

Engaging with Anime and Manga: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract

The popularity of Japanese popular culture in Indonesia, especially anime and manga, has made the growth of anime and manga fans increase. Despite the fact that Indonesia and Japan share differences in language, cultural and geographical aspects, but people who become fans of anime and manga keeps amplifying. This research, therefore, was aimed to study fans of anime and manga in terms of seeking aspects that make people become fans and changes they have experienced as fans of anime and manga. This research was developed by using phenomenological approach of qualitative research method. Observation and in-depth interviews were conducted to get the data and information from informants regarding their experiences and opinion toward anime and manga. This study has revealed that media and technology trigger the increasing numbers of anime and manga fans, but there are other aspects triggering people to become anime and manga fans: 1) their social environments, 2) the characteristics of anime and manga, 3) the access to get anime and manga and 4) preferences to fulfill their certain needs. The fans have experienced some changes and their changes have pervaded in almost all aspects of their life.

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I. INTRODUCTION

What is fan? Semantically the word 'fan(s)' is multi perspective. It means that there is no such an exact meaning for 'fan(s)' depending on contexts and who defines it. The term itself has been used since the 19th century. At that time, an understanding of a fan was associated with a person who had deviant behaviour, was psychologically ill and a victim of pop culture industry.

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As the time goes by, the meaning has shifted because there have been massive developments or changes in technology, social and cultural aspects. In this research context, generally, ‘fan’ is known as a person who is engaged and holds deep interest with various objects of popular culture. Fans also tend to create or reconstruct sites or artefacts that they think important to their particular interest of fandom and often led them to create amateur historical work which later contributes to popular culture history (Reagin& Rubenstein, 2011; Siuda, 2010).

The word ‘fans’ was used to describe the fans sports-club team, therefore in the past time, ‘fans’ were usually used to define a person who appreciated and was an enthusiast/devotee of sports, but then because of development of popular culture and digital technology, it has expanded to other fields of interests such as music, film, literature and so on (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). Development of technology creates changes on culture and media, and also makes the fan culture spread in almost every part of the world, including Indonesia.

In Indonesia the existence of popular culture seems obvious. The popular culture varies from western to eastern one such as hip hop music from western, Turkey soap opera, *kawaii* fashion from Japan, and so forth. Japanese pop culture or J-Pop Culture (Japanese Popular Culture) recently is one of the most popular and influential towards people in Indonesia and throughout the world. Their products like *harajuku* fashion styles, music, movies, video games, *anime* and *manga* have influenced society massively. For instance, there are many events to gather the fans and enthusiasm of Japanese Pop culture such as *Ennichisai*, *Sakura Matsuri*, *Jak-Japan* and so on. Mostly in such events, besides showing traditional culture of Japan like tea ceremony (Chanoyu/Sado or simply Ocha in Japanese), *kimono*, traditional music(*gagaku*) and traditional dances e.g.*Bon Odori*, they also show modern sides or popular culture of Japan. Certainly the event usually becomes an opportunity to expand and to promote Japanese popular culture such as Jpop Music,*Anime*, *Manga* and *Harajuku*.

If we talk about Japanese popular culture, it cannot be separated from *anime* and *manga* because of their popularity all over the world and currently they are ‘huge’ industries, even in the United States (Chambers, 2012). There are quite a lot of people who are not the fans of *anime* and *manga* are also familiar these popular cultural products due to the fans’ loyalty spread by advanced technology. In addition to this, fans act as “the distributor agents” by introducing as well as distributing the translated *anime* and *manga* version for those residing outside Japan and they do not understand Japanese (since the original version is on Japanese). This distribution of translated *anime* and *manga* is a key of global successJapanese sweep on its popular culture (Bryce, 2010).

Cultural differences and languages between Japan and Indonesia do not disband their fans of being more familiar with *manga* and *anime*. These differences even create an increasing understanding and passion among their fans e.g. annual Japan Pop culture festivals such as AFA ID (*Anime Festival Asia Indonesia*), *Sakura Matsuri* in Cikarang, *Ennichisai* in Jakarta, Cosplay Live Action Show: Hybrid in Bandung, *Mangafest*. Many local events relating to

Japanese culture held in some local schools and universities in Indonesia have contributed extensively to the growth of *manga* and *anime* in the country.

