

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of Research

Consumerism seems to have spread all over the world already and has become a part of modern life (Miles 1). In modern society, increased expenditure for physical comfort has led people to greater consumption of goods and services. Their desires follow their various standards, which are flexible. With the increase in wealth, it is hard to stop this habit. Many items are wasteful for honorific only (Veblen and Banta 70). Consumerism is when people satisfy their needs by buying goods and services. Most are out of their plan and executed impulsively (Czarnecka and Schivinski 2). The dissatisfaction and the efforts to satisfy it are determined by six major social factors: environment, stress, commonality, catalyst, activation, and reaction (Gazda 33). Unlike consumption, an individual trait, consumerism is an attribute of society. Society can acquire the attribute with the contribution of individuals for their wanting, desiring, and longing needs (Bauman, 28). Consumerism has a different point of view based on the field in which we view it. From a capitalist point of view, Karl Marx focuses on consumerism as the increase in the production of goods and services (Miles 16). Workers in capitalist societies exchange their labor for the production of commodities over which they have no control (McNall 45). In the postmodern approach, consumerism appears as the new way of life (Miles 23).

Indeed, consumerism affects the society and the environment in many ways. Consumerism contributes to the depletion of nonrenewable resources such as oil

and the degradation of ecosystems and habitats. It increases pollution because the creation and disposal of goods and services create waste and harmful emissions. Consumerism encourages the creation of low-quality items as businesses strive to deliver lower-cost goods to consumers. It can result in neither long-lasting, safe, nor beneficial products to the environment. As firms aim to decrease costs and maximize profits, consumerism can lead to lousy labor standards and low worker pay. It can lead to exploitation, hazardous working conditions, and abuses of human rights (“Consumerism Negatives”). Consumerism can be detrimental to mental health since it encourages materialistic values associated with decreased life satisfaction. It can also detract from activities that promote enjoyment, such as interactions with family and friends. Packard says that many Americans nowadays are so knitted with consumption that they start thinking about gaining significance from the things they buy (ch. 25). The surge in resource consumption in wealthier countries has also widened the gap between rich and poor (Karanouh). In the United States of America, consumerism truly started to rise quickly after the end of World War II. With the increasing prosperity among the Americans, they were tempted to spend more on things. Advertising, branding, credit, and installment payment reinforced and shaped society further into consumerism.

Consumerism is also becoming a theme that is commonly discussed in many American literature. American works of literature discuss many points such as materialism, the American dream, identity crisis, or critiques towards consumerism. Furthermore, many famous American works include consumerism, such as *The Great Gatsby* by Scott F. Fitzgerald, *Player Piano* by Kurt Vonnegut, *White Noise* by Don DeLillo, and *Flight Behavior* by Barbara Kingsolver.

Consumerism also appeared in the novel *Fight Club*. *Fight Club* is a novel written by Chuck Palahniuk. The story is about a middle-class working man, often called the narrator, who has insomnia. He has a dull, standard life. However, he loves the furniture in his condo and keeps buying new ones repeatedly. He works every day only to spend his money on stuff he does not need. After a couple of weeks without sleep, he goes to a doctor, and the doctor suggests visiting a therapy disease. He becomes addicted to it until he meets Marla, a woman who is also addicted to it. Later, he creates his alter-ego, Tyler Durden, who is the opposite of him, an anti-consumerist person. However, Tyler seeks the destruction of capitalist and consumerist people through Project Mayhem.

In the novel, the characters never say where they live and what year they are in. However, it is believed that it takes place in Delaware and time in 1996, the same year as the novel was published ("Book #146 – *Fight Club* by Chuck Palahniuk ") Because it takes place in Delaware, United States of America, it represents a critique to consumerism in American society.

1.2. Identification of the Problems

The novel *Fight Club* by Chuck Palahniuk represents a lot of critiques about American society. It tries to criticize masculinity, alienation, rebellion, anarchy, and consumerism. Chuck Palahniuk criticizes consumerism through the characters in *Fight Club* who show many consumerist things by portraying or stating the consequences of consumerism in society. Palahniuk states the consequences of consumerism literally and metaphorically; it also represents American Society from the 1950s until the 1990s. In this research, the novel will be seen as a representation of the consequences of consumerism in American society.

1.3. Review of Related Literature

As the effects of consumerism in the novel *Fight Club* will be the topic of this research, there will be a border of related literature. It concludes the previous studies related to the novel and the topic, studies about consumerism in American literature, and the theory used in this research. This review excludes any discussion about English literature except American literature.

