

## **Cosplay Phenomenon as a Popular Culture Among Teenagers in Jakarta, Indonesia**

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**Abstract.** This study aims to describe the meaning of cosplay among teenagers in Jakarta as well as describing how cosplay develops and becomes a part of pop culture consumption. The main subject used in this study is cosplayers in Jakarta who join a community and personal. Through the in-depth interviews to informants, data collection techniques in the study conducted. The results of this study indicate that *anime* and *manga* are the main process of Japanese cultural diffusion which has attracted Jakarta teenagers to consume this popular culture since their childhood to adulthood. The informants view cosplay as a form of escape on its identity, a means of self-development ability, as well as meaningful opportunity to build new relations. As cosplay performers, the informants initiated their actions as the consumption of fictional characters, ideally considered imaginations and the admiral of *anime* and *manga* characters. In the end, they internalize these values into themselves both physically and non-physically to the point that they completely imitate the characters.

### **1. Introduction**

In the last few decades, a subculture associated with Japanese *anime* (animation) and *manga* (comic) has quickly attracted the world's attention, including costume play (cosplay). Subculture is a representation that in a larger society, group or nation with the same dominant culture, there may be subgroups having different characteristics and distinguish themselves from other subgroups [1]. Similarly, cosplay in Indonesia can be interpreted as a subculture formed on the basis of pleasure or similarity to activities. In this context, cosplay is a group that has the same passion and activity in the "birth" of a number of *anime* and *manga* characters into the real world.

The Japanese festival, known as *matsuri* or *bunkasai*, is a cultural event presenting variety of products, including culinary, music, *anime* (animation), *manga* (comic), dance and various values of Japanese nation. The fact that each subculture has its own values and norms shared with its members, which give them a common identity [1]. Cosplayer, is a term for those individuals who show off by wearing a costume or often called costume play (cosplay) and bring the characters are played as similarly as possible.

The consumption of popular culture of *anime* and *manga* is a common thread that later bring up the idea of cosplay as a social reality in the life of society to the point that some teenagers in Jakarta become addicted to the Japanese pop culture products that deliver them to the preferences of cosplay activities as the preferred taste for one's identity to be a free individual. Sometimes, the presence of a person or group of individuals who wear *anime* and *manga* costumes in the middle of the festival give a strange amazement from the visitors. The interesting fact of this cosplayer activity is that the majority of the cosplayers are mostly teenagers and adults who declare themselves as cosplayer.

The loves of the cosplayers to the character they play increasingly shape the identity of the individuals and influence their personality in interacting within society. Mass media, in this case,

*manga* and *anime*, have a big share as individual socialization agent that coloured identity and individuals' choice of a cosplayer appetite. When a culture enters the entertainment world, it generally places the popular element as its main element so that culture will gain its strength since the mass media is used as a bypass of spreading influence in society [2]. As time passes, the continuity of the transformation of the costumes and characters played by the individuals raise various perspectives from society, as well as within the individuals themselves.

The study represented by this article offers a way of looking at how cosplay that now enliven popular culture in Jakarta has become a part of culture which internalized in such a way into the cosplayer. The cosplay world that ambiguously fragmented, unpredictable, blurring the boundaries of reality with images and the bias of intercultural boundaries, is part of the characteristics of postmodern culture. In previous related studies on cosplay, mostly they expose the cosplay community, social problems encountered, *dramaturgis* cosplayer, the role of media in shaping the identity of cosplayer, and so forth. The scientific perspective in analysing cosplay phenomena also varied, including the view of communication aspects, Japanese literature, psychological to sociological. Therefore, the position of the researcher is to add previous research on cosplay phenomena from a sociological point of view, especially using a blade of cultural studies analysis that is considered in accordance with the presence era of this popular culture

## **2. Cosplay as a Momentum of the Birth of Popular Culture**

### **2.1 Cosplayer Typology and the Actor Who Drives Popular Culture**

At first glance, people who are cosplaying are individuals who want to change their outward appearance only. However, if it examined further, it appears the difference between the cosplayer through the concept of junior and senior cosplay based on cosplayer flying hours, based on their experience and knowledge on character details and financial stability levels.