Activities like watching *anime* and/or reading *manga* frequently, writing fan fictions, drawing characters, attending conventions or *anime* community gathering and collecting the merchandise relating to their favourite *anime* and *manga* are kinds of devoted activities that those fans usually do. They are often willing to spend money no matter how much it costs. Fans do this to express their fandom identity through objects that relate to their fandom (merchandise and costume play). Some of them are productive (create fan fiction, etc.) and some of them lead to the consumptive behaviour (buying and collecting merchandises). However, whether it is consumerism or productive, fan activities require physical objects (Woo, 2014).

Audience do not become fans for granted. There are some aspects and processes or turning points when they transform from “ordinary audience” to “fans” and as the product of Japanese popular culture, *anime* and *manga* do contain several or even Japanese values such as habits, norms, tradition, slang words, and so on. By watching *anime* and reading *manga* frequently, the audience will receive information, interpret and decode the information they get during the time they consume it and certainly the Japanese values inserted in *anime* and *manga* create the changes in fans perception, behaviour or habits. Therefore, this research explored the aspects that make people become fans of *anime* and *manga* and the changes fans have experienced when they become the fans.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Audience, Fan and Fandom Studies

The basic concept relating to studies on media however is audience. Audience are receivers of information or messages and the ones who will pay to get such information or messages. The audience are not the only ones who are targeted as consumers or buyers for some products, people who produce media products are at the same time also become the audience to the material they produce. For instance editors of magazines also read other magazine, TV producer also watch another television programmes and so on (Burton, 2002).

Active Audience Reception Theory

Audience not only become passive receivers which only “sit” and accept information surrounding them, but they actively and even unconsciously involved in creating the meaning of every messages they received. In fact, every form of information delivered through media contain ambiguity and it makes the interpretation of its meaning can be different depend on audience experience, background and personal contexts therefore the real meaning of the text was created by personal experience of the reader.

In his model Hall stated that the messages are created or encoded by the producers and it contains the information or values that producer intended to deliver. Then the messages are delivered to targeted audience through certain medium or channel. After the messages “arrived” to the targeted audience, then the audience will decode the messages through one of these three positions: 1) Dominant position which is the audience will take the information in accordance with what producer intended to deliver, 2) Negotiated position which is the audience accept certain part of what producers intended to deliver, and the reject the part that seems to not fit to their personal context, and 3) The opposite position which is audience will reject all the intended meaning from producers and instead, using their own interpretation to create meaning. There are many factors that influence audience to decode their messages, such as life experience and their cultural background. This explains why audience from different background of culture and beliefs could reject some messages or even has different interpretation.

Fan and Fandom

According to Lewis (1992), the term fans and fandom refer to “any set of extremely devoted followers of a media star or performer, performance or text”. They are usually identified by great, even obsessive attachment to their object of attraction. Often they show a strong sense of awareness and fellow-feeling with other fans. Become a fan also involves a pattern of supplementary behaviour, in dress, speech, other media use, consumption, and so on (McQuail, 2010 p.344).

The trends on fans research began in 1930’s and since that time the academic opinion about fans has kept changing because of the change in trends, technology and globalization. From the first time the term “fan” appeared, fans have been considered as deviant people or “abnormal” ones in a society because they seemed to overly enjoy and follow things in “uncommon” way and even become “pathological” individuals which are the victims of pop culture industries. However, the development of technology has provided almost unlimited access for continuous research on fan as well as fandom studies and, in turn, changed the understanding of the terms of fan. This has slowly led towards positive direction on what fans are all about. Fans nowadays become “mainstream” and are not “victims” of pop culture industries but as the audience that support media industries and selectively choose the content on media industry – not merely accept it.

Burton (2002) states in his book *Media Psychology* that there are types of need that one can meet through consuming media like watching, reading or listening in the context of this theory: (1) Need for information, based on curiosity, (2) Need to maintain a sense of personal identity, to check media exemplar for behaviour, (3) Need for social interaction, using examples from the media to developing one’s social relationship, and (4) Need to be entertained and diverted, to escape from reality and attain a pleasure.

Based on the idea above, people who consume media are active audience because they select the content they want to consume and use it to match their needs although the choice of content is limited. They take decision to interpret the meaning by themselves.

Cultural Studies

Cultural studies are “theoretical perspectives that focus on how powerful, dominant groups influence culture” (cited in West & Turner, 2010.p.362). This perspective concerns the attitude, approach and criticism of culture. In particular, cultural studies focus on “popular” things opposingto “high class” culture.

Popular Culture

Three definitions of culture are stated by Williams; first it implies a general process of intellectual, spiritual and development of aesthetics. Second, it denotes a certain way of life of specific people or group and the third definition is focused on the works, artistic activity and intellectual practices. Those definitions are related to each other from the current perspectives of popular culture. Popular culture forms a major place for citizens to create meaning and therefore the way modern theorists have sought to conceptualize popular culture merits close attention (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009, p.762).

