

The Role of Lore in Purchase Decisions for Mecha Plastic Model

Rendy Iswanto¹, Suharto²

Rendyiswanto1582@gmail.com ¹, Suharto@mail.unnes.ac.id ²

Postgraduate Doctoral, Art Indonesian Institute of the Art Bali, Indonesia
Department of Language and Arts, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Semarang
Indonesia

ABSTRACT

Nowadays, Japanese pop culture is growing rapidly in Indonesia, encompassing Anime, Manga, and Video Games originating from Japanese subcultures. Anime, Manga, and Video Games are not only popular in Japan and Indonesia but are also adored by people from many other countries, making Japanese pop culture a global phenomenon. Like anime films, manga has various genres, one of which is the mecha genre. The mecha genre is a sci-fi or fantasy genre that involves robot characters, commonly referred to as mecha. One of the most successful mecha anime series that has produced numerous merchandise items is *Mobile Suit Gundam*, Gundam has led to the creation of various merchandise, particularly *Gunpla* (Gundam plastic models), which are often supported by rich lore through anime and manga. In contrast, newer Chinese mecha model manufacturers frequently release products without any accompanying narrative or backstory. The purpose of this study is to analyze how the presence or absence of lore influences consumer purchasing decisions for mecha plastic models. Through qualitative analysis, the research reveals it was found that the presence of a backstory or lore does not significantly influence the consumer's decision as long as the design, price, and quality of the product offered can compete with Japanese model kits. However, lore can serve as an added value for model kits from China, as this background story provides a deeper understanding for the buyer about the story behind the product.

Keywords: lore, mecha, plastic model, purchase decision

INTRODUCTION

Japanese pop culture is currently growing rapidly in Indonesia, encompassing Anime, Manga, and Video Games originating from Japanese subculture. Anime, Manga, and Video Games are not only loved in Japan and Indonesia but also by people from many other countries, making Japanese pop culture a global phenomenon. Anime is a term used to refer to animated films from Japan, derived from the word "animation," which, in Japanese pronunciation, becomes *animeshon*. Anime has become an international commodity, attracting increasing attention from academics and various fields across countries (Triadi Sya'Dian, 2016). Manga refers to comics from Japan, where the stories feature characters and speech bubbles or dialogue. These elements allow readers to not only read but also imagine the narrative being told (Zida Wahyuddin, 2024). Comics are a medium for conveying messages similar to television, radio, newspapers, and magazines (Sutanto & Wardaya, 2021). Video Games are games played by manipulating electronic visuals produced by computer programs on monitors or other display screens (Putri & Muryanti, 2020). Video Games are electronic games involving interactions between humans and computers, where humans provide input to the system and receive responses through audio and visuals generated by the computer (Utomo, 2021).

The globalization of Japanese pop culture is increasingly evident through numerous Japan-themed events, such as karaoke, manga festivals, cosplay contests, and, of course, anime. Anime has long been present on Indonesian television, with dozens of titles aired on various TV stations. Since its introduction, anime has successfully captured the interest of Indonesian audiences and quickly gained immense popularity (Gama, 2024). Similar to films anime and manga feature various genres, one of which is the mecha genre. The mecha genre is a science fiction or fantasy genre that involves robot characters, commonly referred to as mecha. The mecha genre in anime depicts large robots piloted by humans and tends to focus on science fiction, often incorporating elements of fantasy (Reysen et al., 2017). In addition to animation, comics, and video games, the mecha anime genre has given rise to derivative products or merchandise, typically replicas of

mecha characters featured in the anime, manga, or video games. These replicas are miniature versions of the mecha characters, often available as plastic models, action figures, or even statues of the mecha characters. One successful mecha anime that has spawned numerous merchandises is *Mobile Suit Gundam*, commonly referred to as Gundam. *Mobile Suit Gundam* first aired in 1979 and has continued to this day, producing hundreds of giant robots known as Gundams, making it one of the best-selling mecha anime of all time. The image of the Gundam mecha can be seen in Figure 1, which features a design combining the colors white, red, yellow, and blue.



