, and indirectly raise their character's social status in a virtual world. The emotional satisfaction gained by the player when getting the Gacha costume (although having to pay to pull gacha many times) also becoming one of the fetichisms that game developers offer to their players.

## CONCLUSION

From the explanation, commodity fetishism nowadays does not only occur in the real world, but also occurs in the virtual world or precisely MMORPG. Players are ready and willing to exchange real money for virtual currencies to raise their social status and the prestige of their avatars.

In general, any kind of fetishism is still considered as something that is not good, especially in Indonesian society. For example, the Key of Heaven virtual item in RoM: Eternal Love sold for almost a billion rupiah. The sale of virtual item that does not have a beneficial value with the value that resemblance to a luxury house is soon became the headline in various media and attracted negative opinions by Indonesian and international netizens. Generally, the people who consider the fetichism of this virtual commodity as an unwise consumptive behavior.



Fantastis Key of Heaven Terjual Seharga  
Mobil di Ragnarok M Eternal Love

Figure 12. Headline in one of the Indonesian media  
Source: mobileague.id

When viewed from the consumer point of view as well as the intrinsic value of the costume itself, certainly the digital data and visual assets attached to the MMORPG player Avatar is not as reasonably priced when valued with that highly amount of money. However, when viewed from the game developer's point of view, the ability of a video game avatar to do repetition of the values of fetishism of real objects into a virtual object is an opportunity to increase the economic value from their game creation.

Video games have become large business since initially created more than five decades ago. Moreover, the MMORPG offers escapism for the players to momentarily release their identity in the real world and enjoy in the fantasy of playing new role and identity in the virtual world. As an industry with a value of more than fifty-five billion US dollars, it is natural for video game developers, especially MMORPG developers to utilize the values of commodity fetishism and apply them in their virtual products to increase the level of consumption of their players. This is also one of the developers' strategies to get revenue for the video games they have designed. Designing video games requires a lot of cost and resources, so it is reasonably appropriate if the developer expects a comparable return profit.

As a game player there is nothing wrong if occasionally fulfil the needs of commodity fetishism. Beside as the players' contribution to developers, fulfilling the needs of fetishism in reasonable levels is also good as a means of self-expression and escapism.



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