

## DECODING IDENTITY: SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF FASHION PRACTICES AMONG VESPA ENTHUSIASTS IN MAKASSAR RETROHOLIC COMMUNITY

Nurwijaya Hariadi <sup>1,\*</sup>; Alem Febri Sonni <sup>2</sup>; Muhammad Akbar <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup> Universitas Hasanuddin, Makassar, Indonesia; hariadinw24e@ms.unhas.ac.id<sup>1</sup>,

alemfebris@unhas.ac.id<sup>2</sup>, muh.akbar@unhas.ac.id<sup>3</sup>

\*Correspondence : hariadinw24e@ms.unhas.ac.id

### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menganalisis pesan komunikasi yang tertanam dalam aksesoris dan fesyen motor Vespa dalam komunitas Retroholic Makassar, dengan fokus pada bagaimana simbol-simbol visual mengkonstruksi dan mengkomunikasikan identitas kolektif. Dengan menggunakan kerangka semiotika Roland Barthes, khususnya konsep denotasi, konotasi, dan mitos, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana elemen-elemen fesyen dan modifikasi motor berfungsi sebagai tanda budaya. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipan, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi visual. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa aksesoris dan gaya pakaian Vespa berfungsi sebagai sistem komunikasi yang merefleksikan nilai-nilai nostalgia, solidaritas, dan perlawanan terhadap budaya arus utama. Barang-barang seperti target Bullseye Mods dan sepatu bot Dr. Martens telah bergeser dari simbol pemberontakan menjadi representasi identitas gaya hidup kelas menengah. Pakaian yang disesuaikan lebih lanjut bertindak sebagai narasi visual, yang mengekspresikan identitas pribadi dan afiliasi kelompok dalam subkultur retroholic. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi pada teori komunikasi subkultur dengan mengilustrasikan bagaimana objek material beroperasi sebagai sumber daya semiotik untuk konstruksi identitas dalam konteks kontemporer Indonesia. Secara praktis, penelitian ini memberikan wawasan bagi para pemimpin komunitas dan pemasar tentang bagaimana pola konsumsi simbolik membentuk kohesi kelompok dan loyalitas merek dalam komunitas penggemar motor.

### Kata kunci

*Budaya, Identitas Subcultural, Komunikasi, Komunitas, Semiotika, Vespa*

### ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the communication messages embedded in Vespa motorbike accessories and fashion within the Makassar Retroholic community, focusing on how visual symbols construct and communicate collective identity. Using Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, particularly his concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth, the research explores how fashion elements and motorbike modifications function as cultural signs. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and visual documentation. Findings reveal that Vespa accessories and clothing styles serve as a communication system reflecting values of nostalgia, solidarity, and resistance to mainstream culture. Items such as Bullseye Mods targets and Dr. Martens boots have shifted from symbols of rebellion to representations of middle-class lifestyle identity. Customised clothing further acts as a visual narrative, expressing both personal identity and group affiliation within the retroholic subculture. The study contributes to subcultural communication theory by illustrating how material objects operate as semiotic resources for identity construction in a contemporary Indonesian setting. Practically, it offers insights for community leaders and marketers into how symbolic consumption patterns shape group cohesion and brand loyalty in motorbike enthusiast communities.

### Keywords

*Communication, Community, Culture, Semiotics, Subcultural Identity, Vespa*

## Introduction

The Vespa community 'MARCH' (Makassar Retroholic Community) is an urban group in Makassar that revives the retro lifestyle by using Vespa scooters, classic accessories, and vintage clothing as collective identity markers. In this community, the selection of accessories such as Bullseye Mods, parka jackets, and Dr Martens shoes is not just a style, but a form of self-expression and a symbol of subculture membership.

This phenomenon reflects how urban lifestyles shape visual subcultures that are rich in symbolic meanings. In the context of a changing urban society, urban youth produce social identities through visual representations - especially through fashion and vehicles. Lifestyle is not just about the consumption of goods, but as David Chaney (2018) argues, is a symbol-laden social communication practice. Subcultures become a field for the articulation of alternative identities, which not only differentiate from the dominant culture, but also strengthen internal group cohesion.

