

SKATEBOARD, SUBCULTURE, AND INDUSTRY: A STUDY ABOUT YOUNG SKATE WORKERS IN INDONESIA

Odam Asdi Artosa

Social Research Center, Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences,
Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia
E-mail: odamasdi27@ugm.ac.id

Abstract

This article is a textual analysis of skateboard as a subculture and job opportunities for young people in Indonesia, which presents an exploration of their strategies to achieve a career in the skateboard industry. This study uses a qualitative method with a textual analysis approach which was carried out for three months. This study involved three main informants from young people who have achievements at the national and/or international skateboard competition and get their jobs from skateboard sponsors. The findings of this study show that the meaning of skateboard as a subculture has evolved, where young people not only see skateboarding as a form of self-actualization, but also as a space where they can develop their talents and fulfill their needs through collaboration with sponsors. In Indonesia, skateboard became an activity that received recognition from the government, this showed through the efforts of Indonesian government as the host of Asian Games 2018 (Jakarta-Palembang), which registered skateboard as one of the sports that were competed in the event. The Indonesian government's support for skateboarding was also followed by the construction of skate park facilities in several cities in Indonesia.

Keywords: *Skateboard, Subculture, Youth Culture, Worker, Sport*

Abstrak

Artikel ini merupakan analisis tekstual skateboard sebagai subkultur dan peluang kerja bagi anak muda di Indonesia, yang menyajikan eksplorasi strategi mereka untuk meraih karir di industri skateboard. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan analisis tekstual yang dilaksanakan selama tiga bulan. Penelitian ini melibatkan tiga informan utama dari anak muda yang berprestasi pada kompetisi skateboard nasional dan/atau internasional dan mendapatkan pekerjaan dari sponsor skateboard. Temuan penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa pemaknaan skateboard sebagai subkultur telah berkembang, di mana anak muda tidak hanya melihat skateboard sebagai bentuk aktualisasi diri, tetapi juga sebagai ruang di mana mereka dapat mengembangkan bakat dan memenuhi kebutuhan mereka melalui kolaborasi dengan sponsor. Di Indonesia, skateboard menjadi salah satu kegiatan yang mendapat pengakuan dari pemerintah, hal ini terlihat dari upaya pemerintah Indonesia selaku tuan rumah Asian Games 2018 (Jakarta-Palembang) yang mendaftarkan skateboard sebagai salah satu cabang olahraga yang dipertandingkan dalam ajang tersebut. Dukungan pemerintah Indonesia terhadap olahraga skateboard juga diikuti dengan pembangunan fasilitas skate park di beberapa kota di Indonesia.

Kata kunci: *Skateboard, Cabang Kebudayaan, Budaya Anak Muda, Pekerja, Olahraga*

Introduction

Skateboard has become a popular culture for young people to express their creativity in public spaces in a new transgressive way since the 1960s (Roth, 2004; Vivoni, 2009). The popularity of skateboard increased when it was recognized as a sport by making it a new branch in Olympics 2020 (Tokyo) (O'Connor, 2018a).

In addition, the popularity of skateboards can also be seen from the spread of skateboard industry. For example, the increase in number of skate shops that provide easy access for young people to get their skateboards. Furthermore, this condition is mediated by several platforms such as video games, movies, music, zines, thus providing space for skateboard to be better known to the public.

In the Indonesian context, skateboarding trend started in 1980s when young Indonesians got information about skateboarding through videos and skateboard magazines from abroad. Since then, skateboard has grown rapidly and spread from one group to another. With the increasing popularity of skateboard by young people in Indonesia, skate shops, skate parks, skate events and domestic skateboard competitions have emerged. In Indonesia, skateboard

is recognized as a sport through the Asian Games 2018 (Jakarta-Palembang), which is two years ahead than the Olympics 2020 (Tokyo).

However, skateboarding as a sport also has another dimension as a subculture which causes a lot of misrepresentation from the public. As a popular culture among young people, skateboard is often played in public spaces and uses public facilities for their playing equipment. Places that are often used for skateboarding are road pavements or city parks. This often causes the stigma that skateboarding is a rebel and a public facilities destroyer. Recently, on one of the sidewalks in Jakarta, there was a commotion between young skateboarders and the police (SATPOL-PP). Due to this incident, they were skateboarding and causing chaos with the police (SATPOL-PP) were detained at the police station.

