

## **Kamen Rider Fandom in Malaysia: A Conceptual Analysis of Passion and Social Stigma**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Kamen Rider*, a widely recognized Japanese *Tokusatsu* franchise, has cultivated a strong and dedicated following in Malaysia. While the series is primarily targeted at children, many adult fans actively engage with the franchise through merchandise collection and cosplay. However, these activities often face societal criticism, with detractors labeling them as frivolous or immature. This conceptual paper explores the cultural, psychological, and economic dimensions of Kamen Rider fandom in Malaysia, focusing on the motivations behind adult participation, the financial implications of collecting Kamen Rider transformation belts and toys, and the social stigma associated with cosplaying. Additionally, the paper examines how such engagement fosters personal identity, strengthens social connections, and contributes to the broader development of Malaysia's pop culture landscape. By analyzing these factors, this study aims to highlight the significance of fandom culture as a legitimate and meaningful form of adult entertainment and self-expression.

**Keywords:** Kamen Rider, transformation belt, fandom, Malaysia, cosplay, collectibles, pop culture, social stigma, adult fans, consumer behavior, identity formation.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Kamen Rider franchise has been a significant part of Malaysian pop culture since the 1970s, originating from Japan in 1971 as a *tokusatsu* (special effects-based) television series created by Toei Company and manga artist Shotaro Ishinomori. The series centers on masked heroes battling evil forces, embodying themes of justice, heroism, and personal growth. While primarily targeting children, Kamen Rider has cultivated a dedicated adult fanbase in Malaysia, drawn by nostalgia and admiration for its storytelling. Adult fans often engage through collecting related merchandise and participating in cosplay events.

Despite this strong following, adult participation in Kamen Rider fandom frequently encounters societal criticism. Collecting items like Deluxe (DX) Kamen Rider transformation belts is sometimes viewed as financially irresponsible or juvenile (S. Similarly, cosplaying as Kamen Rider characters at conventions can be perceived as immature rather than a legitimate form of creative expression. These negative perceptions mirror broader societal attitudes that stigmatize adult engagement in activities associated with childhood. However, research indicates that fandom involvement offers numerous psychological and social benefits, including stress relief, self-expression, and community building. Participation in fandom activities has been linked to reduced stress and anxiety, as well as enhanced social connections and creative expression (Psychology Today, 2024).

This conceptual paper aims to explore the impact of Kamen Rider fandom among Malaysian adults, analyzing its role in consumer behavior, identity formation, and societal perception. By examining the motivations behind collecting and cosplaying, as well as the broader implications of these activities, this study seeks to challenge the stigma surrounding adult participation in pop culture fandoms and highlight their significance in Malaysia's evolving entertainment landscape.

## 1.1 DEFINITION OF KAMEN RIDER AND FANDOM

The Kamen Rider franchise, created by Shotaro Ishinomori in 1971, is a long-running Japanese *Tokusatsu* series featuring masked superheroes who transform using specialized belts and powers to fight evil organizations. Over the decades, the franchise has expanded into multiple television series, films, manga, and toy lines, making it a cornerstone of Japanese pop culture and a global phenomenon. In Malaysia, Kamen Rider gained popularity through television broadcasts in the 1980s and 1990s, later reinforced by the availability of imported merchandise and streaming services. On top of that, as anime and manga culture have continued to grow in Malaysia, so has the interest in Japanese superheroes like Kamen Rider. The increasing popularity of the broader Japanese pop culture, especially with the rise of anime conventions and fan gatherings, has provided a fertile ground for Kamen Rider to expand and attract more local fans. Over the years, the internet and social media have allowed Kamen Rider to reach a wider audience. Fans can now connect and discuss the franchise through online forums, social media platforms, and fan pages, further boosting its visibility and appeal. Through these digital platforms, local fans have also been able to share and celebrate their love for Kamen Rider, creating a strong community that supports the franchise in the form of a fandom.

