

# Ethnography Study about Fanaticism of "Figure Purwokerto" Community's Members

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**Article History:** **Abstract.** This research is aimed to figuring out the fanaticism from the members of an action figure community in Purwokerto called "Figure Purwokerto". "Figure Purwokerto" community is an action figure community located in Purwokerto, Central Java, Indonesia. The total of the member is about 241 people from different age and culture. The researchers use focus group discussion and interview as the method to gain the information that the researcher needed for research purposes. The researchers applies some theories in order to obtain further analysis related to the issue. Fanaticism theory is used to figure out the fanaticism of "Figure Purwokerto" community's members. Another theory, the Cultural Studies: Cultural Consumption Research, is added to make a deeper analysis about the consumption of culture from the members of the community. The scope of this research is cultural studies under the umbrella of English Studies which relates to American culture and supremacy with action figure as the media. Furthermore, the discussion of this study is divided into two main parts which correspondent with the fanaticism happened in Figure Purwokerto community. The first part explains the portrayal of the fanaticism from the members of the community. The characteristics of a person can be said as a fanatics are included in this part. The second part explains the cultural relation between the members and the action figure as a culture. The result of this research concludes that the members are fanatic based on several aspects and characteristics of a fanatic. This research was also conducted to make another prespective of fanaticism which is seen as a bad term due to it's relation to religion fanaticism.

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## INTRODUCTION

People in our society are familiar with fanaticism. They often see fanaticism as a part of their lives. A person who really like a football club is an example. That person certainly possesses the club's attributes like jersey or any other attributes

as a way to support his/her favorite club. However, the meaning of fanaticism term is actually wide. It does not only cover a football lover, nor any particular religion fanatics. It also covers many aspects of our life. In this case, the term of fanaticism is used in a community of action figure collectors.

Community is a place for people who have same interest. Although the people come from many different backgrounds, they share common interest. An example is an interest in action figure. An action figure community consist of many people from the young age to the adults. They make a group or community to gather more people who have the same interest as them in action figure. The members buy the action figures although the price is not cheap.

Action figure is basically a poseable doll which is made of plastic and other materials. PVC plastic-based figures are the most commonly found figures followed by to diecast or metal based. The material which is used to make an action figure affects the price of the action figure. Materials also give different value as PVC based action figures are lighter than other action figures made from diecast or metal material. Many action figures are often based on fictional character in films, comics, tv shows, or video games. However, it does not rule out the possibility that action figure can be based on celebrity or a real person that exists in this world.

As a matter of fact, action figure is an American popular culture. The term of action figure was first used in 1964 by the Hasbro Company Don Levine to describe their new G.I. Joe toy. Levine preferred the name action figure instead of doll because it was more inviting to young boys. Action figures gained popularity when Hasbro had licensed their products to other market in several countries like Japan and United Kingdom. The Mego Corporation began making Marvel and DC superheroes action figure from their comic book and became successful in 1971. After a few decades, the action figure culture came to Indonesia and become popular around 2009-2010.

People can have an interest in a brand, fictional characters, and real celebrities, and become fans. Thorne and Bruner (2006) stated that a study of fandom is appropriate due to the importance of entertainment in American Culture, particularly given the tendency of many American consumers to develop a fanaticism towards entertainers and select consumption as one avenue through which they express their fanaticism (p.51). Therefore, the previous statement points out that people who become a fan to entertainers can develop a fanaticism. Passmore (2003) also stated that fanaticism has been quite thoroughly studied in such fields as psychology and sociology. However, there are lack of studies in consumer research (p.211).