Figure 1. The commotion between the young skateboarders and SATPOL-PP



As a result, the video of this incident went viral on social media and attracted public attention. In the @insurgentcrew instagram post, it can be seen that a young man is trying to secure his skateboard because he was forcibly asked by the police (SATPOL-PP). The scene in the video shows a commotion between the skateboarders and the police (SATPOL-PP) which led to the skateboarders being detained at the police station. This incident caught the public's attention and demanded the local government to mediate on this incident.

Based on this incident, it can be seen that skateboard still has a misrepresentation in the subculture, even though it has been generally recognized by the government as a legal sport. However, the habit of skateboarding in public space is a form of freedom expressed by skateboarders. This value seems contrary to some values prevailing in society. Meanwhile, skateboarding has also become a trend for young people to generate income from competitions and sponsorships that require them to produce content (photos/videos) in public spaces and/or skate parks. Therefore, in order to have a deeper understanding of the skateboard subculture and job opportunities for young people in the skateboard industry, this article aims to explore four issues. *First*, a discussion of

the history of skateboarding; *second*, skateboarding as a subculture; *third*, representations and misrepresentations about skateboard among the public; *fourth*, skateboard industry and job opportunities for young people.

Method

This study used a qualitative method with a textual analysis approach. Textual analysis is an approach that involves understanding language, symbols, and images to obtain information about how people communicate their lives and life experiences through visual, written, or verbal means (Allen, 2017). With this approach, researcher can collect and analyze data through secondary data and social media accounts of the main informants in this study. The main informants in this study are young people in Indonesia who live their lives as skateboard workers. The three informants selected in this study are: Sanggoe Dharma Tanjung (@sanggutanjung) a 20-year-old boy from Bali; Rubianda Rachman (@rubi4nda) a 17-year-old boy from Tangerang, Banten; and Basral Garito Hutomo (@basralgraito) a 16-year-old boy from Karanganyar, Central Java. All of these informants are young skateboarders in Indonesia who already have sponsors and play in various

national and international skateboard competitions.

In the process of collecting data, the researcher made a comparison of these three young skateboarders. Data analysis includes three elements. First, to see how they know skateboard; Second, to find out how their process of learning skateboard; and Third, to find out the conditions that underlie them to decide skateboarding as a job. These data were obtained from textual sources such as journals, books, and skateboard magazines from both national and international levels. These data are strengthened by data from audio visuals such as skateboard videos and podcasts which are widely available in social media accounts from skateboard community, skateboard magazines, and skate shops.

Data collection was carried out for three months, from February to April 2022. However, the researcher is someone who has an interest in the field of skateboard, so the researcher has been following skateboard issues for more than thirteen years. Therefore, researcher have observed the three informants for approximately the last two years. In particular, the researcher studied the three of them through their Instagram accounts for the last three months.

Results and Discussion

Academic interest in skateboard over the last few years has grown with the increasing popularity of skateboard and its recognition in sports, gaming, film and advertising (Radikonyana et al., 2017; Theluxmag, 2021; Yochim, 2010). Nonetheless, there are inherent opportunities and challenges in skateboard, i.e. skateboard as a subculture that has been misrepresented by the public and skateboard as a new job opportunity for young people. Therefore, to understand this discussion, the article is directed to four main issues: first, the history of skateboard; second, skateboard as a subculture; third, public representation and misrepresentation about skateboard; and fourth, the relationship between skateboard and industry.

1. The History of Skateboard

An explanation of the history of skateboard is important to see how skateboard was born and developed into a subculture. The history of skateboarding began in 1958, when a surfer in California and Hawaii tried to surf on the ground using a small board mounted on metal wheels—they were called “asphalt surfers” (Vivoni, 2009). This condition is influenced by the toy industry in the United States which is growing rapidly due to

economic development during the post-war period (Hartleib & Hartleib, 2021). Then in 1959-1962, skateboard began to be mass produced and marketed in

various stores. However, at that time, there were still many skateboarders who made their own skateboards with improvised properties.

Figure 2. Skateboard with metal wheels



Source: Ross (2017)

In 1965, the accident rate due to skateboarding was relatively high, because people still used their own skateboards which not safety. The highest accident cases are caused by skateboard wheels that break easily and cause injury to the rider. The reason was, at that time to make wheels that were relatively cheap could be created by making wheels from clay, while wheels from metal were not accessible to all people. Due to the high number of accidents, the media began to label skateboarding as a dangerous youth activity and caused the public to stay away from it.

