

Research Article

Cultural Identity of *Attack On Titan* Fans on Social Media Twitter in Indonesia

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Abstract

Research that carries the theme of cultural identity is always associated with identities that are formed and seen from ethnicity, race, country, and the like. The purpose of this study is to reveal the cultural identity of fans in an internet-based fandom, especially on Twitter social media. The theories used are Hall and Barker's theory of cultural identity, Nagy-Koles' virtual identity theory, Jenkins' fan study, and McQuail's new media theory. The approach used to conduct this research is a qualitative approach, while the method used to conduct this research is participatory observation and interview that involved several fans that followed one of the Attacks on Titan's fandom accounts, AOTFESS. In AOTFESS, the study later found out that their cultural identity is not always seen from literal symbols, but rather formed and then found through the interactivities of fans who follow the account.

Keywords: cultural identity; fan studies; social media; Attack on Titan

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1. Introduction

Technology is one of the important things that can never be separated from our lives. With the technology that develops all the time, humans can access and know various kinds of information owned by a person or even a certain place. Japan is one of the countries that produce various anime that has been watched by more than tens of millions of people in the world. It is known for its various unique cultures which are also implemented into its manga and anime, thus making people who watch the anime are piqued and wanted to recognize the Japanese culture. To quote SoraNews24, with the proliferation of digital distribution in this modern era, anime is easier to access and enjoy by all fans outside of Japan. And, based on data from The Association of

Japanese Animators, in 2019 sales solely from video streaming, anime production profit rose by 59.5 billion yen.

Attack on Titan is one of the anime and manga series that is currently experiencing a comeback since the release of the anime which is currently getting its fourth season adaptation. One of the hype that his fans do is to spread and discuss about it through the social media. Because they are liked a lot, fans will start consuming hobbies or things that interest them until they become a tendency or activity that is carried out repeatedly (Sugihartati, 2019; Fung et al, 2019, Yamato, 2018).

In one of the studies conducted by Nikmah Suryandari (2017) in her work "The Existence of Cultural Identity Amid

Multicultural Societies and Global Cultural Pressure" (Eksistensi Identitas Kultural Di Tengah Masyarakat Multicultural Dan Desakan Budaya Global), she discussed how cultural identity can be maintained in a multicultural society, as well as with global cultural pressure. However, the authors also found research conducted by Rahma Sugihartati (2019) with the title "The Identity Fragmentation of Youths as Fans of Global Popular Culture", where he conducted research on the fragmentation of the identity of teenagers who are fans of popular culture and found that cultural identity was found in a group of fans who share a particular interest or hobby. This is also said that fanaticism is a form of expression of people as a part of a fandom. They consume product based on their attachment to the fandom. (Fuschillo, 2018)

With the advancement of technology, it changed a lot of things. Including modes of communication are enabled through the internet connection. With virtual interaction between individual in the internet affect individual and personality characteristics and general self-development ((Nagy, Koles, 2014).

Identity usually being associated with the role of a person in the society, but because people have interaction with several part of society they could have several identity (DeLamater, 2013) The cultural identity is different to a national identity that is based on a historical narration of a nation (Karjalainen, 2020).

A theory about cultural identity put forward by Hall (Fulamah, 2015) suggests that cultural identity is something that is always changing and is something that is created naturally. The thing that makes cultural identity change is the point of difference that exists around cultural identity can cause it to be diverse and develop. From this, it can be concluded that cultural identity is not fixed on various things that are always associated with the identity that has been attached to us, such as ethnicity, race, and lifestyle. But it can also

be associated with a group of people who like something, get together, then do activities together to form a bond, and a certain identity.

The term prosumer was popularized by Alvin Toffler in 1980. The concept of prosumer, which is both a producer and a consumer, and prosumer, which involves a combination of production and consumption is not new (Ritzer, Dean, Jugenson, 2012). This phenomenon could be seen on the Attack of The Titan Fandom where they produce content and at the same time consume the content.

In this paper we will explore how identity is being created through the interaction of people through the fandom of a Japanese anime Attack on the Titan. Through this research we could understand the behaviour of people in a fandom and how the process of cultural identity is created.