The term fandom refers to a collective group of individuals who share a passionate interest in a particular cultural phenomenon, such as television series, films, or comic books. Fandom culture is characterized by active participation, including collecting memorabilia, creating fan content, attending conventions, and engaging in discussions within fan communities. Fandoms play a crucial role in contemporary pop culture, providing fans with a sense of belonging and identity. In the context of Kamen Rider, the fandom consists of individuals who not only watch the series but also participate in related activities such as collecting DX transformation belts, cosplaying, and discussing the franchise's themes and characters online. Like many collectibles, most collectors are driven by their passion and appreciation for the art rather than financial gain. Additionally, the excitement of searching for and acquiring a desired item adds to the thrill of toy collecting (Cruz, 2014).

Each year, every time the Kamen Rider series adds a new instalment into their franchise, more toys are created and released in unison during the current show's run to attract viewers while boosting sales. The popularity of these toys is significant because they provide fans with an interactive way to engage with the show. As the franchise releases new series, there are always new belts associated with each Kamen Rider. This constant release of new, upgraded, and exclusive transformation belts encourages repeat purchases and boosts toy sales each time a new season of Kamen Rider is aired.

Additionally, their ability to continually adapt and develop new toys based on changing trends in toy technology, such as incorporating electronic sounds, lights, and interactive elements, has kept the toys relevant and desirable. The expansion of the Kamen Rider brand into multiple regions ensures that Kamen Rider toys have a consistent presence on shelves worldwide. The continuous success of Kamen Rider toys has also contributed to the **longevity**

**of the franchise.** Toy sales create a feedback loop: the toys create a tangible way for fans to interact with the franchise, which leads to greater fan loyalty and more media consumption. As children and collectors engage with the toys, they become more likely to watch the shows, buy related products, and participate in the larger Kamen Rider fandom. This, in turn, keeps the franchise in the public eye and supports future seasons and toy releases.

## 1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

The objectives of this conceptual paper are as follows:

1. **To examine the cultural and social significance of Kamen Rider fandom in Malaysia** – This study explores how *Kamen Rider* has influenced Malaysian pop culture and the role it plays in identity formation and community engagement.
2. **To analyze the economic and psychological impact of fandom participation** – This paper investigates the financial aspects of collecting Kamen Rider merchandise and the psychological benefits of engaging in fandom activities such as cosplay.
3. **To address societal perceptions and stigma surrounding adult participation in fandom** – This study discusses public attitudes toward adult fans, challenges misconceptions, and promotes a broader acceptance of pop culture hobbies in Malaysia.

## 1.3 METHODOLOGY

This conceptual paper adopts a qualitative research approach based on literature review and content analysis. The methodology involves the following steps:

1. **Literature Review** – Relevant academic articles, books, and journal papers on fandom culture, consumer behavior, and cosplay in Malaysia are examined to provide a theoretical foundation for the study.
2. **Content Analysis** – Social media discussions, online forums, and news articles related to *Kamen Rider* fandom in Malaysia are analyzed to understand public perceptions, criticisms, and fan experiences.
3. **Observational Study** – The study considers observations from pop culture conventions, such as Comic Fiesta and AniManGaki, to explore fan engagement in cosplay and merchandise collection.

## 2.0 ANALYSIS

For this analysis, we will examine three key aspects: the **cultural and social significance of Kamen Rider fandom in Malaysia**, the **economic and psychological impact of fandom participation**, and the **societal perceptions and stigma surrounding adult engagement in fandom activities**.

### 2.1 CULTURAL AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF KAMEN RIDER FANDOM IN MALAYSIA

The presence of Kamen Rider in Malaysia can be traced back to the late 1970s and early 1980s when Japanese tokusatsu series, including Ultraman and Super Sentai, gained popularity through television broadcasts. However, the franchise's impact significantly expanded in the late 1980s and 1990s, particularly with the airing of Kamen Rider Black, which became one of the most influential tokusatsu series in Malaysia and other Southeast Asian countries. The series was so well-received that it was widely known by its Indonesian-dubbed name, Satria Baja Hitam, a title that remains iconic among Malaysian fans. The nostalgia surrounding Kamen Rider Black continues to influence adult fans, many of whom were first exposed to Kamen Rider during their childhood.