The skateboard trend continues to grow, in 1972, Frank Nasworthy invented the urethane wheel—which is made of a very strong plastic material. This invention was very popular in 1973 and managed to reduce the number of skateboard accidents caused by poor wheel capacity (Guinness World Records, 1973; SHOF, 2012). With a flexible wheel capacity for riding a skateboard, skateboard tricks began to develop that year. Then, despite the media label about skateboarding as a dangerous activity at the time, skateboarding became popular again and was known as an extreme sport for youth.

Figure 3. Frank Nasworthy and the urethane wheel



Source: SHOF (2012)

In 1976, skateboarding began to be known in Europe. Germany became the first European country which know about skateboard, especially in Munich. This happened because the US army introduced the skateboarding trend to young people in Munich (Hartleib & Hartleib, 2021). In addition, Titus Dittmann—one of the entrepreneurs in Germany, played an important role in the development of skateboarding there. He imports skateboard-related products from the United States and organizes skateboarding contests and events in Germany (Hartleib & Hartleib, 2021).

In the 1980s the trend of street skateboarding grew along with BMX and inline skates. This can be seen from the proliferation of industries related to skateboard such as shoes, t-shirts, hats, and other skateboarding equipment such as wheels, boards, trucks, bushings, bearings, grip tape, tools, and others. Not only that, one of the leading skateboard magazines—Thrasher—was also born in that era. Thrasher comes with the slogan “Skate and Destroy”. This slogan also became a new face for street skateboarders at that time, because it featured scenes of skate-punk, skate-rock, and street skateboarding.

Figure 4. Thrasher magazine cover in the 1980s



Source: Skatedeluxe.com

After expanding to various countries due to industrialization, in the 1990s, skateboarding began to fade out due to the emergence of a new sport that was more popular. However, due to the presence of digital technology, skateboards still existed in public in the 2000s. This can be seen from the high number of skateboarders in that era. Eventually, skateboard was recognized as a sport that was competed into athletics and began to become a branch of the Olympics.

2. Skateboard as a Subculture

Subculture has such a broad understanding, the concept can be ambiguous because there is no explicitly stated and universally accepted definition. In the broad meaning, subculture is defined as a cultural phenomenon in an

industrial society which is symbolically expressed in the creation of styles and collectively used to against the dominant culture (Hall & Jefferson, 2006; O'Connor, 2018b). The articulation of “against the dominant culture” is interpreted as a rebellion, as explained by Moran (2010) about the punk subculture.

Contrary to the understanding above, Olivo (2015) has its own view in defining subculture. According to him, subculture do not have to be shown in a way that is rebellious or contrary to the cultural values of the dominant society. Instead, subculture should focus on the styles, values, or practices that distinguish them from the dominant culture. Just because a subculture acts, dresses, or thinks differently from the dominant culture, doesn't mean that they have to do it in rebellious ways. They only

differentiate themselves and express the expressions they believe in. Therefore, Olivo (2015) further defines subculture as a socially constructed community to show their distinctive structure, so they can be identified as different from the dominant culture.

As stated by Olivo, the skateboard subculture can be identified from how they display their cultural character. For example, the characteristics of skateboarders mostly use skate shoes, hats and wear a hoodie or t-shirt as an identity they want to display. In general, this seems normal, but explicitly, the identity they use has the meaning of "freedom". Shoes, t-shirts/hoodies and hats are expressions of flexibility in moving in public spaces. By using a t-shirt or hoodie, they can move freely, according to the tricks they will do when skateboarding. They don't need special uniforms like football, basketball,

volleyball, or other athletes.

The skateboard subculture is a very unique and interesting phenomenon, because it is different from other subcultures. In the Olympics or Asian Games, skateboarding is an athletic sport that is officially competed. However, the public still thinks that skateboard is just a game or part of a trend. On the other hand, skateboarders define themselves as athletes who are highly dedicated because they are constantly training in new places (public facilities: streets and parks) to get new tricks. This is an interesting fact, because skateboard has its own style, ideology, value, and practice in expressing its identity. For example, they use the stairs in the city park as a place to practice and use whatever objects are in front of them as a medium to do some tricks. Look at the pictures below.