Figure 1. Gundam

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gundam_%28fictional_robot%29

The Gundam anime has given rise to a wide range of merchandise, with one of the most famous plastic models of Gundam characters, known as Gunpla (Gundam Plastic Model), produced by Bandai. These plastic models differ significantly from action figures or statues, as Gunpla requires assembly and is not a finished product. The act of assembling Gunpla provides a unique sensation, setting it apart from simply purchasing action figures or statues. Gunpla is a type of plastic model that allows individuals to build miniature versions of Gundam robot characters. These models come with various small parts that can be assembled to create detailed miniature Gundam characters (Song et al., 2023). Similar to the anime, Gunpla has become a global phenomenon, loved by people from various countries, making assembling plastic models or Gunpla a hobby in

itself, as seen in Figure 2. According to a study by Habiburrahman, the activity of assembling various plastic components into a Gundam robot increases blood circulation in the brain, which helps improve concentration, reaction time, and memory retention (Habiburrahman et al., 2015).



Figure 2. Gunpla

Source: <https://artrovogundam.com/blogs/news/the-ultimate-beginner-s-guide-to-gunpla-building-your-first-model>

For decades, Japan has been the only country producing mecha-themed anime, manga, or video game series along with their merchandise. However, in recent years, many producers from China have emerged, releasing their own original mecha plastic models. These plastic models are also exported worldwide, including to Indonesia, allowing them to rival the popularity of Gunpla. One such producer of plastic models from China is Motor Nuclear, which is known for its highly detailed and high-quality products, especially in the "Legend of Star General" series, featuring a mecha named Caoren, as seen in Figure 3. They produce mecha models inspired by large robots, featuring complex and accurate mechanical design elements.



Figure 3. Motor Nuclear Plastic Model Cao Ren
Source: <https://sugotoys.com.au/product/mnlosg237292/>

Unlike Gundam and Gunpla, where the manufacturers typically release an anime series first to establish a "lore" or backstory for the Gunpla series, this approach allows Gunpla fans to understand the story behind the series through its anime or manga. The term "lore" is defined as a collection of stories or knowledge that forms the background of a fictional work or cultural tradition. Another definition of lore is stories or knowledge related to a specific subject. Based on these definitions, the term "lore" in this study refers to the story or background of a mecha character created through comics/manga or anime series. However, Chinese manufacturers of plastic models do not release anime, manga, or other media to provide a backstory for their plastic model products. As a result, people who purchase these plastic model products do not understand the story behind them. This contrasts with Gunpla, where buyers can learn the backstory of the Gunpla through its associated anime or manga series.

Another example of a plastic model producer from China is Infinite Dimension IN ERA+. Similar to Motor Nuclear, Infinite Dimension IN ERA+ also releases original mecha plastic models without adaptations from any anime or manga series, meaning they do not have a lore that explains the backstory behind the plastic model products they produce. One of the mecha from Infinite Dimension IN ERA+ is named Ruling, as seen in Figure 4.



Figure 4. Infinite Dimension IN ERA+Plastic Model RULING
Source: <https://shokuningunpla.com/products/ruling>

In addition to Motor Nuclear and Infinite Dimension IN ERA+, Hemoxian is another producer of mecha plastic models from China. One of their plastic model products is *The Legion of Thor*, as seen in Figure 5, which is an original mecha release from Hemoxian. Although there is no anime series, Hemoxian has made an effort to introduce the lore of *The Legion of Thor* in the assembly instruction booklet, albeit briefly and in Chinese, meaning not many people can read and understand the lore behind the product, as shown in Figure 6.