Kamen Rider Black aired in Malaysia in the late 1980s and early 1990s, quickly becoming one of the most beloved Kamen Rider series in the country. The series' protagonist, Kotaro Minami, who transforms into Kamen Rider Black to fight against the evil Gorgom organization, embodied themes of perseverance, justice, and the struggle against oppression (Yatta-Tachi, 2017). These themes resonated strongly with Malaysian audiences, particularly given the socio-political narratives often associated with heroic struggles in fiction. The sequel, Kamen Rider Black RX, further cemented the character's popularity, leading to an enduring fanbase that continues to celebrate the series through merchandise collection, fan discussions, and cosplay. (Yatta-Tachi, 2017).

For many Malaysian fans, Kamen Rider Black represents more than just a childhood television show; it serves as a cultural symbol of heroism and resilience. The show's darker storyline, combined with its mature themes of betrayal and destiny, distinguished it from other children's programs at the time, allowing it to appeal to both young audiences and adults. As a result, many fans who grew up watching Kamen Rider Black continue their engagement with the Kamen Rider franchise as adults, demonstrating how nostalgia and personal values shape long-term fan identity.

Beyond individual identity formation, Kamen Rider fandom in Malaysia serves as a medium for social interaction and community engagement. Fan communities, both online and

offline, provide a space where individuals with shared interests can connect, exchange knowledge, and participate in activities such as cosplay competitions and fan events. The growth of social media platforms has further strengthened these communities, enabling discussions on new series, toy releases, and fan theories. Research on fandom culture in Malaysia highlights the role of conventions such as Comic Fiesta and AniManGaki in fostering social interaction among fans. These events offer opportunities for Malaysian Kamen Rider enthusiasts to showcase their creativity through cosplay, interact with fellow fans, and engage with industry professionals. Participation in such activities enhances social belonging, challenging the stereotype that fandom engagement is a solitary or immature pursuit. Instead, it demonstrates that fandom can be a meaningful aspect of cultural participation that encourages creativity and networking.

Moreover, the economic contributions of fandom communities cannot be overlooked. The popularity of Kamen Rider merchandise, including DX, Premium Bandai and CSM transformation belts and figurines, supports Malaysia's toy and collectibles industry. Hobby shops, custom costume makers, and event organizers benefit financially from the sustained interest in the franchise, indicating that fandom engagement has tangible economic implications beyond personal enjoyment. Despite the cultural and social benefits of fandom participation, adult Kamen Rider fans in Malaysia often face criticism for engaging in activities perceived as childish or financially impractical. This stigma reflects broader societal expectations regarding adulthood and responsible consumer behavior. However, similar criticisms have been directed at other hobbyist communities, such as sneaker collectors and automotive enthusiasts, suggesting that negative perceptions of fandom are rooted in cultural biases rather than objective concerns about financial responsibility. In short, entertainment media such as Kamen Rider contribute to the domestic economy as fans of the franchise will invest in merchandise for the sake of nostalgia and personal interest as a whole and such a fundamental aspect should not be looked down upon.

Academic discourse on fandom studies emphasizes that engagement with popular culture should not be dismissed as mere escapism but rather recognized as a legitimate form of cultural expression. The acceptance of anime and gaming culture in Malaysia in recent years indicates a shift toward a more inclusive understanding of fandom, suggesting that negative perceptions toward Kamen Rider fans may also evolve over time.