“Figure Purwokerto” is one of hundred communities that spread in Indonesia. It consists of more and less 241 members, with only about 20 to 30 active members. The community itself was established on April 25, 2013. This community has some activities like gathering and discussing about action figures, and sometimes also attend some events in Purwokerto. The existence of this community is well-known by people. They usually gathered in a public place like restaurant or cafe to share their new action figures or to do some photography with their action figures. Furthermore, the reasons of the researcher chose “Figure Purwokerto” community is because the members who are collecting action figure in the community can be considered as fanatics. The researcher also wants to show

that fanaticism can happen not only in religious surrounding or hooligans, but it can happen in a wide variety of contexts. They extremely support their favorite characters by buying the original action figure. As a matter of fact, the action figure collectors in Indonesia often buy an exclusive action figure which are imported from other countries like America and Japan. Even though there is a distributor in Indonesia that produces those action figures, they still often order it from other country. They often call it as a pleasure from its exclusivity. Hagi, Andrei and Robin (2007) stated that one of the primary means of differentiation and competition between platforms for consumer adoption is the acquisition of premium or quality content (p. 1-2).

Therefore, this research is focused on the fanaticism portrayed among the members in "Figure Purwokerto" community. The related topics about cultural consumer will be elaborated in this research to make the readers understand about the fanaticism term among action figure collectors in Purwokerto and to support the main theory. This study is also related to American culture because the action figure itself is American pop culture that the members of the community adopt. It brings the messages from other cultures or identity, for example the Spiderman Miles Morales action figures can represent the race of Miles Morales character by the color that is applied in it.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The type of research is qualitative; it is aimed to produce in-depth understanding about the issues. Since this research is a cultural research, a deep analysis is needed to get the specific information. According to Pickering (2008), qualitative research into cultural consumer draws on several wider issues and fields (p. 86). Moreover, in order to reach the goal of this research, the data must be elaborated with the theories and connected with the actual condition of the society; or it is usually called as ethnographic approach which include interviewing and observation. Pickering (2008) stated that focus group method can be used with each participant revealing themselves as a producer of meaning as well as a consumer of meaning (p.84).

The primary data of this research is a community in Purwokerto, Indonesia called "Figure Purwokerto". However, the data were taken from the active members. There were twelve informants involved in the focus group discussions and interviews. The informants were varied; most of them are still in college, while the others have already worked. The secondary source in this research helped the researcher to do the analysis. The researcher used the journal articles, books, and online research to give clearer explanation on the topic namely the fanaticism and the consumption culture in the community.

In collecting the data, the steps were first observing the primary data, the "Figure Purwokerto" community; secondly, it was by selecting participants for the focus group discussion; then, it was conducted by making contact with the participants, discussing with the participants (Focus Group Discussion), and interviewing some participant who did not participate in the focus group discussion. Afterwards, data analysis was done by the following steps. The researcher analyzed the collected data, validated the data, filtered the data from the participants, then gathered and investigated the data that were collected from the participants.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis focuses on the data which were collected from the respondents through Focus Group Discussion and interview related to fanaticism portrayal on "Figure Purwokerto" community. This research uses Rudin's fanaticism theory (1969), which focuses on the characteristics of fanatics (p. 19) and Meyer's cultural consumption theory (2008.), which focuses on cultural consumer (p. 68). The discussion is divided into two parts. The first part is the discussion about the portrayal of fanaticism in "Figure Purwokerto" community which includes the discussion about the fanatical intensity and fanatical intolerance that can be seen from the discussion with the participants. The last part is the discussion about the cultural relation between the members and the action figure culture.

### The Portayal of Fanaticism in "Figure Purwokerto" Community

There are some consistencies in the characterizations of fanatics. According to Redden & Steiner (2000), there are four common features of fanaticism; enthusiasm, zeal, excess and intolerance (p. 324). The enthusiasm and zeal features come from a "religious origin". They refer to a religious fanatic which means "God within" and "devoted to a cause or belief" (Redden & Steiner, 2000, p. 324). Meanwhile, the excess and intolerance features of fanaticism are more related to the members of the community because there are some evidences from the discussion with the participants which lead them to those features.

Fanaticism in "Figure Purwokerto" community can be seen from the members of the community. However, it is difficult to differentiate between fanatics and non-fanatics. The aims and ideals of fanatics are often considered as normal. Taylor (1991) states that "Fanatical behavior may differ in terms of vigor and expression rather than in terms of qualitative differences from behavior we might regard as normal" (p. 14). Fanatics tend to express their feeling and zeal towards their ideals or aims. "Figure Purwokerto" itself was established in the response of the action figure culture from America. The influence came from the larger community like "S.H.Figuarts Indonesia", "Figmania", etc.