Figure 5. Skateboarders performing tricks in public spaces



Source: Primary data processed from instagram informants (2022)

The pictures above is a skateboarding action carried out by

informants in a public space. The first picture (far left) is Sanggu Dharma Tanjung performing the "crooked grind" trick at a public seat located in California. Then, the second picture (middle) is Rubianda Rachman doing the "shoevit 360" trick on a sidewalk. The last picture (far right) is Basral Garito Hutomo doing the "boardslide" trick in a city park. In the skateboard subculture, the actions of these three young skateboarders are a form of expression of the values they believe in. The ability to perform various tricks in new spots has more value for them, because from a visual perspective it is very commercial for sponsors. Meanwhile, in terms of skills, this is a recognition of fellow skateboarders for successfully conquering a new spot (Beal & Weidman, 2003). However, what the three informants did can be seen differently by the public. The discussion about the public perception of the skateboard subculture is discussed in the next chapter.

3. Public Perception on Skateboard: Representations and Misrepresentations

In a dominant public perception, skateboard still has a negative label (Buckingham, 2009). The self-actualization of skateboarders in riding their skateboards in public spaces,

especially in parks or sidewalks causes them to be seen as public facilities destroyer. Based on this statement, it can be seen that there is a disconnect between creativity and the expression of freedom in the public sphere (Johnston, 2016). First, skateboarders want to sharpen their skills in the new places and want to conquer these obstacles. Second, their actions as self-actualization in expressing their freedom cause damage to public facilities. In addition, their actions also caused conflicts with security, police, and other civilians who were disturbed by their actions on skateboarding.

The beginning of the stigmatized skateboard subculture is when skateboarders perform their actions in public facilities and these actions are considered to violate public values and norms. Some examples are doing boardslides on the handrails on city park stairs, noseslides on garden pots or sidewalks, jumping over wastebaskets, and so on. Normatively, handrails are facilities for people to descend stairs, garden pots are public facilities to beautify cities, and wastebaskets are public facilities for disposing of waste. However, for skateboarders, these objects are facilities to support their action.

If we look back at the history in California in the 1960s, there are interesting things that skateboarders did.

At that time, skateboarders used a dry swimming pool as their playground. As a result of this, the media began to create narratives that caused the skateboard subculture become a “stained group” in the dominant culture (Haenfler, 2013; Thurnell-Read, 2021). Since then, national

rhetoric and discourse have linked the skateboard subculture to criminality. This causes the skateboard subculture to be stereotyped and stigmatized as a criminal group that is not respected (Haenfler, 2012; Olivo, 2015).

Figure 6. A group of young playing their skateboards in a dry pool (California, 1960s)



Source: <http://chavezchavezchavez.blogspot.com/2011/07/dogtown-and-z-boys.html>

Basically, the skateboard subculture seems odds with the dominant culture. The value of the skateboard subculture triggers skateboarders to push boundaries and get new tricks. This things caused some damaged to several public facilities and forced the security or police to

conduct surveillance at several points that could potentially be used as places for skateboarding (Beal, 2019; Snyder, 2012). Even in some public facilities there are regulations that prohibit skateboarding in public spaces, such as on sidewalks and city parks.

Figure 6. No skateboarding signs in public spaces



Source: Deluccia (2015)

In general, the purpose of providing skate park facilities is to provide a place for skateboarders to perform their actions and develop their tricks. However, some of them do not feel comfortable if they have to continuously play in the skate park. This condition is driven by the value of freedom that is believed by skateboarders to express their creativity, because skateboarding is not a sport that has standard rules (Beal & Weidman, 2003). In addition, sponsors' demands sometimes make them playing

skateboard in public facilities in order to get a commercial photo/video scene. As a result, they choose locations such as city parks and/or sidewalks by sliding on benches, jumping over stairs, performing tricks on sidewalks, thus giving a bad image to a skateboarder.

The following is a mapping of public perceptions through the representation and misrepresentation of skateboards based on the timeline to make easier for the readers to understand the context. See the table below.

Table 1. Public representation and misrepresentation about skateboard

No	Periode	Representation	Misrepresentation
1	1960s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth • Productive • Take advantage to practice surfing—when there are no waves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dangerous games due to accidents caused by the imperfect skateboard materials.
2	1970-1980s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth • Inovative • Developing skateboard tricks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rebellion • Resistance • Destruction of public facilities
3	1990-2000s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hobby • Dedication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Game and style • Destruction of public facilities
4	2010-2020s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sport • Dedication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Competition ○ Sponsor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Game and style for Generation Z

Source: Primary data (2022)

In the 1960s—Public misrepresentation of skateboard was a dangerous game because of the accidents it caused. In fact, skateboarders see themselves as productive young people who use their time to practice surfing skills when there are no waves.