2. Methods

The research method carried out by the author is to use a qualitative approach. This approach is taken by the author because the author will find out and analyze the activities of Attack on Titan fans or fans on Twitter, especially on one of the accounts used by fans from Indonesia to share information and interact with fellow Attack on Titan fans. The account name is AOTFESS with the username @aotfess. In this study, the author uses a participatory observation method on what activities fans do on the AOTFESS account, and interviews consisting of four Attack on Titan fans who are followers of the AOTFESS Twitter account. The primary data used by the author is data derived from participatory observations. The author also analyzes to reveal what types of content are on the account, and how the content can make fans stay to follow the account continuously, to carry out interactivity there, both actively and passively. The interview method with four fans and followers was carried out to complete the

corpus of the author's primary data, namely to prove through a review from the perspective of fans and followers about the types of activities and what benefits they get from following the AOTFESS account as fans of Attack on Titan.

3. Result and Discussion

In this study, the author has made participatory observations on the account that is the subject of the study, namely the AOTFESS Twitter account. These observations then produced results consisting of a description and purpose of making AOTFESS, then what content was presented in the account during the author's observation period which was held from May 20, 2021 to June 21, 2021. In addition, the author also conducted interviews with four people fans or fans who are also followers of the AOTFESS account as validation and complement to the data corpus that has been carried out in the participatory observation method above.

3.1 Description of AOTFESS Attack on Titan Fan Community on Twitter

The AOTFESS account was created on May 16, 2020 by several people who also have duties as administrators who identify themselves with the initials H, E, L, and M. Quoting from the thread or thread of posts made on the account regarding the brief identity and purpose of creation the account, "AOTFESS is for fans of Shingeki no Kyojin or Attack no Titan, both about anime and manga, even voice actors and Hajime Isayama-sensei".

The account is often used by fans of Attack on Titan primarily to share information about the anime and manga series, discuss, and disseminate the work of their fans and for the consumption of other fans. The fan community or fandom on the @aotfess Twitter account has a unique way of conveying information to followers or followers of the account.

This account has its administrators, but the role of the admin here is also in

accordance with its own meaning, namely managing and monitoring post traffic that enters the account timeline. Various kinds of posts such as discussions and information about the series (anime and manga), written works (fanfiction, and the like) or paintings and drawings on the account timeline are submissions from fans or followers of @aotfess who have been given a followback feature by that account.

Although this has similarities to the way forums work, the author emphasizes the uniqueness of how this account works from the existing post submission system called auto menfess. Auto Menfess or Mention Confess is a system that uses bots where an account that uses the service of the bot, if someone sends a Direct Message with the trigger that has been set, the Direct Message will be sent to the timeline of the account. Quoting a tweet on how to use AOTFESS services from one of the threads, "Menfess delivery is done automatically by sending messages via direct messages or Direct Message (DM) using the *aot trigger". On the AOTFESS account, the administrators on duty also apply rules that must be heeded by their followers, especially those who have been given followback and will use the existing auto menfess feature, such as not speaking outside the topic of Attack on Titan, and not allowed to say something rude or indecent when interacting with fellow fans or content posted on that account.

According to the author's observations described above, the AOTFESS account is an embodiment of cyberfandom which is certainly used by fans or fans of Attack on Titan. The account has a definite purpose and has been stated by the account administrators themselves, namely to exchange information and communicate with fellow fans or fans of Attack on Titan. From the results of this observation, the author can conclude that various information and content on the AOTFESS account timeline are the result of actions or works of fans for fans to

return. For now, the posts that are often sent by fans include works such as AU content (alternate universe) or fans' imaginations if the characters from Attack on Titan are in the modern world and so on. In addition, many fan-made pictures (fanart) mainly about the favorite character of the menfess sender were sent to the AOTFESS base, such as paintings by Eren Jeager, Mikasa Ackerman, and so on.

3.2 Types of Content Available on AOTFESS

The type of content described by the author and researcher is content that was observed from May 20, 2021 to June 21, 2021. The following is a description and analysis of the types of content obtained from observing the AOTFESS account.



Figure 1. Alternate Universe (AU) Content
(Source: AOTFESS Twitter)

1. The first is the Alternate Universe or commonly known as AU, which is an imagination where characters from Attack on Titan are placed in a scenario setting that fans or fans want other than the verse or the original world the characters are in. For example, Mikasa, Sasha, Annie, Historia and Hitch are a group of warriors against Titan in the original world of Attack on Titan, but in the fan-made Idol AU (Alternate Universe) scenario, they are a group of people who work as idol singers.



Figure 2. Halu Content
(Source: AOTFESS Twitter)

2. The second is the content of hallucinations or hallucinations that are just for fun or entertainment. Fans can imagine scenarios where one or more specific characters have roles as their best friends, parents, or even lovers. For example, fans usually send a fake chat image or a conversation text that is edited by them, then adjust the content of the existing chat according to the nature or characteristics of the character they want to create.



