



The Role of the Kemono Community in Tourism Growth

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Abstract. Tourism is about relieving or disconnecting ourselves from the daily crowdedness of life, and it sometimes involves experiencing new things and moving or visiting a new place. The popularity of a tourist spot is sometimes based on some factors; one of them is how society offers a unique experience exclusive to some destinations. This research aims to give another perspective on Japan's tourism magnet over a growing community called *Kemono* Community that has significantly growing attention to their events and day-to-day life. Their uniqueness lies in their art and colorful costumes that represent their individuality, and each of them is one of a kind, giving an iconic attraction when they hold activities such as, dancing, singing, art markets, and conventions. This community multiplies and spreads across nations, creating their own unique culture mixed with local customization, creating tourist attractions for the community and beyond. By taking a case study of how the *Kemono* Convention was held outside of Japan, especially in Indonesia at the Indonesia Weekend Anthro Gathering 2024 Jakarta, the results of this study are expected to give a new perspective on how a community can give impact to help growing tourism.

Keywords: *Kemono*, Community, Tourist Attraction.

1 Introduction

Tourism is about relieving or disconnecting ourselves from the daily crowdedness of life, that involve a temporary "departure" both physical or metaphorical, from one's daily surroundings and habit. Tourism involves movement through places, with a staying period [1]. This explanation also found on Cohen statement that said "An increased awareness of the outer world seems to lead to an increased readiness to leave one's habitat and to wander around temporarily, or even to emigrate to another habitat"[2]. Usually the tourist choose a destination of their visit based on how they attracted to a place. That mean the tourist attraction is a main component of a destination [3].

1.1 Tourist Attraction

Pearce in Page and Connel (2006) describe that "tourist attraction is a named site with a specific human or natural feature which is the focus of visitor and management attention"[4].

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"Tourist Gaze", a theory developed by John Urry in 1990 suggests that our perception of what makes a place worth visiting is not accidental. Instead, it is shaped by social construction. We are influenced by how cultural institutions, media representations, and even our own pre-existing beliefs portray certain destinations as desirable and interesting. In essence, we are drawn to places that we have been conditioned to see as attractive [5].

For example, Japan are well known to provide both cultural and natural feature that attract both International and local tourist to visit their famous places. According to Japan National Tourism Organization, on April 2024 the estimated number of international visitors reach 3,042,900 visits [6]. The reason this information could be received and well known among the world because of internet society help us to spread information to anywhere without any limitations, the media representation create a point of view to wich we become desire to know more and eventually pay a visit.

1.2 Kemono Community

The *Kemono* (獣) or *Jyūjin/Kemonobito* (獣人), is directly related to Therianthropy, which is a combination of humanoid appearance with other animals. In the past, these creatures often appeared in folklore and were often discussed in mythology and anthropology. In addition, due to the proliferation of popular culture that promotes and adapts the types of literature related to *Kemonobito*, the figure of *Kemonobito* began to appear in game adaptations, novel works, and manga, gaining special attention in the world of subcultures.

The first appearance of anthropomorphic animal forms in Japan comes from one of the oldest 12th century manga by a monk named Toba Shōjo. In the most famous *Emaki-mono* (絵巻物, horizontal-illustrated narrative) art *Choju-Jinbutsu-Giga* (鳥獣人物戯画) drawn in the 12/13th Century, is sometimes regarded as the roots of the whole Japanese manga, the animal like rabbit and monkey is drawn as if they were human [7]. There is also some *Ukiyo-e* artists, especially Kuniyoshi Utagawa (歌川国芳, 1797-1861), having drawn some pictures including anthropomorphic characters in the middle of the 19th century[8].

The community itself is a unit of human life that occupies an area and interacts continuously in accordance with a system of customs and is bound by a sense of community identity [9]. As an individual's appreciation of a character from the Japanese *Kemono* subculture that he or she likes the most, it is then visualized in the form of a two-dimensional drawing, which is then applied to a costume depicting that individual's character. All *Kemono* characters are usually derived from an individual's embodiment of their animal spirit, with various customizations according to their own wishes.

People who have an interest in *kemono* in Japan come together and create *Kemono* communities, as a place to gather and express themselves.



Fig. 1. The researcher with a *Kemono* suiter at IWAG2024 Jakarta (source: researcher's own camera)

The *Kemono* uniqueness lay on the figure-character called Fursona, used to represent themselves in characters that are usually half-human and half-animal, as figure 1 above show that the costume comes with smaller muzzle and bigger eyes that boosting their *anime-like kawaii* feature [10]. The choice of species and the attributes they use usually reflect how an individual wants to be recognized and interact within the community so it's going to be different character for each person. In some cases, avatars in *Kemono* use demon characters in traditional Japanese folklore [11]. *Youkai* such as *Kitsune* 狐 (fox), *Inugami* 犬神 (dog-shaped god), *Komainu* 狛犬 (half-lion half-dog), *Bake-danuki* 狸 (raccoon dog), and other creatures closely related to *Youkai* (demons) in Japanese folklore, are often found in character adaptations within this community. This is because in some cases, an individual will feel a spiritual and emotional bond with an animal or *Youkai* species that they have adapted into a representation of themselves [12].

