

Fandom Culture in White Raven Community

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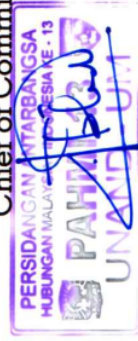
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FANDOM CULTURE IN WHITE RAVEN COMMUNITY

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Abstract. This research is aimed to find out the fandom culture of White Raven community. Fandom culture is a culture where the community is not only as the consumer but also as the production. The fan group is not only related to consumption but also related to the production of cultural texts, in this case, Japanese popular culture. White Raven is a Japanese popular fandom culture Padang, which was found on March 5th, 2013. This research applied the perspective of cultural studies with qualitative research methods. The research approach used text analysis and interviews. The results showed that the White Raven community was not a passive community, but they did an active reading by reproducing cultural texts in order to increase the creativity of community members.

Keywords: fandom culture, white raven, cultural studies, Japanese popular culture

1. Introduction

In Japanese, popular culture is also known as *taishuu bunka* that consist of the word *taishuu* which means a great number of people and *bunka* which means culture. Hence, *taishuu bunka* can mean a great number of people's culture, a culture that is favored by many people. Not only Japanese people but also people from other countries like this popular culture, especially Indonesian. Japanese popular culture first come to Indonesia in the early 1990s that begins with *manga* (a term for Original comics from Japan) [6]. It is afterward followed by *anime* (animation arts from Japan), fashion, J-Pop (Japanese pop music), and others.

Due to the entry of Japanese popular culture, Indonesian people began to consume this culture, even on a massive scale. They consume this culture in the form of visuals, collecting things, representation or also known as costume players (cosplay), and so on. Meanwhile, they also consume the cultural products itself such as games, action figures, clothing, merchandise, and others.

People who consume these cultural products are called fans. Fans are always categorized as a potential bigotry that means a group of fans are seen as excessive behavior and close to madness [5]. Furthermore, the fans are treated in two ways, laughed at or cataloged. However, cultural studies reject the nostalgic and romantic way of thinking [5].

Nevertheless, these fans can be found in various gatherings or activities regarding certain hobbies related to Japanese popular culture. These group of fans subsequently create a community called *fandom*. Fandom, an acronym for the fanatic domain, is a term that refers to a subculture created by a group of fans formed who share the same interests. They subsequently create Japanese community to facilitate and accommodate their passion toward Japanese culture, including Japanese popular culture.

Japanese communities in Indonesia do not only appear in the big cities; however, Padang is also a city that has several Japanese communities, one of them is the White Raven community. White Raven is the most active community consuming Japanese popular culture in Padang. It can be seen in their social media accounts that regularly update about Japanese culture. The White Raven Community was found on 05 March 2013 to facilitate the consumption activities of Japanese culture fans. The White Raven Community actively take part in various Japanese cultures events or other cultural events.

This research was conducted to discuss the culture of the White Raven fans community. It aimed at finding out how the White Raven community enjoys and consumes their favorite cultures. Thus, it can be known what kind of meaning production occurs to be able to reject the negative stereotypes or stigma about fans.

2. Cultural Studies and Fandom Culture

In cultural studies, culture is known as texts and practices of everyday life. Cultural studies are seen as important sites for the production and reproduction of social relations in everyday life. A text (culture) can only mean something in the context of experience and situation of the audience. Text does not define how the texts are used or what functions can be carried out. Whereas, texts can have different utility for different people in different contexts. It covers how a specific text is used, how the text is interpreted, how it functions for the audience, which are closely related through the struggle to create a better place for it [5].

In this case, text (culture) is popular culture. Popular culture refers to a culture that is popular in many people and tends to be compared with other cultures. As explained by Storey [4], popular culture is simply culture which is widely favored or well-liked by many people. Heryanto [2] added that popular culture has its own characteristics that easily accessible and immediately attract many people's attention. When it is produced for sale, the works and practices are relatively inexpensive and attract many people's attention from various races, dwellings, ages, and genders.

However, from a high culture perspective, popular culture is placed below the standards of taste, aesthetics, even quality. Storey (1996) [5] explained that popular culture becomes the central study in cultural studies, even though it is not only the popular culture. It is caused by the meaning of culture that is not interpreted politically rather than aesthetically, interpreted and understood through texts and cultural practices that emerge every day. This negative perspective gives rise to a discourse about *liyan* (other). As Jenkins [3] explained that *liyan* is a representation of fans whose tastes and cultural practices differ from the aesthetic logic of the dominant.

Meanwhile, fans occupy an important position in cultural studies where the cultural studies against a discourse that assumes fans as *liyan*. According to Storey [5], cultural studies reject the definition of fans as a negative side, lonely people, potential deviations, and alienated people. Fans are not only enthusiastic readers but also fill the empty spaces in popular culture texts. Thus, fan culture is important to discuss in cultural studies.

The study of fan culture (fandom culture) cannot be separated from consumption and production culture. Consumption emerged as a cultural concern in the late 1950s and early 1960s debating about the development of 'consumer societies'. It was obviously visible in the 1970s in cultural studies where exist in a work about how various subcultures provided various commodities to produce alternative and oppositional meanings [5]. Consumption Culture is also seen as a diversion strategy and an endless search to 'force' a person to consume certain products.