Numerous studies have also shown American literature that analyzes consumerism. In these researches, consumerism in American literature is what they share in common. However, they do not specifically discuss the consequences of consumerism in American society. Malewitz analyzed that every small thing can be interpreted as consumerism; even an action that almost has nothing to do with consumerism has a connection to it. He researched the misuse of value and rugged criticism in *No Country for Old Men*. David Brown's mutilation with a shotgun in the story is analyzed from the consumerist perspective. Malewitz offers the factors and proofs that support David Brown's rugged consumerism. However, these findings only focused on things that can be analyzed as consumerism.

Contrary to Malewitz's findings, few researchers focused on the author by analyzing some of their works. Lee focused on Crews, Coupland, and Palahniuk's works that have potential changes in satire. He claims those authors aim for consumerism in their works but lack initiation for rebellion and change. He analyzed some parts of the works that have the potential for satire.

On the other hand, some researchers analyzed consumerism in society and depicted how consumerism is portrayed in the subjects they analyzed. Stoneley claimed that 1860-1940 was the central time for allegories to portray how women

can be fictionalized for the girl reader and promote the ‘buying the womanhood’ scenario. Meanwhile, Osten discussed Don DeLillo’s Early Fiction, such as *Running Dog*, *Americana*, *Players*, and *White Noise*. He focused on showing the picture of consumerism in Don DeLillo’s works.

Many studies consistently conclude about the consumerism theme in *Fight Club*. However, none of them discuss consumerism only. However, these studies are insufficient to portray the consequences of consumerism in American society, primarily through Adorno and Horkheimer’s theory about consumerism. Several studies claim that consumerism can be one of the reasons for rebellion, both through cult and ideology, as revealed by Lockwood and Rizano, respectively. In their study, consumerism in capitalist life can lead to rebellious acts as a response to the negative effect of capitalism. On the other hand, Ta claims that masculine violence and the crisis of capitalism can lead to consumerism. Ta shows that the narrator (Jack) portrays people nowadays who used to have read porn in the bathroom but changed to IKEA catalog now.

Regarding theory, Marxist criticism has lots of research and researchers that discuss this approach. In terms of consumerism, the leading theory that will be used is the critical theory proposed by two members of the Frankfurt School, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, in their book *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. This book discusses the culture industry, a term that they propose. Also, it discusses consumerism and its consequences, such as standardization, pseudo-individuality, commodity fetishism, loss of critical thinking, manufactured desires and false desires, social inequality, and alienation. On the other hand, another member of the Frankfurt School, Herbert Marcuse,

discusses consumerism in his book *One-Dimensional Man*. He also proposes an idea similar to Adorno and Horkheimer but in a different way. Herbert Marcuse's consumerism theory is based on the concept that consumer culture in advanced industrial economies is critical to preserving a conformist, one-dimensional society. It creates false needs, promotes alienation and uniformity, and strengthens the capitalist system. Marcuse emphasized the necessity of critical thinking, antagonism, and the search for actual emancipation to break free from consumerism's restrictions. Both of the theories provide a clear explanation of the consequences of consumerism. However, the researcher will still use the theory by Adorno and Horkheimer because it is more relevant to the novel.

These studies have contributed to the researcher's data collection and choice of theory. Many researchers have discussed consumerism in American literature and the novel *Fight Club*. Unfortunately, they still lack research that thoroughly discusses the consequences of consumerism in American society as portrayed in *Fight Club*, especially using Adorno and Horkheimer's theory. This research is weighty as not many researchers discuss the consequences of consumerism in *Fight Club*, primarily through Adorno and Horkheimer's theory. As consumerism is already a part of life in society, it is imperative to learn about the consequences of it. Thus, this research will discuss the consequences of consumerism portrayed in the *Fight Club* novel by Chuck Palahniuk using Adorno and Horkheimer's theory.

1.4. Research Questions

The main issue to be explained in this research is the consequences of consumerism in American society according to Theodor Adorno and Max

Horkheimer's theory represented in the novel. This research aims to answer these questions:

- How do the characters in *Fight Club* portray consumerism?
- What consequences of consumerism can be found in the novel based on Adorno and Horkheimer's theory?

1.5. Scope of the Research

One of Chuck Palahniuk's works, *Fight Club*, has already been examined by many scholars from different perspectives, approaches, and themes. It is essential to make the scope of this research to prevent gaining unclear and inaccurate information. This research will focus on the consequences of consumerism in American society displayed by characters in *Fight Club* novel through the Marxist view by using Adorno and Horkheimer's theory.

1.6. Objectives of the Research

This research aims to explain the consequences of consumerism in American society through the *Fight Club* novel by using Adorno and Horkheimer's theory of consumerism, giving a new view of consumerism from the novel.