This community began as a sub-culture that developed through the internet[8]. With the ability of the internet to connect the boundaries between countries, more and more people are interested and join this community, so that it can be found that most interactions between individuals are carried out through social media facilities such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter (x), etc, and it eventually spread outside of Japan.

Charles Sanders Peirce used the term "hypoicon" to refer to an icon that stands alone, without any accompanying label, legend, or an index. He further categorized hypoicons into three distinct types: (a) Image, this type of hypoicon relies on a single, straightforward quality to convey its meaning; (b) diagram utilizes internal relationships, primarily dyadic or perceived as such, to create an analogy that represents the relationships present in another entity; (c) metaphor, functions by representing the

representative character of a sign through depicting a parallel or similarity in a separate entity[13].

This community can be seen as a hypoicon of contemporary culture that being shaped after social construction, making its unique activity and annual gathering event to become a tourist attraction as much as an anime convention attract tourist from local and international to visit wherever this gathering be held.

The study case area located on Indonesia Weekend Anthro Gathering (IWAG) in Sunter Jakarta, Indonesia. The study aim to learn how the *Kemono* community impact the local tourism growth based on how many tourist visiting non-Japan Country *Kemono* convention.

With the blooming tourist attraction after the pandemic strike in 2020, the emergence of tourism has become more potent to restore economical stability. many art festivals, many innovations always emerge and bring new colors to the global art world. However, in the vast era of globalization we will seek more point of view to the creative world creating a new chance of helping regrow tourism. The role of *Kemono* community as a new icon that become a tourist attraction to help tourism growth is fascinating to seek. This research uses tourist gaze theory to understand how the Kemono community becomes a tourist gaze. By using tourist gaze theory, as developed by John Urry, become a guidance that examines how cultures and social construction can shape an attraction in the tourism world [1].

2 Methods

This research is using a study case and qualitative descriptive research that uses literature review data methods. The phases of research include of collecting and analyzing data as well as presenting the results of the study case by observing the object, which taken at Indonesia Weekend Anthro Gathering held on 13-14th of July 2024 at Ibis Styles Jakarta Sunter Hotel. Research data is being provided in primarily data obtained through observation, and statistic provided from the IWAG event management, and the secondary data, such as articles, website, and books about *Kemono* and tourist attraction.

3 Result and Discussion

While the *Kemono* community finds its roots in Japan, its influence on tourism is increasingly visible beyond its borders, demonstrating the global reach of niche interests and their potential for driving tourism growth. As the community reach a global recognition, the social construction began to potray this contemporary culture as unique, and so it was aligned with Urry's tourist gaze theory that said the media

representations are influencing our preception, attracting us to a new place that what we think worth to visit.

3.1 Sustainable Tourism Growth Attractor

The *Kemono* community shows promising chances of being a key factor of tourism growth. The following data shows the role of *Kemono* community as a tourist gaze in the tourism growth.

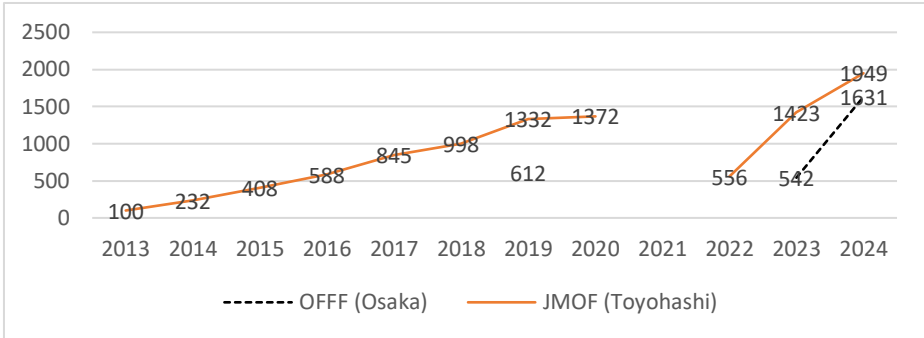


Fig. 2. Japan’s *Kemono* convention visitors (source: JMOF and OFFF official website) (Accessed: June, 28 2024)

The figure 2 above, shows how the *Kemono* community keep growing each year in Japan. This chart comes from two different *Kemono* convention held in two different region which is Japan Meeting of Furries (JMOF)[14] that being hold in Aichi Prefecture, Toyohashi; and then Osaka Furry Fun Festa (OFFF)[15] hold in Osaka Prefecture. Their attendees growing every year show a promising visitors growth in the said regions.