Stuart Hall (2016) explains that identity is not fixed, but always constructed in representations. Through visual symbols, subcultures such as MARCH negotiate their existence. Visual symbols are visual sign systems embedded in material cultural relics that serve as carriers of ideological meanings, crystallisations of ancient wisdom, and mediators of collective memory, while acting as keys to the interpretation of social structures and cultural concepts, visual communication mediums in the broader myth system, as well as a profound expression of the survival ideal and value pursuit of a particular ethnic group that demonstrates the dynamic mechanism of culture through the process of inheritance-development-integration-regeneration with the characteristics of variety in form, diachronic evolution from image to symbol to text, regional uniqueness of mutual influence, and embodying the ecological wisdom of human-nature harmony, humanistic spirit of respect for ritual and ethics, and eternal creative vitality (Ouyang & Wang, 2025). These symbols, in the perspective of Roland Barthes-style cultural semiotics, are not only denotative signs, but also carry ideological connotations. Objects like Vespas and retro accessories become social myths-signs that are absorbed and transformed into ideas about lifestyle, class, and even resistance to the mainstream (Barthes, 1972). The cultural semiotics approach offered by Roland Barthes (1972) provides a sharp analytical framework to understand how visual symbols can contain layers of meaning. Through the concepts of denotation, connotation and myth, Barthes explains that cultural objects carry more than just utilitarian functions. Objects can become modern myths that subtly construct ideologies through visibility. In the context of MARCH, a symbol like Vespa is not just a means of transport, but a myth of freedom, individuality, and an anti-mainstream retro lifestyle.

Urban society itself as the center of cultural production is also a place of cultural transformation from other cities around the world, some urban areas (urban) with a variety of relatively dynamic socio-cultural conditions are also able to give birth to various cultural alternatives for urban communities (urban). This is usually said to be a sub-culture (Monica Sklar Jessica Strübel & Elhabbassi, 2022) (Moran, 2021).

When we talk about youth as agents of the products of capitalism many people believe that youth is synonymous with pleasure-seeking activities. Youth is always associated with leisure, freedom, and a rebellious spirit. Media and industry create "needs" for young people to serve the interests of the market, and are marketed as a way for young people to break away from parental identity. Youth culture is closely related to appearance as a representation of identity. Youth culture is fashion, music and parties.

Urban youth have wide access to information. They pick up information everywhere, from television, magazines, radio and even torn posters on the side of the road. They have the opportunity to spend their free time in shopping centers, entertainment venues and public spaces that allow for interaction and information exchange.

Young people in the city always have a way to stand out. Urban youth are constantly updating their appearance, adopting celebrity styles, to present a desired self-image, which includes more than just physical clothing. Then there is language, which is considered one of the important things that will give urban youth a special characteristic. Verbal expressions reflect urban teens' efforts to construct a desired self-image through appearance. Thus, they have the terms "tacky" or "hick" for certain styles, which they consider to be trendy, but inappropriate (in their language: not matching). This term also shows how they view young people in non-urban areas (not to mention villages) as "inferior" to them.

This is what drives youth subculture movements. Subcultures are often associated with unique, non-conformist, independent and peripheral cultures, while simultaneously serving as a dominant area of concentration in theoretical and empirical scholarly inquiry. These subculture-related investigations are significantly shaped by the intellectual legacy of the Chicago School of Sociology alongside the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies. Despite a wealth of research, Williams notes there has been no book that specifically explores interpretive practices in conceptualizing subcultural phenomena (Williams 2024).

More specifically, this subculture is a cultural 'community' that serves as a form of emotional expression and collective identity that is distinct from official culture and general social norms, as well as a place where members can empathise and share emotional experiences that are difficult to accept officially (Tan & Cheng, 2020). Young people's style no longer refers to the designers who once had enormous legitimacy. The post-'50s and '60s youth - the baby boomers who began to enjoy prosperity after the end of the post-world war recession - created their own fashion (Morin, 2018).