### Fanatical Intensity

According to Rudin (1969), there are three general characterization of fanatics, they are excitement, passion and rage of will (p. 19). These characterizations refer to "Fanatical Intensity". The characteristics of "Fanatical Intensity" often overlap and can be seen from a person.

The first thing needed to explain is excitement. Based on the data from the discussion and interview, there are some overlapping characteristics that can be seen from the participants. Participants from the Focus Group Discussion described their feeling when they buy action figures. They usually express their feelings through some actions like crying or sobbing, immediately open the action figure, taking some pictures and post them. However, Rudin (1969, as cited in Redden & Steiner, 2000) observes that there are some fanatics who do not overtly show extreme excitement. "Mustofa" (28 years old, general employee) mentioned several emotions or feelings that he expressed associated with action figures like he was "excited when [I] bought a new action figure . . . some of them are memorable". Several other participants agreed, describing their feeling when their action figure arrived like "happy," and "satisfied". "Anom" (22 years old, college

student) described his feeling when he got an action figure from his favourite TV-series. He said that he cried and was happy because he had waited for several years until he got the action figure.

Passion is another characteristic of fanatics that can be seen. Rudin (1969, as cited in Redden & Steiner, 2002), states that the intensity feature of fanaticism also involves display of "extreme passion towards what one is fanatical about". According to the participants, some of them definitely buy an action figure of the characters they like most. This can be categorized as passion towards participant's favorite character. Naufal (25 years old, freelancer) told that he would buy the new action figure series of his favorite animation series because "[I] focused on that series". For additional information, the reason Naufal collects action figures is because he "wants to continue [my] collection from childhood". Six other participants also describe that they will buy the newest action figure from their favorite character. The rest of the participants depend their purchase on "financial condition" and "priority". This tendency to obtain a certain action figure based on their preferences can be considered as rigidities among them on collecting action figures.

Furthermore, the discussion shows a form of commitment from the participant when collecting action figures. The form of commitment of the participants can be seen from how long they collect action figures and how many action figures that they have bought until now. According to the discussion, the participants averagely start knowing and collecting action figures since 2010-2015. They have known action figures and collected it for about 5 to 10 years. Danu (25 years old, undergraduate student) said in the discussion that he started to collect action figure from 2012 when he was in senior high school. He mentioned that he knew action figure from "internet". He also joined the community in between 2012-2013. He still collects action figures until now. There is another finding from the discussion in which the participant's pursuit to buy action figures is quite extreme. Rudin (1969, as cited in Redden & Steiner, 2002) suggests that fanatical passion also involves displays of strong emotion that can be "blinded by instinct, unguided by any logical deliberation, and unhindered by doubt". The efforts from the participants when they collect action figures are mostly same. Some participants set aside some money; others sell their personal items. However, some participants are extreme and can be categorized as "blinded by instinct". Mustofa (28 years old, general employee) mentioned that he even "owe money" from someone to buy an action figure. It means that he forces himself to buy action figure even when he has no money. The necessity of action figure can be high depends on some factors. The action figure might be the participant's favorite character, or it is a limited item which is only produced for limited time or limited quantity. Those factors are the reason why the participants will owe money or do not eat to get the action figures.

The last characteristics of fanatical intensity is rage of will. It is found that some participants place action figure above their basic needs like eating. They place it on the second category of consumption. According to Mackellar (2006), Rudin explains rage of will as "clearly outlined goal which must be reached . . . Their will for action is so strong so they can forget human needs . . ." (p.198). According to Douglas & Isherwood (2002), there are three sets of goods: a staple set, which represents the primary production sector; a technology set which

represents the secondary production sector; and an information set which represents tertiary production (p.132). The primary sector is related to foods, drinks and other staples product. The secondary sector is related to transportation like car, motorcycle, and basic things like clothes, bag, accessories and etc. The tertiary sector is related to communication and leisure time things or activities which are used to find pleasure. The action figure itself is supposed to be included in tertiary sector because it is an item to find pleasure. It is not necessary to buy action figures. If the action figure is placed in the secondary sector, it means that the participants equalize the action figure with basic things like clothes and transportation.