In the 1970-1980s—Public misrepresentation of skateboarding was an activity that damaged public facilities in public spaces. The invention of the urethane wheel has allowed skateboard to be played in multiple locations, so skateboarders take advantage of the durability of their skateboards to find new

tricks on the streets or city parks. On the other hand, the representation of skateboarders at that time was young people who were innovative in developing their skills through new tricks.

In the 1990-2000s—the media gave a framing that skateboarding was just a game or just a style. As a result, the public internalized the information. In fact, skateboarders see themselves as dedicated athletes who train hard to get the new tricks they want.

In the 2010-2020s—The public misrepresentation is skateboard just a game and a style of Generation Z. In fact, skateboarders represent themselves as athletes who are committed to participating in championships and competitions. In addition, they also represent themselves as young workers who work from skateboarding activities through sponsorships and championship prizes.

In relation to the data above, in the skateboard subculture, there are several elements that are tied to the dominant culture. In other words, there are values and practices that may appear to be different and sometimes contradictory to the dominant culture, but actually have many similar elements and run parallel to the dominant culture. For example, the ideology and practice of exploring new spots and looking for opportunities in

dealing with difficult times runs parallel to the ideologies and practices of industrial societies who are willing to take risks and try new things.

Although there is a disconnect between representation and misrepresentation of the skateboard subculture. Interestingly, there is a contradiction that shows skateboarding as a form of government rebellion through the use of public facilities as playing spots, on the other hand, industries provide support to skateboarders by providing them with sponsors. Although the government prohibits skateboarders from carrying out their activities in public facilities with security and/or police, the government also provides support to skateboarders by sending them delegates to international skateboard events or competitions.

4. Skateboard and Industry: Competition, Sponsorship and Jobs

The skateboard industry has grown rapidly in the last decade. Global View Research (2019) shows that in 2018 the global skateboard market was worth 1.9 billion USD and projected increase to 2.4 billion USD by 2025. According to Zach & David (2021), in the United States, skateboard has become a popular sport and in the third position after football and basketball. In terms of industry, United

States and Europe have the highest market commodities. But in the past year, skateboard's popularity has grown the most in Asia. The high popularity of skateboard is also caused by competitions such as X-Games, Street League, and the Olympics. With this kind of competition, skateboarding is increasingly recognized by the public, through news from online mass media, that is easily accessible by the public through social media (Miller, 2021). Apart from that, the market demand which is dominated by young people is also the reason for the high popularity of skateboard.

Through a skateboard competition, a young skateboarder not only gets a reward, but also has the opportunity to be

monitored by a well-known brand. This condition is an opportunity for them to get sponsorship and generate income. This is the reason why skateboard is seen as a sport that is associated with the ideology of neoliberalism, where this sport is part of a global industry worth billions (Donnelly, 2008; O'Connor, 2016). So, it is not surprising that young people make skateboard as their job. This method is commonly used by young skateboarders to gain recognition from the public due to the subculture process they go through. By appearing on several websites, social media, or billboards from well-known brands, it can help them show the values and styles of the skateboard subculture that they follow. Thereby, it also increases their popularity in public.

Figure 7. Skateboard rider recruitment process



Source: Primary data (2022)

The relationship between skateboard and industry can not be separated, especially in employment issues, young skateboarders benefit from the skateboard industry. Besides they can play their hobby, they can also earn income. This is interesting because through a long subculture process, they are able to achieve their subcultural status through the accumulation of

abilities and experiences (Li, 2022). This condition is also an opportunity for skateboarders to fight the stigmatization that has made them marginalized (Geckle & Shaw, 2022). So, the skateboard industry is a potential way that able to fight the inequality of public perception about skateboard through proving that skateboard is a job that generates income. To find out how popular young

skateboarders are in the public sphere, I informant in this study. Look at the table have identified the sponsors of each below.