We can trace how young people are portrayed by the media from time to time, and then how that image permeates everyday life. It is also interesting to see how the mass media has created a certain icon of youth in each era.

The role of mass media as a provider of information also functions as a provider of personal identity for the audience. Media as a provider of personal identity and behavior models. We can get behavior models from media offerings. Whether it is the same behavior model that we have or even the opposite of what we have (Denis, 2020).

Media serves as a model of behavior and identity, allowing individuals to identify with other values presented in the media. Humans have their own life values that shape their worldview. Media conveys globally diverse values, allowing consumers to learn about values beyond their own. However, one should not create information without proper context.

The phenomenon of communities like MARCH is important to study because it shows the dynamics of how collective identities are formed through symbolic practices. In the era of urbanisation and digital connectivity, community spaces are important for maintaining a distinctive cultural identity. This is where it is important to see subcultures not only as lifestyle expressions, but as symbolic fields where meanings are produced and communicated.

This study is relevant because there are not many studies in Indonesia that specifically explore how visual symbols in classic motorbike communities function as identity communication systems. Most studies still focus on aspects of consumptive lifestyles or media representations without exploring how the visual elements themselves work semiotically in shaping collective identity.

In the midst of popular culture and globalisation of values, there is an urgency to understand how communities like MARCH produce and communicate identity through visual symbols. This is important so that the discourse on lifestyle is not trapped in mere consumption, but is understood as a cultural practice full of social meaning.

The concept of popculture refers to how visual and verbal language is creatively watered down and distorted in everyday life to create effective instant communication. Popculture here is not just about trends or the masses, but also a sign system that relies on mutually agreed symbolic conventions, and operates in the context of consumption, entertainment, and public identity (Kapuścińska, 2022).

## Method

This research is a qualitative-descriptive study employing a visual interpretative approach aimed at uncovering the symbolic meanings behind the use of Vespa accessories and fashion by the MARCH (Makassar Retroholic Community) as a form of subcultural identity construction. Roland Barthes' semiotic theory is applied explicitly as the primary analytical framework rather than a supplementary technique to interpret the meanings of signs within the local cultural context. The study positions visual symbols as cultural texts, focusing on the signification process that includes denotation, connotation, and myth, as formulated by Barthes. Accordingly, the methodological design is directly aligned with the research objective: to understand how visual symbols are used by the MARCH community to shape a collective identity.

The research was conducted in Makassar City, South Sulawesi, the central base of MARCH's activities. Data collection took place over a period of three months, from May to August 2024, and involved several key locations where community interactions occur, such as gathering points, Vespa modification workshops, and cafes where discussions are held. Four main techniques were used to collect data: literature review to reinforce the theoretical framework on subculture, identity, and cultural semiotics; participatory observation, in which the researcher engaged directly in community activities; in-depth interviews with five key informants who are active members, style creators, and opinion leaders within the community; and visual documentation through photographs and records of Vespa accessories, stickers, fashion attributes, and symbolic member interactions.

Informants were selected purposively based on the following criteria: having been active MARCH members for at least one year, being involved in Vespa styling or modification, representing diverse demographic backgrounds (age, occupation, gender), and being recognized as symbolically influential figures within the community. The total number of informants was five, aged between 22 and 40 years old.

Data analysis was conducted using Roland Barthes' semiotic framework through several stages, beginning with the identification of signs (signifier and signified) in visual objects such as Bullseye Mods stickers, the Union Jack logo on Vespa, Dr Martens shoes, and the Fred Perry logo. The basic (denotative) meanings of each object were examined in relation to how they are used within the community. This was followed by connotative

analysis, where the cultural or symbolic meanings attached to these objects were interpreted for instance, the parka jacket is not only protective clothing but also a representation of Mods identity and retro masculinity. Finally, the study examined myth, referring to the ideological meaning formed through repeated connotations for example, the transformation of Dr Martens from a symbol of working-class resistance into a nostalgic expression of urban middle-class identity.