#### **- Beginner\_Player**

Beginner level cosplayer can be known from the low level of the complexity of the costumes, does not follow the small or large-scale competition and the purpose of cosplay is to cos-street (cosplay off) as well as taking photo with visitors. The goal of this level cosplayer is to fulfil his personal desire, not to get prizes when following cosplay competition.

#### **- Middle\_Player**

Mid-level cosplayers usually follow local-level competitions such as schools and universities cosplay competition. The level of complexity of the costumes is medium, not too simple and not too detailed as well. The point of the cosplay is the make-up technique in order to get the character's face as similarly as possible. Budget per costume ranges from Rp100.000,00 - Rp850.000,00.

#### **- Advance Player**

Cosplayer Advance is a cosplayer that often follow the competition with a large scale. The worn costumes are complicated by complex manufacturing details to custom-tailored properties (such as dioramas) to support the play. In addition, it also shows the action of the stage in accordance with the played character. Budget per costume between Rp500.000,00 - Rp3.000.000,00. This Advance-level cosplayer is usually scheduled at any Japanese festival that will be held in one year, so they can prepare well the budget and the duration in making the costume. Nevertheless, all of these things will be paid off with satisfaction when they can perform optimally, especially if they won the cosplay competition. Refer table 1 for cosplayer typology's description.

Table 1. Cosplayer Typology

	[Beginner Player]	[Middle Player]	[Advance Player]
<b>[The Function of Japanese Festival]</b>	<i>Cos-street</i> event and taking photo with the visitors of the festival	Community reunited event and small-scale competition stage	Big-scale competition event
<b>[Costume Complexity]</b>	Using the existing material and create the costume by his/her self	Prioritizing the similarity result between the costume and the character rather than costume quality	Maintaining costume detail and material quality
<b>[Budget]</b>	< IDR 100.000,00	IDR 100.000,00 – IDR 850.000,00	IDR 500.000,00 – IDR 3.000.000,00

(Source: Arrangin by Research Result, 2018)

Cosplayer is dominated by urban teenagers who are eager to find their identity and therefore they often try interesting things and challenging themselves to achieve self-actualization in the community. Mostly, teenagers go through a process or the journey of life as a human being that has no characteristic intact and does not have a definite transitional stage. Teenagers have a high level of aspiration that is not realistic and if their achievements do not meet expectations, it will arise a sense of dissatisfaction with themselves [3]. Therefore, teenagers tend to try a variety of interests that are fit with their passion (though sometimes not realistic). In the end, if they found or felt the "click" on a hobby, they will continue to occupy it for several years into the future.

The informants started to receive their Japanese cultural information from *anime* and *manga*. The process of consuming popular culture from this Cherry country seems to increase the interest of informants to deeply cultivate it. The things they have seen from childhood up to these days have pushed their actions to further become "players" of the characters. Therefore, it can be concluded that the informants started cosplay because they love the character of *anime*, *manga* and game, then experiencing the process of inauguration of information because of their interaction with various parties, including their introduction with a cosplayer and also their frequent visit to Japanese festival, so it reinforces them to be a cosplay in order to have the same appearance with the character.

The fragmentation of the split self-associated with cosplayer identity dynamics is seen when it relies on a socially structured 'place'. Cosplayers show complete self-absorption when they are in the area that allows them to express themselves such as in the Japanese festival. However, in daily life, the activity of the cosplayers does not appear explicit, except their activities in consuming and collecting materials for the cosplay. The more individuals involved in the cosplay world, the deeper the meaning is generated. They will continue to refine themselves as cosplayer and rise to a more established level.

## 2.2 Cosplay Consumerism and the Escapism Form

The significance of cosplay for informants can be categorized as an escape of self, a means of self-development and building new relationships. The informants try to engage in activities that contemplate their consumption and interpret their actions as a rational thing. As stated by Barker, that meaning is produced in the interaction between the text and its readers [4]. Hence, the moment of consumption is also a meaningful production moment. When informants who are urban teenagers

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choose to take advantage of time to do a cosplay, they are not only driven by psychological factors or motivation to acquire mere knowledge but rather caused by the construction and the logic of desire formed by the attraction of popular culture.