Figure 5. Hemoxian Legion of Thor
Source: <https://takaramodel.com/products/the-legion-of-thor>



Figure 6. A brief explanation of the lore of The Legion of Thor
source: author's documentation

From the explanations provided, it is evident that there are plastic model products with lore formed from anime or manga series, such as Gunpla, and there are plastic model products without lore. The purpose of this study is to analyze how the presence or absence of lore influences consumer purchasing decisions for mecha plastic models. The previous study used in this research is titled *Sistem Pendukung Keputusan Pemilihan Model Kits Gundam Menggunakan Metode Fuzzy Analitical Hierarchy Process* by Samudra, which discusses the Fuzzy Analytical Hierarchy Process method to assist in the decision-making process of purchasing (Samudra, 2022). While This research focuses more on examining purchasing decisions based on whether or not lore is a consideration.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research method, specifically conducting interviews with respondents. Qualitative research is focused on exploring qualitative phenomena, such as investigating human behavior to uncover the underlying motives behind that behavior (Adhi Kusumastuti, 2019). The qualitative research method is suitable because the main objective of this study is to deeply understand consumers' *perceptions*, *experiences*, and *subjective reasons* when making purchasing decisions for mecha model kits, particularly in relation to the presence

or absence of *lore*. The criteria for respondents in this study are individuals who have a hobby of collecting plastic model mecha and have been engaged in this hobby for more than 3 years so ensure that respondents have substantial experience with plastic model kits and can provide insights based on long-term engagement. The respondents used in this study are David Pranata, a trainer and writer on presentation techniques who has been collecting plastic models since 2019; Rendy Alfeta, a former chairman of the Gunpla community in Surabaya (Arek Gundam Surabaya) who has been involved in the plastic model mecha hobby since 2010; and Sun, a moderator and administrator of several national and international plastic model mecha hobby communities. To overcome distance limitations, the interviews will be conducted online via Zoom which were recorded and transcribed for further analysis, scheduled for October 25-27, 2025.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Mecha

The term "mecha" is derived from the word "mechanical," which refers to anything related to mechanics. This includes various things such as vehicles, electronic equipment, machinery, and even robots (Iswanto, 2022).

Plastic Model

A plastic model refers to a set of models made of plastic, consisting of parts or pieces that can vary in size, from large too small. The size and number of parts usually depend on the difficulty level and realism of the model kit (Fabiyan, 2020). The relationship between mecha anime and plastic models is closely intertwined and mutually supportive, creating a rapidly growing industry. Plastic models, which are often robots or mecha characters from popular anime, such as Gunpla (Gundam model kits), have become the main merchandise that expands the mecha franchise. Overall, mecha anime and model kits form a cycle that strengthens both industries: anime creates characters and stories, while model kits deepen the fan experience and sustain the franchise's longevity.

Lore

Lore refers to the customs or knowledge passed down from ancestors through generations, either verbally (spoken), behaviorally (non-verbal), or through physical evidence such as relics from the past (Encep Zainul Syah, 2020). Lore or the backstory in mecha anime or comics plays a crucial role as it provides depth and context, making the world and mecha within the story more engaging and complex. Lore includes the history of the world, technology, major events, and character motivations, all of which contribute to building the depth of the story in mecha anime or comics.

Purchase Decision

A purchase decision is the reason that drives consumers to make choices regarding the purchase of a product based on their needs (Brama Kumbara, 2021). Consumer behavior encompasses various actions directly related to efforts to obtain and decide on products or services, including the decision-making process that occurs before and after the action (Brama Kumbara, 2021). Consumers must go through each stage in the product purchase process, especially since this model considers all the aspects that emerge when consumers face a new purchase decision with a higher level of involvement.

Interviews

The first respondent is Rendy Alfeta, the former chairman of the Gunpla community in Surabaya (Arek Gundam Surabaya), who has been involved in the mecha plastic model hobby since 2010. From the interview, it was found that Rendy is an anime and manga fan as well as a mecha plastic model collector. When choosing a plastic model, the first thing Rendy considers is the mecha design itself, followed by factors like price, quality, and ease of assembly. The backstory or lore of the mecha is very important, as this element adds value to the design and makes it more interesting. Rendy is also aware of the mecha plastic models produced by manufacturers from China. These products are usually offered at more affordable prices compared to Gundam plastic models or Gunpla but still have competitive design and quality. However, the lack of a backstory or lore in the Chinese mecha plastic models is one of the main weaknesses. This lack of lore means that buyers

do not have context or understanding about the role of the mecha in the story, such as whether it is a protagonist or antagonist. The presence of lore significantly impacts the appeal and collection experience.