To ensure the validity of findings, triangulation was applied through source comparison (observations, interviews, and visual data), cross-checking among informants to minimize perceptual bias, and expert consultation with a supervisor specializing in cultural studies and visual communication.

## Result and Discussion

### Scooter Accessories Symbol

A scooter is a two-wheeled vehicle characterized by a floorboard integrated into the body of the machine. Elements of scooter design have appeared in some motorcycles, and scooter-like motorcycles have been manufactured as early as 1917. The development of scooters gained momentum in Europe and the United States during World War II. Globally, scooters rose to prominence in the post-war period, especially with the introduction of iconic models such as the Vespa and Lambretta. Initially, scooters were produced with engine capacities ranging from 50 to 250 cc, primarily intended to offer low-powered, affordable personal transportation.

Scooters have remained popular for personal mobility due to their relatively low cost, ease of parking, and storage efficiency. However, their function has evolved over time. In the present day, scooters are no longer viewed merely as utilitarian vehicles; for many users, they have become part of a lifestyle. This is reflected in the symbolic personalization of scooters, where accessories and visual markers are deliberately added to express identity and affiliation.

The focus of this study is the MARCH (Makassar Retroholic Community), a local scooter enthusiast group. The research specifically investigates the symbolic attributes used within this community and how the "mods" ideology is represented and constructed through the practices and visuals associated with MARCH. To analyze these symbols, the study employs Roland Barthes' semiotic model, which explores the relationship between the *signifier* (the form of the sign) and the *signified* (the concept it represents). Barthes emphasizes that this relationship is not about similarity but about equivalence in meaning.

Barthes' semiotic framework operates through what he termed the "two orders of signification": (1) Denotation refers to the literal, dictionary meaning of a word, object, or image; (2) Connotation involves the cultural and emotional associations attached to the term or symbol. Barthes further extends his model with a third, ideological level known as myth, which represents a socially constructed narrative or belief system that naturalizes certain cultural meanings.

The following section presents a diagram or application of Roland Barthes' model to interpret the symbolic system embedded within the MARCH community.

**Table 1.** Roland Barthes' analysis model.

Signifier	Signified
Denotative Sign	
Connotative Signifier	Connotative Signified
Connotative Sign	
Myth	

Source : (Barthes, 1972).

Based on the analytical model outlined above, Barthes' semiotic framework serves as the guiding method for the researcher to analyze and interpret the various symbols embedded within the MARCH community. This model provides a systematic lens to decode how visual signs such as accessories and fashion elements function as carriers of meaning in the construction of subcultural identity.

Drawing from data collected during participatory observations within the MARCH community, the researcher identified several recurring visual symbols attached to the scooters and members of the group. These symbols are not merely decorative but carry layered meanings that contribute to the collective identity and ideological representation of the community. Among the prominent symbols observed are:

**Bullseye Mods : From Military Heritage to Lifestyle Statement**

**Figure 1.** Bullseye Mods symbol and its application on March member vehicles



One of the most prominent symbols observed within the MARCH community is the Bullseye Mods logo, originally the roundel of the Royal Air Force (RAF) of the United Kingdom. This concentric circle design featuring a red center, white middle ring, and blue outer ring gained widespread popularity in the 1960s, often appearing in fashion as an emblem of national pride among British youth. Over time, it became strongly associated with the Mods subculture, symbolizing modernist aesthetics and urban youth identity (Susilotomo, n.d.) .

The term "Mods" itself is derived from "modernism" or "modernist" and refers to a youth subculture that emerged in Britain in the late 1950s and reached its peak in the mid-1960s' (Dow, 2021). Mods embraced stylish fashion, Vespa scooters, and a clean-

cut, forward-looking image, often as a form of subtle defiance against dominant cultural norms.