Meanwhile, production culture is a response to cultural texts that have been consumed. Fandom culture then becomes a participatory culture where fans change their experience of consuming media by producing new texts, and even new cultures [3]. Therefore, fandom culture reproduces the culture as a response to text about a group of fans based on consuming experiences [5].

4 3. Research Method

This research¹ used a qualitative method² based on the opinion of Bogdan and Taylor (in Endraswara, 2006) which states that the qualitative perspective is to produce descriptive data in the form of written or oral words from people and observable behavior. The research emphasis was directed at the background¹ and the individual in a holistic way. The qualitative method was done by observation and interview techniques. This study used a cultural study approach that focuses on fandom culture. Fandom culture is used to concern the research focus to connoisseurs of cultural products by community members.

4.1. Sampling Technique

¹ The population of this study was the Japanese community named White Raven in Padang.

4.2. Data Collection Technique

¹ The research data consisted of primary and secondary data. Data collection was done through online data searching, non-participant observation, literature study, and interviews. Interview techniques were carried out through social networks and interview the community directly based on the prepared-questions points. Meanwhile, secondary data were obtained from previous studies related to this study and through the documentation of respondents' activities.

4.3. Data Analysis Technique

¹ In processing the data, the interview results with respondents were analyzed. The secondary data were sorted based on the focus of the study. The data analysis was carried out by classifying the respondents' answers, afterward an interpretation was made to answer the research questions in the formulation of the research problem.

5. Result and Discussion

This study discussed fandom culture, namely the cultural consumption and reproduction by the White Raven Community from the perspective of cultural studies. White Raven was founded on March 5, 2013. In Indonesian, White Raven means White Crow and *Shiroi Karasu* in Japanese. The name of White Raven was inspired by crows that are generally black, however, white crows will be unique and have their own characteristics. It was an inspiring story behind the name given of this community with a purpose that White Raven will always be unique and has its own characteristics among other communities and can reach many high achievements ahead.

White Raven is a group of fans who love Japanese popular cultures such as *manga*, *anime*, cosplay, J Music, action figures, games, merchandise, *Yugi-oh* cards, *Gundam*, and others. Nevertheless, they do not only consume the culture they love but they also became fans who actively changed their experiences in consuming culture into the production of new texts/cultures.

In consuming the culture, all the community members become creative in finding practical and cheaper ways to consume cultural products due to the need for much money to spend in order to have related cultural products. It is also in the same line when viewing from cultural studies' perspectives that the popular cultural products will 'force' the audience or fans to spend more money such as buying merchandise related to the characters they like (posters, clothes, bracelets, hats and key chains), collecting action figures, creating some costume for cosplay and its equipment.

White Raven community has regular gatherings scheduled every Thursday afternoon at Pendopo of Faculty of Language and Arts in Universitas Negeri Padang where they came with their costumes that resembled certain characters. The ability to create those costumes is obtained from the result of gathering routines schedule. They do not only talk about the cultures they consume but also talk about how to create costumes that resemble their favorite characters.

White Raven community members usually wear a certain costume (cosplay) to perform in various Japanese cultural events or the other popular culture events, or they just come to attend those related events. If the members want to participate in the cosplay competition, this community has its own rules as requirements to take part in a certain competition; they have to create their own costume. Additionally, the member who has already won a cosplay competition in a particular event, it is no longer allowed to take part in the other competitions in the related event. It can give a chance for the other members to show their creativity in creating costumes. Therefore, they do not only show their passion for Japanese popular culture by attending some events or contests in wearing certain costumes but also show their creativity in creating certain costumes to the public and trying to resemble the original character even in limited material and cost.

The main material they use to make those certain costumes is a material made from Eva Sponge Sheet. It is easy to get and commonly used by other cosplayers to create costumes. Besides, using other materials such as some expensive materials, resin and fiberglass, the cost must be incurred. However, by using Eva Sponge Sheet, they spend about a hundred thousand Rupiahs to create a costume, and still below five hundred thousand Rupiahs depending on their artificial costume itself. Although they use cheap material to create the costumes, what make those costume expensive is their handmade creations.

Due to the limit of the materials, cost, and resources that can be avoided, the proportional costume creation is not perfectly created. Nevertheless, they live the character they love, and they can animate and represent the character well. They do some choreographies and movements identical to the characters' play to appreciate each character. They surely did some deep observation about the character they want to imitate before the performance in order to demonstrate as the same as the original character.

Creating some costumes and doing choreography to imitate the original characters are ways that they do together to interpret the text. They do not work alone, yet they do some interaction with the fans in the community. In conclusion, they are indeed united by the same interests even though their acceptance toward the text is different.

6. Conclusion

This research was conducted due to focusing on consumption and reproduction activities by the White Raven community. White Raven is part of a group of fans who consume cultural texts, especially Japanese popular culture. Some negative perspectives about a lonely fandom culture and potential to be distorted and alienated are inavoided by the White Raven Community. These negative perspectives occur in society because they are considered not being nationalist due to their passion in foreign culture seem bigger than their own culture. The

society see them as a strange community because of their unusual appearance, and they got many other teasings from society.

However, White Raven community do some creative activities that are not only consuming the culture but also reproduce them. Despite the limited resources and cost, the White Raven community can still be creative in producing new cultural products as a result of their experience in consuming popular culture.

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