The second respondent is David Pranata, a trainer and writer on presentation techniques who has been collecting plastic models since 2019. From the interview, it was found that David is not a hardcore fan of anime and manga, but he does follow certain titles. However, David is a mecha plastic model collector. When choosing a plastic model, the main factors he considers are the price and quality of the product. The backstory or lore of the mecha is not very important to David in his collecting experience. David is also aware of the mecha plastic models produced by manufacturers from China. One of the advantages of these products is their unique design, which no longer simply imitates the mecha designs from Japanese anime like Gundam. However, according to David, if Chinese mecha plastic models were accompanied by an anime or manga series as supporting media, it would have a positive impact on the purchase decision, as it would add appeal and value to the product in the eyes of collectors.

The third respondent is Sun, who is a moderator and admin for several mecha plastic model hobby communities, both national and international. Sun is a fan of anime and manga as well as a mecha plastic model collector. When choosing a mecha plastic model, Sun considers three main factors: price, quality, and design. However, for Sun, the backstory or lore of the mecha is not an important factor in collecting experience. Sun is also aware of mecha plastic models produced by manufacturers from China. For him, if the product has an affordable price, attractive design, and good quality, the existence of lore or backstory is not very important. Nonetheless, Sun believes that if the mecha plastic model were equipped with lore, such as an anime or manga explaining its background, it would definitely be an added value that could increase the product's appeal.

Based on the data obtained from the interviews, it was found that all plastic model collectors are fans of anime and manga. The main consideration when purchasing or collecting plastic models is the design of the product, followed by the price, and

the last factor is the quality of the product, which in this study refers to how easy it is to assemble. These considerations align with what Kotler stated in Kumbara (2021) that when making a purchase, consumers choose from several available alternatives. This choice is based on quality, value, price, and other factors that strengthen the consumer's desire to buy the product.

All respondents are aware of plastic models from China, and their opinions on Chinese plastic models are that they are generally cheaper compared to Gundam plastic models or Gunpla, but the quality and design offered are competitive. Chinese plastic models have unique designs and no longer imitate the designs of Japanese mecha anime, such as Gundam. The presence or absence of a backstory/lore is not a significant factor if the design, price, and quality of the product are competitive with Japanese plastic models. However, having a backstory/lore can be an added value for Chinese plastic models because it provides buyers with an understanding of the story behind the product, such as whether the mecha represented by the plastic model is an antagonist or protagonist, which can spark interest for mecha fans to collect models of those mecha characters. If an anime or manga series becomes popular, its products or merchandise are sure to sell in the market, but this must be complemented by the design and quality of the products or merchandise produced (Ziyue & Zijun, 2024).

CONCLUSION.

Main Findings

Based on the data obtained from interviews, this study found that the presence of a backstory or lore does not play a dominant role in influencing consumers' purchasing decisions for mecha plastic models. Consumers prioritize aspects such as design, price, and product quality, especially when these products compete directly with Japanese model kits. Nevertheless, lore still provides additional value for model kits, particularly those produced by Chinese manufacturers, by offering consumers deeper context and narrative engagement with the product.

Implications

The existence of lore can enhance consumer experience by providing background information about the mecha character, such as its role as an antagonist or protagonist. This narrative element can increase consumer attachment and interest, especially among mecha fans and collectors. Therefore, while not the primary factor driving purchasing decisions, lore has strategic potential to differentiate products and build stronger brand engagement.

Recommendations

Plastic model mecha manufacturers from China are encouraged to maintain and continue improving the originality of their designs, competitive pricing, and product quality. Additionally, to create added value and foster a larger fan community, it is recommended that manufacturers develop backstories or lore for their products. This can be achieved through various media, such as anime, manga, or dedicated lore books, to provide consumers with a richer narrative experience and strengthen emotional connections with the products.

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