Applying Roland Barthes' model of semiotic analysis, the Bullseye symbol can be interpreted through three levels of meaning: **Denotation:** At the most literal level, the Bullseye Mods symbol is a visual form consisting of concentric circles a red dot in the center, surrounded by a white ring, enclosed within a blue outer ring. This is directly derived from the RAF target roundel used in British military aircraft insignia. **Connotation:** In the original British context, the symbol came to represent working-class pride and resistance to rigid social hierarchies, especially when adopted by youth subcultures like the Mods (Hebdige Dick, 1979). However, within the context of the MARCH community in Makassar, this connotative meaning is reinterpreted. As one member, identified by the initials R.A., stated during an interview (28 May 2024), "*Kami pakai simbol ini bukan karena perlawanan, tapi karena keren dan menunjukkan kita tahu sejarah Mods*" ("We use this symbol not for resistance, but because it's cool and shows we know Mods history"). **Myth:** At the level of myth, the Bullseye symbol undergoes a transformation in meaning. No longer a marker of British class struggle, it becomes a signifier of cultural sophistication and cosmopolitan identity among Indonesia's urban middle class. This process reflects what Stuart Hall (1973) refers to as a *negotiated reading*, wherein the dominant meaning of a symbol is partially accepted but reinterpreted to fit local sociocultural contexts.

#### UK - Flag: National Pride Transformed into Fashion Currency

Figure 1. Bullseye Mods symbol and its application on March member vehicles



Another widely observed symbol within the MARCH community is the Union Flag, commonly known as the Union Jack. From a semiotic perspective, a flag is not merely a piece of coloured fabric but a powerful sign imbued with deep cultural and ideological meanings (Anne et al., 2022). The Union Jack, as the national flag of the United Kingdom, originated with the Act of Union in 1801, which merged the Kingdom of Ireland with Great Britain. The design, which incorporates the crosses of St. George (England), St. Andrew (Scotland), and St. Patrick (Ireland), historically signified British imperial identity and national unity (Groom, 2006) . Using Roland Barthes' three-tiered model of

semiotic analysis, the meaning of the Union Jack within the MARCH community can be broken down as follows: **Denotation:** The Union Jack is visually represented as a tricolour flag combining red, white, and blue in a symmetrical pattern formed by the overlapping crosses of the patron saints of the UK. Within the MARCH community, this symbol frequently appears on Vespa stickers, scooter windshields, helmets, and clothing accessories. **Connotation:** In its original context, the Union Jack symbolised British imperial power and later became a representation of Mods' nationalist pride and cultural assertion during the post-war years. However, in the MARCH community, its connotative meaning has shifted significantly. Rather than indicating political allegiance or nationalism, the flag is perceived as a fashionable element—a global signifier of retro-modern aesthetics. As Chaney (2018) argues, such symbols serve as "lifestyle markers" that indicate cosmopolitan taste and cultural literacy. One MARCH member, identified by the initials M.A., affirmed this interpretation, stating, "*The flag is just cool; it's about style, not politics*" (Interview, July 2024). **Myth:** At the mythological level, the Union Jack has been recontextualised within the MARCH community to represent a form of international sophistication and aspirational modernity. It no longer signals colonial legacy or nationalism but instead functions as a marker of cultural capital. During community gatherings, the flag's presence is not read as a political statement but as an index of affiliation with global youth subculture movements, reinforcing an imagined connection to a broader, transnational "mod" identity.

### **Fred Perry : From Sports Heritage to Class Distinction**

**Figure 3.** The Fred Perry logo and its application on March members' vehicles



Fred Perry is a globally recognized fashion brand that has become increasingly popular among youth, particularly in public and urban spaces. Originally founded by Fred Perry a three-time Wimbledon champion and co-inventor of the sweatband and polo shirt the brand became synonymous with classic British sportswear. The laurel wreath logo, derived from the traditional Wimbledon championship symbol, is now featured prominently on all Fred Perry apparel. Though the company is now owned by a Japanese firm, its cultural associations with British heritage and youth fashion remain strong (Strübel & Sklar, 2022).