However, there is one participant who puts action figure in primary sector. Evan (24 years old, employee) once assumed that action figure was in primary sector. It was because he chose not to eat rather than not to buy action figures. He also said that he once had a motto "action figures for life, live for action figure". He really dedicated himself to action figure back then when he was new to action figures. The action figures become equal to food and other staples goods. It means that the action figures are the primary goods that he needs to live his life. He cannot live without action figures.

### **Fanatical Intolerance**

Fanatical intolerance is another feature of fanaticism. The intolerance of the fanatics can be seen from the members' opinion and their will to reach their goal which is to collect action figure. There are some overlapping characteristics which are found in the community's members from the interview. However, there are only three out of five overlapping characteristics that are found from the members; they are focusing, resistance to change, and contextual facilitations.

Fanatics focus on their beliefs and goals. According to Redden & Steiner (2000), fanatics have an unyielding and excessive focus (p. 327). In addition, the object of their obsession becomes more important than everything. The members of the community are focused on collecting certain action figures. The focus from the members refers to setting aside some needs that they need and prefer to buy action figure. Some members of the community prefer to buy action figure than other things. Anom said that he often put aside some of his needs when he was given a choice to buy action figure or his needs. He gave an example, "There is a month which the action figure that I want will release. I will put the need of action figure to the priority needs and put aside other needs except for food needs, but maybe I will do fasting". This attitude can be considered as "obsession" towards their ideals which in this case is action figure. They will fight for their ideals until they get it.

It also happens to the other members. Arvian explained how he spent his earning for action figure than other stuffs. He described "So, when I get my salary, I have planned it for foods and other needs. I also planned it for random things that I wanted to buy. . . the money for random things is usually used for buying action figures than other things". Most of his expenses are devoted for action figures. It means that he dedicates himself to collect action figures, even if there are many things that he can buy.

The members of the community have their own focus related to the brand of the action figures. Heri (28 years old, entrepreneur) mentioned several brands

that he liked or usually bought. He usually buys action figures from S.H. Figuarts. He also likes Hot Toys as the brand which he wants to buy. Several other participants also mention their preferences related to the brands of the action figures like "Hasbro" and "Mafex". The preference of brands from the members of the community leads to the next intolerance characteristic which is the resistance to change. Anom described that he would not buy any action figures from other brands that had lower quality than his preference. He said, "Although the price of the action figure is cheaper, if the quality is bad, I don't think [I will buy it]". This attitude can be considered as resistance to change because he does not change his preference even though the other brands offer the action figure with cheaper price. Most of the members also mention the same statement that if they already have their own preference to a brand, they will not change. The reason is they have already known the quality of their preferred brand. They will buy from the brand that they like even if the price is more expensive than the other brands.

Then, the contextual facilitation is involved in the way fanatics choose their friends, entertainment, and media in order to sustain their beliefs. The members of the community have their own way in choosing their entertainment, friends, or media. Evan mentioned several facilitations that he used related to action figures. He chose social media like *Facebook* and joined a group containing of many discussions and information related to action figures. He becomes friend with people who are also interested in action figures. Most of the members of the community provide themselves with many entertainments which are related to action figures. Arvian mentioned that about 60% of his social media (*YouTube*, *Instagram*, etc.) contained any news or photos of action figures. He said "There is an official account from the company of the action figures were made. They usually announce the news or information about the schedule of a new release of action figures. I also watch some videos on *YouTube* about action figure events or vlogs from other people who visit the events and introduce the new action figures in there". He follows the trend of action figures until now. He even registers himself to the official website of his favorite company. Thus, he will not miss any information on the newest action figures and the release schedule.