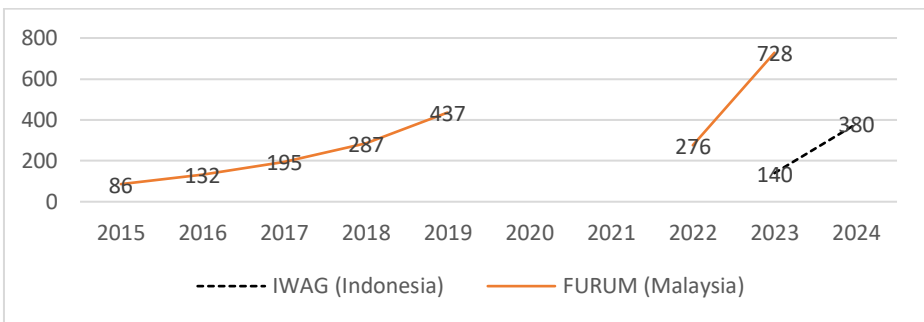


Fig. 3. *Kemono* convention visitors outside Japan (source: IWAG and FURUM official website) (Accessed: June, 28 2024)

According to the figure 3, shows how the *Kemono* based convention grew visitors each year. Even being hold outside Japan, the community could serve as a magnet to attract

tourist for visiting their conventions. The said conventions are Indonesia Weekend Anthro Gathering (IWAG)[16] in Indonesia; and Fur Upon Malaysia (FURUM)[17] in Malaysia.

3.1.1 Niche Tourism Magnet

The *Kemono* community, with its passion for anthropomorphic characters and related events, could be considered a niche tourism segment. Their travel decisions, often centered around conventions, meetups, or locations that are relevant to their interests.



Fig. 4. IWAG2024's group photo (source: IWAG's archive provided by the management)

From the figure 4 above showing all the total of 362 attendees and 18 main staffs of Indonesia Weekend Anthro Gathering, gathered in this convention because of this specific *Kemono*-themed held in Indonesia. From the observation done in IWAG, the attendees comes from both local and international visitors, mean that their travel decision is drawn by this niche event. As *Kemono* community thrives on art, crafts, and performances, by embracing niche interests, fostering engagement, and prioritizing authenticity and sustainability, it can create unique and memorable experiences, and bring significant revenue to specific destinations and business.

3.1.2 Social impact

Kemono enthusiasts often travel to attend conventions even when they needed to go abroad, they usually meet artists, and purchase some merchandise. This a factor that can drive tourism to areas that hosting such events or with a concentration of *Kemono*-related business. The Increased visitor traffic from the *Kemono* fans, translates into the higher local revenue, such as hotels, restaurants nearby, the transportation services, and some local business that can incorporated *Kemono*-themed products to attract more one that catering to their interest.

Some of the conventions are even donated their revenue obtained from the ticket sales, raffles, into the local zoo. For example from the Osaka Furry Fun Fest, they donated 1,000,000 JPY to the Osaka Tennoji Zoo in 2024[18]. There is also from the Japan Meeting of Furies convention that donated some portion of the entrance fee, and all the raffles, they managed to gather 3,290,150 JPY that then donated to Toyohashi Zoo and Botanical Park in 2024[19].



Fig. 5. IWAG2024's financial statement (source: IWAG's archive provided by the management) (Accessed: July, 20 2024)

From the IWAG convention's financial statement data provided by the management, on the figure 5 can be seen that the money raised by attendee's tickets alone reached 201.5 million rupiah, and around 57% of that money goes into the local venue. The money that *Kemono* community could raise for the area can be considered as their way of having a role in social aspect such as local venue, funding into animal studies, and creating sustainable relation within the local community and beyond.

3.2 Community-led initiative

The *Kemono* community's strong online presence and global connections could foster a sense of community-based tourism[20]. This means they might be more likely to support businesses or initiatives run by fellow community members, creating a more interconnected and sustainable tourism ecosystem. By showcasing acculturation with the local talent, customs, and passion, these create a welcoming atmosphere for visitors, making them feel like they are part of something special. This sense of belonging can lead to repeat visits and positive recommendations.

Successful community-led initiatives often generate positive media coverage and word-of-mouth marketing, attracting attention beyond the initial target audience. This pique the curiosity of those unfamiliar with *Kemono*, potentially leading them to discover the region and its other attractions, just like what Urry explain in his tourism gaze theory. The *Kemono* community that eventually becomes a tourist attraction are the product of modern social construct culture.

4 Conclusion

Based on the research, the *Kemono* community offers a valuable opportunity for tourism growth, cultural exchange, and social development. By embracing their passion, respecting their culture, and collaborating creatively, destinations specifically

in the Southeast Asia can tap into this burgeoning market and create unique and memorable experiences for local and international visitors.

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