Regarding to consumption activities, it does not stop at the process of spending a certain amount of goods, services or materials, but consumption activity can also be an information acquired through the media, as Eco discloses that people are living in the age of communication in which information is no longer an instrument to produce a trade economy, but instead manifests itself as the commander of all commercial goods. Therefore, information brought from Japanese media such as *anime*, *manga* and games consumed by teenagers in Jakarta, will make a profit in the economic dimension of the parties involved, especially the one who involves in the activities of cosplaying as it takes a lot of cost in order to become a desired character. *Anime*, *manga* and games become a medium for cosplayer to gain knowledge about stories, characters and clothes worn by the characters. Based on the characteristic of all informants, they started the activities of cosplaying by becoming an *anime*, *manga* and game consumer since years ago.

Based on the fact that there is a relationship between the consumption patterns affecting the mass production, and create a culture that is so closely in the community called popular culture, the cosplay can be seen as circulated phenomenon in the middle of society, especially when there is Japanese festival. The consumption activities and popular culture cannot be separated from each other as consumption is not simple needs and emerges as an important aspect of human activity. As Herbert Marcuse explains, the ideology of consumerism promotes false needs and these needs work as a form of social control. Based on this context, the desire of cosplayer to be a certain type of character, wearing certain clothes or using special items is certainly required a large budget as informants said, they require a budget ranging from IDR 100.000,00 to IDR 3.000.000,00 per costume. This table 2 below is presented range of expenses incurred.

Table 2. Range of Expenses Incurred

[Category]	[Budget]
<b>[One Costume Making]</b> *Wig, Make Up, Armor, One Costume Set, Accessory, and etc.	IDR 100.000,00 - IDR 3.000.000,00 *Depends on beginner, middle or Advance level
<b>[Entrance Ticket of Japanese Festival]</b>	IDR 0,00 - IDR1.500.000,00 *Depends on local or international scale
<b>[Manga Price]</b>	IDR 20.000,00 – IDR50.000,00
<b>[Anime Price]</b>	Obtained through unpaid online sites
<b>[Food Price at Japanese Festival]</b>	IDR 15.000,00 – IDR 50.000,00
<b>[Merchandise Price at Japanese Festival]</b>	IDR 5.000,00 – IDR 1.000.000,00

(Source: Arrangin by Research Results, 2018)

The current social system always sells fantasy and hope results through the media. Therefore, consumption is always more than economic activity. Consuming products or using commodities to satisfy material needs is also related to dreams, passions, identity and communication. Cosplay phenomenon becomes important not only because it is created by the love of the character, but rather because the idea that cosplay becomes a stream of meetings between commodities and imagination that is constituted for public consumption [5].

Richard Maltby argues that pop culture is regarded as the world of collective dreams because it provides a space for escapism that not only runs from or to a particular place, but an escape from our own utopia [5]. Popular cultural products tend to be popular as public fantasy and collective dreams. As it is commonly known, the products of *anime*, *manga* and games are fictional works in the form of two dimensions. Manufacturers deliver the treasures of values through forms of drawing that are liked

by audiences. Ranging from children to adults seem to enjoy *anime*, *manga* and games. The story is categorized fantasy, though it does not mean adults will not be the consumers. *Anime*, *manga* and games have their own segment according to their genre.

Although the backgrounds of the informants vary, there is a uniformity in interpreting cosplay as an escape or escape form. Escapism itself means a will or a tendency to avoid oneself from reality by seeking entertainment and tranquility in a fictional or imaginary world. This idea cannot be separated from the saturation and alienation of the informants while undergoing routine. The weekend when the Japanese festival was held was the day that the informants had been waiting for. A day where they let go of boredom and unwanted things to meet other individuals in the same interest group for *anime*, *manga* and games. The costumes that will be worn by the cosplayer has been prepared in such a way many months earlier. Cosplayer certainly wants to perform as perfect and as detailed as possible in imitating his favourite character. The glitter of this week shows the importance of images and romance in their lives.

## **2.3 Literature References**

### **2.3.1 Cosplay and Popular Culture**

The term cosplay refers to *Animonster* magazine volume 61, an abbreviation of costume play, an absorption word from the merging of two English words “costume” and “play”, means "costume play". The Japanese themselves pronounce it as *kosupure* (コスプレ). The term is used to refer the activities of young people who wear costume-style characters in *anime* (animation) and *manga* (comics) [6]. Therefore, it can be said that cosplay is a kind of activity of *anime* and *manga* fans, performed by individuals or groups, by making and wearing costumes, and dressing up adapting certain characters in order to appear in public and do shooting.