According to John Storey in his books entitled *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An introduction* (2009) popular culture is the term having various meaning. Popular culture can be described as “simply culture that is widely favoured or well-liked by many people”. Williams (1983) also suggests four current meanings for the term popular culture: ‘well-liked by many people’; ‘inferior kinds of work’; ‘work deliberately setting out to win favour with the people’; ‘culture actually made by the people for themselves’(Storey, 2009, p.5).

Nowadays the term ‘popular culture’ is more defined as “the everyday, the mainstream, and that commonly accessible culture produced for mass consumption”. Because of this mass consumption, that is why popular culture gives huge influence towards almost everything in society and daily life, such as fashion, food, lifestyle, behaviour and so on. As phenomena popular culture is intimately connected with education, mass communication, production and society’s ability to access knowledge (Jacobs et al, 2015). Commonly popular culture covers the study of texts (popular fiction, television, pop music, etc.) and live cultures or practices (seaside holidays, youth subcultures, the celebration of Halloween, etc.)

Japanese Popular Culture:Anime and Manga

For most of people, the term Japanese popular culture is often associated with *manga*, *anime* and J-pop. “Pop” in the context of Japanese popular culture has meaning “popular” as in “of the people”, it is rather different from the usage in western which tends to describe “light” culture and “well-liked by many people”(Seaton & Yamamura, 2015).

Anime and *manga* as the central of Japanese Popular Culture are forms of a hybrid text which means that *anime* and *manga* are a mixture of Japanese art and western comic one. Cartoons, drawings, and comics are examples of “*Manga*”, while movies, videos, and animated pictures are “*anime*”. *Anime* is also called “*Japanimation*”.

Manga and *anime* usually employ many symbols such as sweat drop indicating the nervousness of character, having nosebleed as a symbol of sexual arousal and flowers showing the romantic or happy atmosphere. Different sizes and shapes of certain body parts are also showing the different meanings such as larger eye as showing innocence or cuteness, smaller eyes showing coldness and etc. The character image shift from “realistic” forms to “super-deformed” in one frame usually shows that the characters are affected by strong emotion. These kinds of iconographic symbols makes the readers of *manga* and *anime* audience perceive the meaning instantly by reading or watching it. In some cases, however, there are also *manga* and *anime* which do not show details of iconic symbols like mentioned above. These *anime* and *manga* types depends on the genre and target audience (Bryce, 2010).

Besides various genres already mentioned above, things like featured characters, plots and themes in *anime* and *manga*, which audience can align themselves also become the reason that *anime* and *manga* are easy to be accepted. For some audience, emotional intensity and character's complexity in *anime* and *manga* appeal for them as they have similar experiences with the characters. In summary, *manga* and *anime* can fulfil their needs of entertainment and to “escape from reality” (Bryce, 2010).

In Indonesia *anime* was introduced in early 1980 in the form of video tapes. The first batch of *anime* aired in Indonesia was the one that had been popular in Japan in the 70s such as Google V, Ultraman, Doraemon, Candy-Candy, Gundam and many others. They were also the pioneers of the *anime* in Indonesia. These *anime* characters at that time attracted a large audience and started becoming a trend in Indonesia because *anime* gave the different characteristics compared to animation from America or Europe, therefore Indonesian people view *anime* as a new and unique form of entertainment.

Media Ecology Theory

McLuhan suggest that media are like ecological system which is the change in media such as technology and media development shapes the perceptions, feeling, emotion, and value for those who “live” in that ecosystem. The power of technology and media to construct society can exist because of communication bias and also communication media have ability to control and deliver the opinion and idea to the society (Turner & West, 2010).

Media ecology stated three assumptions. First, media infiltrate every action in society. People can't avoid or escape from media. This kind of media such as radios, television and games construct the society. Second assumption is, media fix perceptions and organizes experiences. For instances, when people watch television or read newspaper, unconsciously they will get influenced and somehow manipulated by the news or information that exist in those media and

they surely will create changes to their daily life. The third assumption is that media tie and connect the world together. Media lead people into creating global village, which is defined as the world that media unite into becoming one big political, economic, social, and cultural system.

III. METHOD

This research was conducted by using qualitative research method using phenomenological approach because it was best suited to be used for exploring and understanding individual as ascribed to social or human problem and also qualitative research method was focused on interpreting the data gained from participants directly.