## **2.2 ECONOMIC AND PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF FANDOM PARTICIPATION**

The Kamen Rider franchise has had a significant economic impact on its consumer base, largely driven by Bandai's strategic expansion of its merchandise lines. Beyond the standard DX (Deluxe) toy releases, Bandai introduced premium lines such as Premium Bandai and Complete Selection Modification (CSM), which cater specifically to older fans and collectors. These high-end products are highly desirable due to their show-accurate scale, detailed craftsmanship, and enhanced features like authentic background music (BGM), character voice lines by original actors, and LED or mechanical effects that replicate scenes

from the TV series. Among the most sought-after items are transformation belts (drivers), gimmick items (such as collectible keys, cards, or bottles used to activate powers), weapons, final form items, SO-DO figures (poseable mini-figures with swappable parts), and highly detailed display figures. The allure of owning replicas that closely mirror what is used on-screen intensifies consumer demand, often justifying their higher price points. As a result, these premium items contribute to a robust secondary market and increased brand loyalty, reflecting how Kamen Rider transcends its role as entertainment to become a powerful driver of economic activity in the toy and collectibles industry.

Many collectors regard these products as both nostalgic memorabilia and valuable assets, with limited editions often appreciating in value over time (Chatchalermwit, 2021). While some are drawn by the investment potential, most collectors are driven by passion and the thrill of acquiring desired pieces (Cruz, 2014). The popularity of Kamen Rider merchandise has also supported the growth of local businesses, including custom prop makers, independent toy resellers, and cosplay material suppliers. Pop culture events like Comic Fiesta and AniManGaki generate substantial revenue through ticket sales, vendor booths, and brand sponsorships, showcasing the financial impact of fandom. Moreover, large-scale events such as the Kamen Rider 50th Anniversary Exhibition in Kuala Lumpur have attracted significant crowds and boosted local commerce, reinforcing the franchise's role in Malaysia's growing entertainment economy (Malay Mail, 2025).

The rise of social media platform has amplified consumer interest in Kamen Rider collectibles. On social media platforms like TikTok, Malaysian fans actively engage with the Kamen Rider series. The hashtag #kamenriderfansmalaysia has garnered over 1.4 million views, showcasing unboxing videos, transformation demonstrations, and discussions on rare collectibles influencing viewers to purchase their own items through unboxing videos, transformation demonstrations, and discussions on rare collectibles. This growing trend of online toy appreciation has made fandom engagement more visible and socially accepted. Additionally, the accessibility of Kamen Rider merchandise in Malaysia has improved with the introduction of Japanese thrift store chains offering second-hand toys, belts, and figures at affordable prices, allowing a broader audience to engage with the fandom.

Despite these economic benefits, adult fans often face societal criticism for spending money on what some perceive as a childish hobby (South China Morning Post, 2008). Similar criticisms have been directed at other collectible-based hobbies, such as sneaker collecting and car modifications, indicating that negative perceptions are rooted in cultural biases rather than objective financial concerns. Economic data suggests that fandom engagement contributes to various industries, from retail and tourism to digital content creation, reinforcing the idea that it is not merely a frivolous pursuit but a legitimate market force.

Beyond its economic impact, Kamen Rider fandom plays a significant psychological role in participants' lives. Nostalgia is a key factor keeping fans engaged, as many recall watching *Kamen Rider* during their childhood and now seek to relive those memories through collecting or cosplaying. For some, it provides a much-needed break and a sense of achievement, while many with good financial capacity purchase the toys to relive their happy childhood memories and feel connected to these characters and pop culture (Pettit, 2017).



Additionally, fandom engagement fosters community bonding through online groups, fan gatherings, and pop culture conventions. These spaces provide emotional support and create safe environments where fans can share their enthusiasm without fear of judgment. Social media has further strengthened these connections by enabling real-time interactions, collection showcases, and discussions on the latest series. Studies indicate that having hobbies and personal interests contributes to mental well-being by reducing stress and increasing overall life satisfaction.

However, despite these psychological benefits, adult fans continue to face stigma for engaging in activities associated with childhood. Critics argue that spending money on collectibles is financially irresponsible or that cosplaying is a waste of time and resources. These negative perceptions are particularly evident on social media, where viral posts featuring Kamen Rider cosplayers or collectors frequently attract dismissive comments. Nevertheless, the rising popularity of cosplay, anime conventions, and digital content creation suggests that fandom engagement is gradually becoming more socially accepted in Malaysia.