Table 2. Young Indonesian skateboarders and their sponsors (2022)

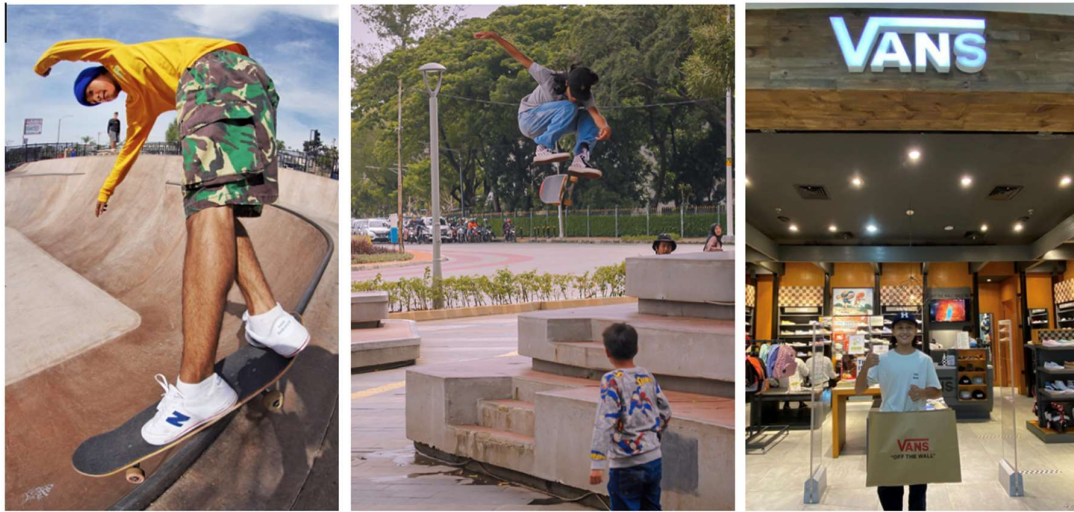
No	Name	Sponsor	Brand	Scale
1	Sanggoe Dharma Tanjung	1. New Balance 2. Flip Skateboard 3. Volcom 4. Motion Skateboards	1. Shoes 2. Skateboard 3. Clothing 4. Skateboards	1. International 2. International 3. International 4. Local
2	Rubianda Rachman	1. Vans 2. Motion Skateboards 3. Stay Cool Socks 4. Insurgent	1. Shoes 2. Skateboard 3. Socks 4. Clothing	1. International 2. Local 3. Local 4. International
3	Basral Garito Hutomo	1. Vans 2. Flip Skateboard 3. Televisistar 4. Malibu Skate Shop	1. Shoes 2. Skateboard 3. Clothing 4. Skate Shop	1. International 2. International 3. International 4. Local

Source: Primary data (2022)

Based on the data above, it can be seen that the three informants in this study have a main job as a skateboarder with a salary paid by each sponsor. The amount of income between informants are variety, depend on the sponsor who contracted them. Until this article was written, I have not found a specific amount of salary for each informant. However, in one article Kumparan (2018), it is stated that one of the young Indonesian skateboarders (Rubianda Rachman) has a salary that can be used to buy some smartphone such as iPhone. Another example, Sanggoe Dharma Tanjung, his

main sponsor is New Balance (one of the leading shoe manufacturers from the United States). During his contract with New Balance, he was frequently invited by the company to come to the United States and do several photo shoots and make commercial videos. In addition, on several occasions he was also invited to travel to several countries to participate in international competitions and represent the brand. From his trips to various countries, he got fresh money and some shoe products that the company gave to him.

Figure 8. Young skateboarders take a photoshoot with their sponsor



Source: Primary data processed from instagram informants (2022)

In the skateboard industry, it is not enough for a young skateboarder to just playing skateboard, get tricks, and participate in the competitions, but they have to be active in producing content (photos/videos) to support the marketing of the sponsor's brand (Snyder, 2012). The picture above shows each informant doing a photo shoot with the brand that sponsored them. From the left to the right: (1) Sanggu Dharma Tanjung is doing photo shoot with New Balance in California, United States of America. (2) Rubianda Rachman is doing a photo shoot with vans shoes in a city park in Indonesia. (3) And the last one is Basral Garito Hutomo, who is taking a photo in front of one of his sponsors (vans shoes).

Conclusion

In this section, I want to convey two main points as the conclusions and notes of this article. **First**, although the skateboard subculture is a subject to public representation and misrepresentation. However, young skateboarders try to show that this misrepresentation is not completely acceptable and generalizable. These efforts are carried out by making skateboard as a medium for young people to have achievements and generate their salaries. Therefore, the meaning of skateboard as a subculture has evolved, where young people not only see skateboarding as a form of self-actualization, but also as a space where they can develop their talents and fulfill

their needs through collaboration with the sponsors. **Second**, academic studies on the sociology of sports, particularly skateboard, are an academic debate that needs to be explored more depth in Indonesia, because the key literature on this issue is still very limited. However, there are many aspects that could be developed. In addition, skateboard is a strategic issue because of the high popularity of skateboard in Indonesia.

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