Furthermore phenomenological approach is used to describe a common phenomenon that individuals experience such as “how” and “why” they experience it. In this context the objects studied are fans, *anime* and *manga*. Therefore the common phenomenon they experienced is their fanatical emotional tie toward *anime* and *manga*.

The research was limited and only covered particular scopes, which describe the aspects that have made people or audience become *anime* and *manga* fans. Therefore researchers will know what kind of aspects that make people or audience of popular culture “turn” into fans in general. In this context, the research studied *anime* and *manga* fans of popular and various genres in Indonesia since there are so many kinds of *anime* and *manga* ranging for children to adult.

In order to gain primary data for this research about study on fans of *anime* and *manga*, researcher used in-depth interview and observation methods to certain informants. Their selection was based on criteria set up by the researchers. The secondary data were taken from previous journals, research and books related to this research e.g audience, fan and fandom studies, communication theories, cultural/popular culture studies and media studies. The researchers also sought some changes that fans have experienced when they become fans of *anime* and *manga*. Actually *anime* and *manga* are not the only products from Japanese Popular Culture, but since their popularity has reached people in the world, therefore the researchers used *anime* and *manga* as the indicators to find the aspects that make people or audience become fans of Japanese popular culture.

The selected informants were mostly in the 20's since the researcher selected the informants that the researchers are familiar with. A reason for it is to make the process of data collecting easier, especially during the in-depth interview so that the openness, amenities and flexibility from the informants needed most were met. In addition, the locations where the informants collected were randomly chosen. Gender was not the concern in this research; therefore the informants are male and female.

IV. FINDING & ANALYSIS

Aspects that make people become fans of *anime* and *manga*

Based on the data gained, what made them interested in *anime* and *manga* was various. Although the informant stated differently, but the aspects making *anime* and *manga* become appealing to them were the art styles (artwork) and the stories. Furthermore, what made them like *anime* and *manga* was the story, cultural aspect, knowledge, drawing technique and. Every individual has his/her own preferences regarding what kind of entertainment they need, what kind of shows they like, and so on.

The changes fans experienced when they started becoming fans of *anime* and *manga*

When a person becomes a fan of certain object or thing it means that s/he is devoted, attached and sometimes obsessed to things. In this context, fans had different perspectives with non-fans towards *anime* and *manga* and this perspective shaped their perception. The perception of every individual created changes on her/his attitude and behaviours.

Therefore, based on the data analysis, there were several aspects involving the process of audience to transform themselves to become *anime* and *manga* fans: (1) media and technology, the social environment, (2) easy access to get *anime* and *manga*, (3) characteristics of *anime* and *manga* and (4) fans preferences to fulfil certain needs. Media and technology such as television, internet and video games were the important aspects supporting the development of *anime* and *manga* popularity throughout the world. Next, social environment like family and friends also took part in the process of becoming fans. Neutral and even positive reaction from family and friend was enough to support them to be fans, moreover the influence of friends and peers were strong enough to trigger them to be more interested in and obsessed to *anime* and *manga*.

Books, DVDs, and *anime* stores also triggered the fans to consume more and more of *anime* and *manga* because of this easy access. These fans went to the stores that were mentioned above to get their collection of *anime* and *manga* and stuff related to it. Referring to fulfil their certain need, as stated in Uses and Gratification theory, there are types of needs that one can attain through consuming media: (1) Need for information, based on curiosity, (2) Need to maintain a sense of personal identity, to check media exemplar for behaviour, (3) Need for social interaction, using examples from the media to develop one's social relationship, (4) Need to be entertained and diverted, to escape from reality and attain some kind of pleasure.