What began as functional sportswear has gradually evolved into a symbolic marker embraced by various subcultures, most notably the Mods. Fred Perry's clothing, polo shirts, twin-tipped shirts, jumpers, and cardigans became iconic within the Mods movement, representing a blend of minimalist fashion and subcultural identity. Over

time, the brand has transcended its sporting origins and achieved global appeal, including among scooter communities in Indonesia.

Within the MARCH community in Makassar, the Fred Perry brand functions as one of the most symbolically dense and socially charged fashion choices. Applying Barthes' model of semiotic analysis, the brand's meaning can be deconstructed through three levels: **Denotation:** The laurel wreath logo appears on a variety of clothing items, including polo shirts, sweaters, and jackets. The visual form of the logo retains its original shape and is easily identifiable, maintaining a link to its heritage in British tennis culture. **Connotation:** While the logo originally connoted elite athletic achievement and was later reappropriated by British Mods as a form of understated, working-class elegance, its meaning shifts in the context of MARCH. Here, Fred Perry signifies not only stylistic alignment with the Mods aesthetic but also connotes economic privilege. Ethnographic observation revealed that community members invest heavily in authentic Fred Perry merchandise often at a cost exceeding the average monthly income in Makassar indicating that the brand has become a symbol of social status and financial capacity. **Myth:** At the level of myth, Fred Perry constructs what Barthes (1972) identifies as a *bourgeois myth*, where class-based privilege is masked by aesthetic presentation. The consumption of high-end Fred Perry fashion is naturalized as a cultural norm within the community, obscuring the economic exclusivity that underlies its adoption. In this way, the brand functions as a form of *distinction* in the Bourdieusian sense (Bourdieu, 1984), allowing MARCH members to differentiate themselves from other scooter groups through conspicuous consumption and refined taste.

#### **Dr. Martens Boots : Working-Class Authenticity as Middle-Class Performance**

**Figure 4.** Dr. Martens boots



The Dr. Martens brand has its origins in World War II, when German army doctor Klaus Martens, recovering from a skiing injury in the Bavarian Alps, developed an alternative to the rigid army boots that contributed to his injury. He designed a more comfortable boot using softer leather and air-cushioned soles. By 1947, Martens partnered with his former friend Dr. Herbert Funck, and together they began producing the boots using surplus rubber from Luftwaffe airfields. Initially marketed to women over 40, the boots soon gained broader popularity. In 1952, the brand established its first factory in Munich, and by 1960, it entered the British market through a licensing agreement with R. Griggs Group Ltd. The first English-manufactured Dr. Martens boot,

known as the 1460 model, featured signature design elements: yellow stitching, Nappa leather, and air-cushioned sole (Klara, 2015; Wei, 2023).

Dr. Martens boots were initially worn by British working-class professionals, including postal workers, police officers, and factory laborers. In the late 1960s, however, the boots were adopted by youth subcultures such as the skinheads and Mods, later gaining prominence in the punk and new wave music scenes of the 1970s. Over time, these boots evolved into global cultural icons, worn by musicians, celebrities, and fashion-forward communities across the world.

Within the MARCH community in Makassar, Dr. Martens serve as one of the most symbolically charged fashion items. Using Roland Barthes' semiotic model, their layered meanings can be interpreted through three levels: **Denotation:** The physical form of the boots includes thick leather, yellow stitching, air-cushioned soles, and robust construction. These design features remain intact across different cultural contexts, preserving the brand's visual identity. **Connotation:** Initially, Dr. Martens symbolized durability and practicality for industrial laborers and later became emblems of resistance and working-class pride among British youth subcultures. In the MARCH community, however, this connotative meaning is displaced. As McCracken (1990) theorizes, the boots carry a "displaced meaning" where authenticity is sought through the appropriation of symbols removed from their original socio-economic and political contexts. MARCH members wear Dr. Martens not as a statement of class resistance but as a signifier of alignment with global subcultural aesthetics. **Myth:** At the mythological level, Dr. Martens construct an illusion of authentic subcultural participation. Yet, this myth obscures the economic privilege necessary to obtain them, particularly in an Indonesian context where original products are financially inaccessible to the average consumer. This phenomenon exemplifies Hebdige's (1979) notion of *recuperation* the process by which originally resistant or oppositional symbols are absorbed into mainstream commercial culture, stripped of their radical edge, and commodified for broader consumption.