With the continued growth of pop culture industries and the increasing influence of digital platforms, Kamen Rider fandom is expected to remain a significant cultural and economic phenomenon. While challenges such as stigma and financial scrutiny persist, the economic contributions and psychological fulfilment derived from fandom engagement highlight its enduring value in Malaysian society. Moving forward, greater awareness and acceptance of fandom culture will allow individuals to freely pursue their passions, reinforcing the idea that enjoying pop culture is not limited by age but rather by personal interest and creativity.

### **2.3 SOCIETAL PERCEPTIONS AND STIGMA SURROUNDING ADULT ENGAGEMENT IN FANDOM ACTIVITIES**

Adult participation in fandom activities, particularly in Malaysia, often encounters societal stigma due to prevailing perceptions of maturity and appropriate adult behavior. Engaging in activities such as cosplaying Kamen Rider characters or watching the series online is frequently criticized as childish or unproductive. This stigma becomes especially evident when cosplayers share their photos or videos on social media platforms, where netizens often label them as attention-seeking or financially irresponsible. The negative perception stems from cultural expectations that associate adulthood with conventional responsibilities, discouraging engagement in hobbies perceived as juvenile (Yamato, 2012). This mindset overlooks the fact that cosplay is not merely a pastime but also a form of self-expression and identity exploration, allowing individuals to embody different aspects of their personalities and interests.

Similarly, watching Kamen Rider as an adult is often met with skepticism and ridicule. Many assume that because the series originated as a children's program, it is unsuitable for mature audiences. As a result, adults who continue watching Kamen Rider—whether through television broadcasts or online streaming—are sometimes viewed as failing to "outgrow" their childhood interests (Paidi et al., 2014). This criticism ignores the fact that Kamen Rider, like many other long-running franchises, has evolved to incorporate deeper themes, complex narratives, and mature storytelling that appeal to a broader demographic. For many fans, the franchise represents more than just entertainment; it carries nostalgic value and provides



meaningful messages about justice, perseverance, and heroism. The stigma surrounding adult viewership of such series reflects a broader misunderstanding of pop culture and its significance in shaping personal identity and social belonging.

Social media has played a major role in amplifying both support and criticism of adult engagement in fandom activities. While fan communities on platforms like Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter provide spaces for enthusiasts to connect and share their interests, they are also sites where negative perceptions are reinforced. Viral posts featuring cosplayers or collectors often attract dismissive comments from individuals who view these activities as wasteful or immature. This backlash is not unique to Kamen Rider fandom but extends to other fan communities, including anime enthusiasts, who are often subjected to similar stereotypes. Anime fandom in Malaysia, much like the Kamen Rider community, faces criticism from those who perceive it as an obsession with unrealistic fantasy worlds rather than a legitimate cultural interest. Watching anime as an adult is frequently ridiculed, with critics dismissing it as an escape from real-life responsibilities rather than recognizing it as a diverse and respected form of storytelling (Rahman et al., 2020).

Despite these societal challenges, fandom engagement continues to be a source of social interaction and identity formation. Conventions like Comic Fiesta and AniManGaki provide safe spaces for fans to celebrate their interests without fear of judgment. The growing acceptance of cosplay as an art form has helped shift some perceptions, but stereotypes still persist, particularly when fandom activities are shared in mainstream online spaces. Overcoming these stigmas requires a broader cultural shift in understanding that interests and hobbies are not inherently tied to age but to individual passion and creativity. By challenging outdated perceptions, Malaysian society can foster a more inclusive and accepting environment where adults can freely enjoy and express their fandom without fear of judgment.