Figure 3. Meme Content
(Source: AOTFESS Twitter)

3. The third is funny content or commonly referred to as memes created by fans. Referring to the implied intent of the meme, the meme content posted on AOTFESS is a mere joke whose purpose is to entertain fans or fans who follow the AOTFESS account, and to show their

creativity by channeling it through this funny content or meme.



Figure 4. Appreciation Tweet Content
(Source: AOTFESS Twitter)

4. The fourth is content intended to appreciate a character or appreciation tweet. Appreciation tweets are content that is sent to the AOTFESS account by fans or fans to appreciate various aspects of a character that comes from Attack on Titan. This appreciation varies, starting from praising the existing character designs, or praising their roles and behavior while in the storyline. Fans also create appreciative content which is often referred to as glow-up content. Glow up content on the AOTFESS account is content that compares a photo of a character when he was young or very young with a photo of the character when he was an adult and underwent a significant facial change and became more fashionable.



Figure 5. Storyline Discussion Content
(Source: AOTFESS Twitter)

5. The fifth is discussion content, which is content that contains questions about opinions addressed to fans or followers who follow the AOTFESS account regarding storylines or other things that are still related to Attack on Titan, whether about anime series, manga, voice actors or seiyuu, and other things. However, according to the author's observation as a researcher, things that are often discussed or asked in discussion content like this are things related to the storyline and theories that exist in the Attack on Titan series itself.



Figure 6. Fanart Discussion
(Source: AOTFESS Twitter)

6. The sixth is fanart content or fan-made works sent via menfess. Fanart is a fan culture that is created in a visual form based on the character, environment and story of the object that the fan likes (Gooch, 2008, in Sulistiana, Sujoko, Pujarama, 2018). Fans who post this kind of content generally have a purpose, namely because they want other fans to appreciate the artwork and characters that they have created and sent through the AOTFESS account. According to the author's observations, so far the fans or followers of AOTFESS have always shown positive responses to the artworks made by these fans.

7. The last is content about mutual search or new acquaintances on AOTFESS. In the realm of AOTFESS mutual search, usually fans or fans create menfess by including the mutual criteria they are looking for, for example those who like a certain character, it doesn't matter if they are friends or mutual friends with people

who like series other than Attack on Titan or multifandom (following various types of film or music series), and likes the pairing or pairing of characters A and B from Attack on Titan.



Figure 7. Finding Mutual Content
(Source: AOTFESS Twitter)

Quoting Gooch (Afifah, Kusuma, 2019), the most recognizable characteristic of cyberfandom is a group of fans formed in the virtual world (virtual world) through internet technology-based social media. Twitter can be said to be a platform that was created and is a result of the emergence of new media or new media, where Hodkins (2017) once said that only the media can help us open up opportunities for various kinds of communication and information to be widely spread. With the presence of the AOTFESS Twitter account, it can also be said that this account is the embodiment of cyberfandom from the anime and manga series Attack on Titan which is fully operational in cyberspace.

Through the AOTFESS account, fans of the Attack on Titan series, mainly from Indonesia, can get information about the anime and manga series, and at the same time find entertainment in the form of cultural texts that are channeled through edited content such as hallucinatory content, tweets of appreciation for characters and storylines, discussions and interact with other fans, and so on.

The creativity created by fans or fans of Attack on Titan on the AOTFESS Twitter account can be said to be endless too, because the AOTFESS account will continue to operate almost every day, and

fans who can send menfess will continue to appear and present new content for AOTFESS account users to enjoy. .

With various types of content, interactions and activities of fans or fans who follow the AOTFESS account on Twitter can occur. Interactivity that often occurs includes replying, retweeting, quote-retweeting, or loving content that they find interesting or funny. However, usually on content about discussions, fans will leave replies as a form of their participation in the discussion.

Referring to Jenkins (Kusuma, 2014) regarding fans are members of sub-culture groups who enjoy cultural texts generated from their interests or hobbies, they interact with various kinds of content presented on the AOTFESS account; starting from discussion content, fanart, and other types of content described above. By looking at the activities and behavior of followers who are mainly fans of the Attack on Titan series, it can be said that they are textual poachers. In addition to consuming, fans can also create their own cultural texts that have been interpreted, where this will lead to a conclusion that fans or fans of Attack on Titan who follow the AOTFESS account are a group of prosumers.

Sugihartati (2019) once said that interactions and activities made by fans, starting from sharing their ideas and ideas into a cultural text in the form of fanart, editing videos related to their hobbies, is an effort by fans to maintain unity of cultural identity that exists as fans of a particular object. With the cultural text being created, and in the context of the content on the AOTFESS account on Twitter, this is what makes fans endlessly coming and doing interactivity in it.