### **Transformation of Meaning in Local Context**

The adoption of Mods symbols by the MARCH community in Makassar exemplifies a notable transformation in meaning from their original context in the United Kingdom. In their UK origins, Mods appropriated fashion and visual symbols as forms of resistance to capitalist class structures, expressing working-class pride through elegant style, self-made aesthetics, and anti-mainstream values (Hebdige Dick, 1979). By contrast, within the MARCH community largely composed of urban, upper-middle-class youth these same symbols are reinterpreted as markers of lifestyle, cultural sophistication, and social distinction. Rather than functioning as tools of subversion, the symbols are integrated into consumer culture, reflecting Hebdige's (1979) concept of *recuperation*, in which originally oppositional signs are absorbed and neutralized by the dominant culture through commodification.

The socio-cultural landscape of Makassar plays a central role in this semantic shift. As part of an emerging affluent youth scene, MARCH members embrace high-cost, branded items such as Fred Perry polo shirts and Dr. Martens boots, signaling economic privilege rather than the DIY ethos of the original Mods subculture. This movement away from resourceful self-expression toward curated consumption marks a localized rearticulation of global subcultural symbols. As Chaney (2018) notes, fashion functions

as a site for the mediation of identity, wherein global cultural signs are adapted and recontextualized to align with local social and economic realities.

### **Socio-Economic Influences and Limitations**

The socio-economic background of MARCH members primarily from upper-middle-class urban settings profoundly shapes their interpretation and appropriation of Mods symbols. Rather than signifying ideological resistance, as was the case in the original British context, these symbols are rearticulated as markers of aesthetic taste, consumer sophistication, and social distinction. This class-based lens introduces an inherent limitation in the study, as it may overlook or underrepresent alternative interpretations from lower-income or grassroots scooter communities in Makassar. Furthermore, the selection of informants comprised mainly of active participants and opinion leaders within the community may inadvertently skew the findings toward dominant narratives, potentially marginalizing dissenting or non-mainstream perspectives within the group.

### **Research Limitations**

This research has several limitations. First, the focus on one community in Makassar limits the generalisability of the findings to other Vespa communities in Indonesia or elsewhere. Secondly, the relatively short observation period may not capture all the nuances of long-term community dynamics. Thirdly, although interviews were conducted, the primary analysis relies on the researcher's semiotic interpretation of visual cues; community members' perspectives may be more diverse or complex than fully captured. Lastly, this research focuses on visual aspects and may fall short of exploring other dimensions of community identity, such as social practices, music, or oral narratives. Overall, the results of the analysis show that the visual style of the Makassar Retroholic community is a dynamic semiotic system. Visual signs not only communicate affiliation with the global Vespa subculture but are also negotiated within the local context of Makassar, reflecting a blend of nostalgia, community solidarity, individual expression, and at times, a shift in the meaning of symbols from historical resistance to contemporary lifestyle signifiers.

### **Conclusion**

The MARCH community in Makassar adopts Mods symbols Bullseye Mods, Union Jack, Fred Perry, and Dr. Martens Boots to construct a distinct subcultural identity. Using Barthes' semiotic framework, this study reveals how these symbols shift from denotative markers (e.g., a flag, a logo) to connotative expressions of lifestyle and status, culminating in myths of cosmopolitan sophistication and elite subcultural belonging. Unlike the UK Mods' resistance to capitalism, MARCH's use of these symbols reflects commodification, aligning with consumerist aspirations in Makassar's affluent youth culture.