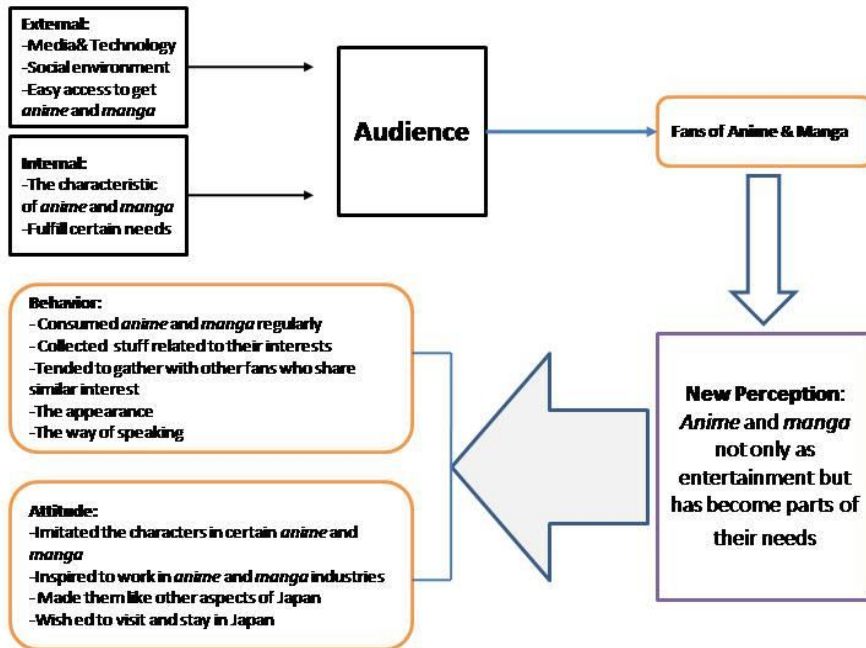
Such changes, from audience to fans, changed their perspectives toward *anime* and *manga* and the changes in perspectives created new perception toward *anime* and *manga*. As the result, the new perception certainly influenced behaviour and attitude of fans. The changing behaviour meant was the way they consume *anime* and *manga*.

Fans consumed *anime* and *manga* regularly. The way they consume *anime* and *manga* was different from ordinary audiences, who only consume it rarely and even would rather not read *manga* or watch *anime*. In general, fans also loved collecting stuff regarding their favourite *anime* and *manga* such as merchandises; figurine, poster, etc. because it was a kind of fun and could satisfy their need as the fans. They also incline to gather with other fans who shared similar interests with them. It could be like joining community, club or have group that consists of people who also fans of *anime* and *manga* to do discussion and exchange information about any updates regarding their interest.

Their appearance was also influenced just like the way they do a *cosplay*. For instance, when fans came to an event they usually wore costumes or attributes (sticker, pin, bag, and hat), it was like the way they showed their fandom or favourite *anime* and *manga* characters through this activity. Frequently, in their daily life, they also dressed up like their favourite *anime* and *manga*. The way they talked was also highly influenced by *anime* and *manga* because of continuously exposed to *anime* (that uses Japanese language). These fans sometimes uttered out Japanese words they got from *anime*, even unconsciously when they gathered with other fans.

Not only did their behaviour change, but also their attitude also did. They tended to imitate the personality of certain *anime* and *manga* characters that they believed to have inspired them and applied it in their daily life. What is surprising is when they imitated the way character interacted to one another in certain *anime* and *manga* scenes and made it as a role model of social interaction among them (mimetic). Besides, these fans of *anime* and *manga* had a thought or WERE inspired to work in *anime* or *manga* industries because of their interest to *anime* and *manga*. *Anime* and *manga* also made them interested in another aspect from Japan such as its traditional culture, traditional food, snacks, and even they wished to visit and stay in Japan if they could. Conclusively, *anime* and *manga* did change the perception of the fans and modified their behaviours and attitude.

Figure 1 Pattern of Research Result



V. CONCLUSION

Based on the research finding and analysis, the researchers have concluded that there were several aspects making people become fans of *anime* and *manga* by which the researchers categorize into two major aspects: external and internal ones. These aspects are interrelated and supported each other; they are as follows: Below the researcher will breakdown the aspect that makes people become fans of *anime* and *manga*:

A. External:

- a. Media and technology development
 - i. The broadcasting of *anime* on television
 - ii. Distribution of video games
 - iii. The Internet development
- b. Social environment
- c. Easy access to get *anime* and *manga*

B. Internal:

- a. The characteristics of *anime* and *manga*

b. Fulfilment of certain needs of individual

Afterwards, the changes from audience to fans of *anime* and *manga* transformed the perspective of individual toward *anime* and *manga*. The changes in individual perspectives will create new perception toward *anime* and *manga* because perception exists as the results of perspective. The new perception in fans certainly will modify the behaviour and attitude of the fans.

As in cultural study assumptions, culture pervades almost all aspects in people's daily life. Culture in this context is delivered from *anime* and *manga*. Becoming fans changed the perspective of those people toward *anime* and *manga* and thus it also changed their perception on it. By consuming *anime* and *manga*, the culture appearing in *anime* and *manga* was recorded to create changes in fans' behaviour and attitude.

However, the aspects mentioned previously are not absolute, since development of technology, media and popular culture are still going on. Therefore in the future there may be another aspect that will trigger people to become fans of *anime* and *manga* and thus reshape their perception again.

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