### **Cultural Relation**

The members of the community also get the influence from foreign culture. They are affected by many aspects, for example movies they watch or several youtubers they follow. Movies bring many aspects of culture in it. For instance, the action figure of Captain America brings some identities from America like their nationality, their supremacy, and etc. Alexandratos (2017) stated that action figures often "speak for, or against, source texts that have been taken the form of movies, books, TV shows, video games, and historical icon" (p. 5). The process when the members watch the movie can influence them to like, buy, and become a fanatic to action figures. Most of the members have their favourite movie or character. Anom mentioned his favourite movie and character that were Harry Potter (Movie) and Black Panther (Character). He said "Black Panther has the nature as a leader. The characterization of Black Panther is clearly animated in the movie. Harry Potter also has many characters; it got me carried away with the atmosphere". In addition, the identity of the character also affects him. The identity of the character includes the way of the character dresses up and the gender of the

character. He thought of how the details of the character in the movie could be applied in action figure. On the other hand, the other participant has a different opinion about the cultural influence from a movie or character on their desire in buying action figures. Arvian described the process of how he got the influence from the movie. He got a strong influence from Marvel's movies like *Avengers: End Game* and *Ironman*. The characters in the movie have their own role. The role, for example as a main character of the movie, makes Arvian become interested in the character. Then, he said that he wanted to pose the action figure like the actual scene of the movie. Other than that, he said "I think there is a satisfaction when I pose the action figure freely as I like".

In addition, the superiority from American pop culture also takes part in the consumption of action figure culture. The American toys company might have intentions to spread their culture through action figures. One of the way is making the action figures become the media to spread their supremacy. They make their action figure become more durable. Mustofa (28 years old, general employee) stated that he preferred action figures from America's brand like Hasbro and NECA because their durability to be posed and played. Action figures also bring many culture from foreign country, like their clothes, race, nationality and so on. Alexandratos (2017) stated "action figures operate as both history and a means to express that history"(p. 5). Captain America, "The Hero" from America itself, is one of the example that action figure is the media for America to spread their supremacy. Captain America's action figure came from the movie. The toys company implements the look, the proportion, the shape, and other aspects from the movie into the action figure; when the action figure were made, it represents the character of Captain America from the movie. Thus, the symbolism of "Hero of America" also got carried away to the action figure.

The action figure collectors from foreign country have the influence on the members of "Figure Purwokerto" community. Danu said that there was an influence from youtuber who is an action figures collector . He once felt doubtful when he wanted to buy an action figure. Then, he watched a review and unboxing video from an action figures collector on *YouTube*. After he watched it, he decided to buy the action figure. In conclusion, Danu was persuaded by the collector in the video. The other participant also experienced the same influence. Arvian also described that he got many influences from people on *YouTube* . These people are action figure collectors who reviews and unboxes action figures to share their experience to the viewers. "Usually, I watch the reviews from foreign collectors who got the action figures earlier from the release date than us", he said. Moreover, his statement about deciding to buy action figures is based on someone's social media posts. The reviews are also categorized as an influence from other people.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research provides some evidences from focus group discussions and interviews with some members of the community. There are twelve informants involved in the focus group discussions and interviews. The informants are varied, who are mostly still in college; while the others have already had jobs. Based on their responses, the researchers has figured out that there are some tendencies from the informants to become a fanatic. They are



buying action figure for their pleasure. Some of them are interested in collecting action figures because their favorite characters. Their dedication to their favorite characters makes them collecting action figures. There are some members of the community who are collecting because of the detail of the action figure, even they did not know from where the characters of the action figure were.

There is a relation between American culture with the action figure culture among the members of the community, which is the superiority of American pop culture that influenced the members to collect action figures. The culture which is taken from movies, books, or video games applied on the action figures also can be considered as a superiority; to some extent it encourages the curiosity of the members to buy more and more action figures. The relation between the superiority American pop culture and the members also become the reason of why they collect action figures. The toys company from America certainly have intentions to spread their supremacy to other countries. The people who buy the action figures unconsciously consume their ideology. Moreover, there are some members who was influenced by American action figure collectors. They usually get the influence from *YouTube* videos about action figures, and most of the videos are from American collectors. Thus, the fanaticism which is portrayed in "Figure Purwokerto" community is an example of how a popular culture can influence people to become a fanatic. It also gives an explanation that fanaticism is not always related with religion or hooligans. The fanaticism is actually close to the society, considering that people can be fanatic over anything.

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