This transformation underscores the interplay between global subcultural symbols and local contexts, as theorized by Hebdige Dick (1979) and Hall (1973). The study highlights the need for further research into how socio-economic factors and local cultural dynamics shape subcultural adoption, addressing limitations such as potential bias and the scope of symbolic analysis.

### **References**

- Anne, M., Steven, A., Ff, A. M. P., & Knowlton, S. A. (2022). *Old Flags, New Meanings*.  
Barthes, R. (1972). Mythologies. In *Books Abroad* (Vol. 31, Issue 4). Farrar, Straus and Giroux.  
Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Harvard University

Journal Homepage : <http://jurnalilmukomunikasi.uho.ac.id/index.php/journal/index>

DOI : <http://dx.doi.org/10.52423/jikuho.v10i3.1685>

- Press. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315775357>
- Chaney, D. (2018). Lifestyles : sebuah pengantar komprehensif. *Jalasuara*, 276.
- Dow, T. (2021). *The Migration of Mod: Analysing The Mod Subculture in The North of England*. Master Thesis. University of Huddersfield.
- Groom, Ni. (2006). *The Union Jack: The Story of the British Flag*. Atlantic Books Ltd.
- Hall, S. (1973). Encoding and decoding in the television discourse. *CCCS Selected Working Papers, September*, 402–414. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203357071-35>
- Hall, S. (2016). CULTURAL STUDIES 1983. In *Cultural Studies 1983*. Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822373650-006>
- Hebdige Dick. (1979). *Subculture The Meaning of Style* (1st Editio). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203139943>
- Kapuścińska, A. (2022). On the Use of Pictographic Elements in Pop-cultural Short Texts on the Example of the Heart Pictogram. *LingVaria*, 17(2), 49–61. <https://doi.org/10.12797/LV.17.2022.34.04>
- Klara, R. B. T.-A. (2015). *Dr. Martens*. 56(17), 31+.
- McCracken, G. D. (1990). *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities*. Indiana University Press.
- Monica Sklar Jessica Strübel, K. F., & Elhabbassi, S. (2022). Beyond Subculture the Meaning of Style: Chronicling Directions of Scholarship on Dress since Hebdige and Muggleton. *Fashion Theory*, 26(6), 715–735. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1362704X.2021.1954834>
- Moran, I. P. (2021). Punk: The Do-It-Yourself Subculture. *Social Sciences Journal*, 10(1), 13.
- Morin, A. (2018). The Fashion of the 1960s. A New Power Shaping the American Image. *USAbroad, Journal of American History and Politics*, 1(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.2611-2752/7162>
- Ouyang, H., & Wang, X. (2025). Signs and Symbols: A Visual Culture Study of Civilization Markers in the Yangtze River Basin. *Journal of Ecohumanism*, 4(1), 4511–4521. <https://doi.org/10.62754/joe.v4i1.6337>
- Strübel, J., & Sklar, M. (2022). *Fred Perry: Polos for All*. February, 73–90. <https://doi.org/10.1108/s0163-239620220000054005>
- Susilotomo, H. L. (n.d.). *Ketika Musik , Fashion & Scooter Bersatu - Lahirlah sebuah genre [ MODS ]*.
- Tan, K. C., & Cheng, S. (2020). Sang subculture in post-reform China. *Global Media and China*, 5(1), 86–99. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2059436420904459>
- Wei, A. (2023). Study on the Historical Changes of Dr. Martens Martin Boots Advertisement. In *Proceedings of the 2022 International Conference on Science Education and Art Appreciation (SEAA 2022)* (pp. 410–416). Atlantis Press SARL. [https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-494069-05-3\\_51](https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-494069-05-3_51)
- Williams, J. P. (2024). *Interpreting Subcultures: Approaching, Contextualizing, and Embodying Sense-Making Practices in Alternative Cultures*. Bristol University Press.