Raymond Williams provides four meanings related to popular cultural terms, including what many people like, the kind of low-level work, the work done to please people and the culture that people make for themselves [7]. Hence, popular culture or so-called pop culture (pop culture) is a cultural product that is entertained and liked by many people. Mostly, the pop culture lovers are people who do not vote, consume the culture without thinking and without calculation as well.

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### **2.3.2 Anime and Manga**

*Manga* (漫画) which means comic, is a term used specifically to talk about Japanese comics in accordance with its distinctive style of description and different characteristics from comics from other countries.<sup>10</sup> The use of *manga* term in Indonesia is a representation of comic terms derived from Japanese publications as there are other comic terms such as manhua originating from China/ Taiwan and manhwa from South Korea. Furthermore, each country has its own characteristic description and plot and if a *manga* is quite popular, it will be produced as animated version or so-called *anime*.

*Anime* (アニメ) is a typical Japanese animation that is typically characterized through colourful pictures that feature characters in various locations and stories. The *anime* itself is influenced by the style of *manga* depictions, typical Japanese comics. Its production is supported by computer graphics technology and visual technology. The Japanese people themselves consider the *anime* and *manga* as part of their lives, as a cultural product and as the largest animation industry state.

### **2.3.3 Consumerism**

In the present era, the term consumption is very closely related to shopping activities as a form of pop culture and a shift in meaning about satisfaction of a need becomes the only way to satisfy individual needs outside his self. The ideology of consumerism also develops in which the meaning of life must be found through what it is consumed, not on what it is produced [5]. Thus, the ideology legitimizes and encourages attention to the dredging of profit by capitalism, a system that constantly demands increased consumption of goods.

Pop culture sees consumption activity more than economic activity, but also deals with dreams, passions, identity and communication. Cosplay phenomenon becomes important not only because it is created by the love of the character, but rather because the idea that cosplay becomes a stream of meetings between commodities and imagination that is constituted for public consumption.

### **3. Conclusion**

The *anime* and *manga* cosplayers range from diverse backgrounds, from different ages, sexes, education, jobs to social status in the community. In general, everyone can be a cosplayer when they have the desire to express their likes and hobbies in the same look and have a character similar to their idol. The four informants who came from Jakarta became consumers of these fictional cultures and tried to revive the characters into the social environment. However, they do not stop from being a mere consumer, there is a meaning generated by cosplay actors which changed and regulated to be the consumption of people who are productive in producing the meaning. The meaning for cosplayer is believed to be a self-development activity, the opportunity to build a new relationship to become an escape arena or escapism for himself. The cosplay phenomenon becomes one of the creative games in which cultural forms are produced and consumed, even though their original production is in the hands of transnational capitalists.

The influence of foreign culture in this period cannot be avoided considering the era of globalization that increasingly burst and open aspects of a wide-open communication between the nations. Outer culture can be a cultural threat of its own or even it can enrich the local culture if it is appropriately adapted. Looking at the cosplay phenomenon of some educational journals, this issue is certainly very crucial considering that education becomes one of the institutions responsible for the formation of human character in the process of life. Through education, we can also build the filters in response to the diffusion of Japanese pop culture.

Education can be a vehicle for giving birth to the producers of popular culture itself. Human ideas must contain elements of innovation, creativity and improvisation so that the expression of cultural actors can be channelled through the concrete cultural results. Contemporary culture can enter the realm of education in order to respond to the globalization of this culture. Cinematography and animation can enter the local content of high school education in Jakarta. Obviously, it has the aesthetic, harmonious and economic value that is represented by popular culture.

Therefore, educational actors can use popular 'vehicles' to market a culture full of moral values. No longer view tradition as stale, but using a universally acceptable local value. Its products must be perfect packaging and have a vision of culture in a head of time. It is intended that the next generation of the nation is not seen as a passive subject absorbing everything that is served by foreign media only, so they no longer heed the efforts aimed at manipulating them.

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