### **3.0 CONCLUSION**

The Kamen Rider fandom in Malaysia is a multifaceted cultural phenomenon that extends beyond childhood nostalgia, encompassing economic, psychological, and social dimensions. While initially introduced as a children's television series, Kamen Rider has cultivated a dedicated adult fanbase that remains engaged through collectibles, cosplay, and online communities. The rise of social media, particularly platforms like TikTok, has further amplified the fandom, with influencers such as JimanTheCollector, Ryder Xtreme, Kazumi Sinichi, and Itsu Itsumo showcasing their collections and cosplay, fueling consumer interest in Kamen Rider merchandise. The accessibility of such products has also improved with the expansion of stores like Jalan Jalan Japan, which provide affordable, second-hand Kamen Rider items, making it easier for both new and longtime fans to engage with the franchise. This increased consumer activity has led to the growth of local businesses, including independent toy resellers, custom prop makers, and cosplay material suppliers, contributing to Malaysia's creative economy. Furthermore, fan conventions like Comic Fiesta and AniManGaki have created platforms for enthusiasts to connect, engage in cosplay, and celebrate their interests, highlighting the broader financial impact of fandom culture.

Despite these positive contributions, adult participation in Kamen Rider fandom continues to face societal stigma. Many perceive collecting action figures, cosplaying, and watching Kamen Rider as childish or a waste of financial resources, particularly when

enthusiasts share their fandom activities on social media. Negative perceptions often stem from cultural biases regarding appropriate adult behavior, with hobbies linked to childhood being dismissed as immature. This stigma is reinforced by mainstream societal expectations that adults should prioritize conventional responsibilities over personal interests. However, similar criticisms have been directed at other hobbies such as sneaker collecting, automotive modifications, and gaming, suggesting that such judgments are rooted more in subjective cultural expectations than in objective financial or social concerns. In reality, engaging in fandom activities provides numerous psychological benefits, including stress relief, identity formation, and a sense of belonging. Many fans resonate with Kamen Rider's themes of heroism, justice, and perseverance, which reinforce positive personal values and emotional connections. Fan communities—both online and at conventions—foster meaningful relationships, allowing individuals to connect with like-minded peers who share similar interests and experiences.

The stigma surrounding adult engagement in fandom is not unique to Kamen Rider but extends to anime fandom in Malaysia as well. Anime, much like Kamen Rider, has a strong following in the country, with fans participating in activities such as cosplay, merchandise collecting, and online discussions. However, anime fans, especially adults, often face similar criticisms, with some sections of society viewing anime as childish or associating it with negative stereotypes. The act of cosplaying as anime characters at conventions, for example, is frequently criticized as attention-seeking or a waste of money, despite it being a legitimate form of artistic expression and cultural appreciation. Online anime streaming also receives backlash, with some believing that watching animated series is immature, failing to recognize that anime includes a wide range of genres that cater to all age groups. The persistence of such stigma highlights a broader societal issue where unconventional hobbies are not widely accepted as legitimate adult pursuits.

Despite these challenges, both Kamen Rider and anime fandoms in Malaysia continue to thrive, driven by a passionate community that actively contributes to the local pop culture scene. Events like Comic Fiesta and AniManGaki have become major cultural events that attract thousands of fans, exhibitors, and businesses, demonstrating the economic impact of these fandoms. Furthermore, the increasing presence of anime and tokusatsu-themed content on streaming services, along with the influence of social media, has helped normalize fan engagement and reduce negative stereotypes. As the pop culture industry continues to grow, it is essential to challenge outdated perceptions and recognize fandom activities as valuable aspects of modern cultural expression.

Moving forward, addressing the stigma surrounding adult fandom participation requires a shift in societal attitudes. Recognizing fandom as a legitimate form of self-expression, creativity, and social interaction can foster a more accepting environment where individuals can feel free to pursue their interests without fear of judgment. The continued expansion of pop culture industries, along with the influence of digital platforms, suggests that fandom engagement—including Kamen Rider and anime fandom—will become increasingly more mainstream. As these fandoms contribute to local economies, encourage social interaction, and promote individual well-being, it is essential to move beyond outdated stereotypes and appreciate the cultural and economic significance of fan communities. By embracing the diversity of interests among adults, Malaysian society can create a more inclusive and supportive environment that values creativity, passion, and the positive impact of pop culture.

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