The cultural identity of Attack on Titan fans on AOTFESS on Twitter can be seen and can be found from how they interact with the endless content that is presented every day, then it is also a group of prosumers who also play an important role as creators of cultural texts or content

related to Attack. on Titan itself before finally being distributed through the AOTFESS account. This is done with the aim of having fun with other fans who are also fans of the same hobbies and interests.

3.3 Cultural Identity of Attack on Titan Fans on AOTFESS

Fans do not only consume novels, films, or products of the global popular culture industry, and fans in a digital fandom or cyberfandom can create cultural texts, then produce the meaning of the consumed cultural texts, and produce paratexts to be shared with other fans (Sugihartati, 2019). The cultural text referred to in this context is content that is presented every day and then becomes consumption for fans or fans who follow the AOTFESS account. In addition to consuming, many fans are also trying to channel their creativity through the creation of content which is then redistributed through the AOTFESS account. In addition, the creativity or thoughts of fans can also be known through the reply, retweet, quote-retweet, and love Twitter features that are used by fans or followers of AOTFESS as a form of appreciation or form of their participation in responding to existing content.

It was said above that with the technology that is already fast and sophisticated, fans will carry out activities in order to actively participate in order to support their hobbies and interests. AOTFESS fans or followers have their own way of doing this.

Regarding the AOTFESS account, in addition to being a means of channeling and exchanging information, the account also acts as a channel for the creativity of fans or fans packaged in the previously described contents. Apart from the data obtained from the previous chapter, the author can also state that this is true by using the data obtained based on the answers to the eighth question from the fourth informant regarding the benefits of

AOTFESS to the Attack on Titan fan community. He said that the creativity of fans in creating content or cultural texts contained in the AOTFESS account could be channeled well. From this, the writer concludes that the symbolic creativity reflected in the content on the account is one of the identities of Attack on Titan fans who also follow the AOTFESS account.

The content presented on the account is a cultural text that is interpreted differently by the four informants, and perhaps also all fans or fans who are followers of AOTFESS. It can be concluded again that the activities and content in the fandom by these fans are created and disseminated for themselves, and to maintain the unity of cultural identity that exists as fans of a particular object, and in this case are fans of Attack on Titan (Sugihartati, 2019).

Quoting from the previous discussion, the content on the account will continue to appear every day, and in general there are significant differences in the content of the content. It is known from this, the researcher also hypothesize that the interest of fans or followers in content that is continuously updated every day may also vary. However, even though they are different, this is where the essence of the uniqueness of the AOTFESS Menfess autobase account is. Because of these differences, the content provided from fans to fans will return and continue to receive interactivity every day, as long as the AOTFESS account is still operating.

With content that continues to be updated every day, as well as from fans or fans who follow the account, it will continue to grow, then carry out good interactivity with content that exists with other fans, and also in accordance with the rules set by the account administrators. With this, researcher can hypothesize and interpret all of this as one of the identities they have as fans and followers of the AOTFESS account on Twitter..

4. Conclusion

Fans in this study who are also followers of the AOTFESS Menfess autobase account have different interests and content preferences for each person. However, the differences that exist here are not an obstacle for them to remain fans and followers of the AOTFESS menfess autobase.

The cultural identity of Attack on Titan fans or fans on social media on Twitter Indonesia lies in how the existing content and information will increase and be updated every day, making the interactivity on the AOTFESS Menfess autobase account carried out by fellow fans becomes unlimited or will continue to exist continuously as long as the account is operational. The interactivity of the fans also occurs every day, and on the various types of information or content available at that time.

Fans and followers of the Attack on Titan autobase menfess account have a cultural identity, namely as fans who follow the account for reasons of interest in the content and information seen by them at that time. After that, they enjoy the existing content and information, then perform interactivity to the content presented and interact with other fans who also follow the account. In addition, most of them are fans who have creativity that is channeled through the creation or interactivity of the content there.

This research was conducted by taking one of the various digital fan communities or cyberfandoms that are on Twitter and are a place for gathering and interacting with fellow fans who like the Attack on Titan anime and manga series, called AOTFESS. AOTFESS itself is one of dozens of account types whose performance uses the autobase menfess system.

According to the researcher, research that takes the subject of autobase menfess as the subject of research is still very rare, and researcher feel that there are

still many aspects of autobase menfess that can be used as objects of research. In future research, the data may be collected through other methods such as conducting interviews or questionnaires with a wider scope to obtain more variation and actual data.

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