

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of The Study

Fictional movies are usually written to illustrate how human life is. Movies can attract more people because they are presented with audio and visual aspects compared to other works of fiction, such as books. Nowadays, many works of fiction, such as books, novels, and comics, are being adapted into a movie or series. Of the many types of movies, superhero movies are the most popular, four of the top 10 highest-grossing films in the world are superhero-themed films (Top Lifetime Grosses - Box Office Mojo).

Superhero movies are films that feature heroes with incredible abilities, frequently with the goal of saving the world or combating evil. These films usually feature protagonists with superhuman skills, such as flying, super strength, or the capacity to manipulate elements, who utilize their abilities to defeat villains and protect the innocent. Superhero films frequently feature comic book characters and are notable for their action sequences, amazing effects, and themes of courage, justice, and morality.

A superhero is a character in a movie or story who has special powers and uses them to do good things and help others. Stan Lee, argues that superheroes are those who are able to perform heroic acts in ways that are beyond the reach of the average person. In other words, in order to be a superhero, you require a power that is greater than any normal person's power and use it for good actions.

Nowadays, individuals are often referred to as superheroes by others, and sometimes fans consider singers to be superheroes. This occurs because, when feeling exhausted, humans seek an escape by listening to music and may consider the singer of a particular song to be their superhero for providing entertainment and for the feeling of being saved by the song. However, it is also important to consider the potential negative outcomes, such as idol worship and brand loyalty leading to fanaticism. Fanaticism may be caused by excessive addictive idolatry within a group, which leads to disinhibited conduct owing to deindividuation (Pan, 2022).

Fanaticism is an attitude in which a person has an excessive obsession with something, such as fanaticism for a belief, fanaticism for a certain sports club, or even fanaticism for a figure. Fanaticism can grow out of personal dissatisfaction and a desire for goals and a sense of belonging, and these feelings will attract people who feel left out from society and who are looking for a way to belong (Hoffer, 1951). Hoffer also argued that fanatical movements frequently share characteristics such as a charismatic leader, a sense of moral superiority, and a willingness to use violence to achieve their objectives.

Fanatics often disregard the importance of debates and consider opposing views as a threat to their own values and beliefs. The adoption of fanatical notions may result in prejudicial acts and even hostile behavior towards those with dissenting perspectives (Alzangana, 2017). Notably, the development of fanaticism is a learned rather than an innate predisposition. Individuals acquire behavioral patterns through their social environment and the prevalent concepts

and ideologies within their social circles. Extremism, often the deadliest form, arises from religious and political viewpoints. Such ideologies have been and continue to be the primary sources of many fatal clashes.

In the modern world, fanaticism can be exploited by capitalism. The fans of an idol, who are gathered into a unit termed fandom, can be regarded as a visible and specific representation of the same wider phenomenon, which is consumer fanaticism as an individual and/or collective hostility to society as a whole (Fuschillo, 2020). This phenomenon is ultimately exploited by certain parties to seek large profits, which can lead to capitalism.

The attitude of Capitalism's exploitation of Fanaticism in the development of the "Korean Wave" phenomenon, also known as *Hanryu* or *Hallyu*, referring to the popularity of South Korean popular culture, which is largely apparent via countless cultural products that are produced, conveyed, and continuously consumed (Chung et al., 2017). We are presented with various kinds of entertainment originating from Korea, such as drama series and music. Certain parties take advantage of this to do product placement, and the results are very satisfying. When a brand does product placement for an idol, this will increase sales because the brand gets direct access to the idol's fans, gets their attention, and doesn't hesitate to buy products that their idols use with the aim of making them look like their idols (Cheah et al., 2019).

Fanaticism and capitalism have been recurring themes in various forms of media throughout history. *The Boys*, a television series developed by Eric Kripke

based on Garth Ennis and Darick Robertson's comic book series, digs into these subjects in a darkly humorous and subversive manner. The series takes place in a universe where superheroes, known as "Supes," are owned by corporations and sold as public figures, while a squad of vigilantes known as "The Boys" attempt to expose their corruption and hold them accountable for their abuses of power. The series also portray the role of consumer culture and commodification as the Superheroes are marketed and consumed like any other product.

Overall, the series uses satire and subversion to portray the societal norms and values that enable fanaticism and capitalist societies. By examining the themes and portrayal of characters in *The Boys*, this study seeks to deepen our understanding of the dangers of fanaticism that can be exploited by capitalism.

Some previous studies of commodification have been conducted as theses by analyzing the characteristics of heroes and superheroes based on their characteristics and dialogue. Chomsaeng (2020) analyses the first season of *The Boys* through the lens of corporate capitalism and commodification. The purpose of this study is to determine how corporate capitalism is represented in the series and how the commodification of superheroes in capitalist countries affects the concept of heroes and superpowers. According to the study's findings, companies that profit off superheroes become greedy and selfish, with some engaging in non-heroic behavior to maintain their social position.

Vought International is a fictional company that features in *The Boys* series. It operates in the pharmaceutical field and is responsible for the creation of

superheroes in the series. In addition to this, Vought International acts as an agency for its superheroes, facilitating their commercialisation for use as city guards, movie stars, advertising icons and even as icons for amusement rides.

Based on previous studies above, the writer will explore how the series portrayed capitalism's exploitation of fanaticism from the point of view of The Vought International as the representative of capitalism using marxism theories and analyze the fanaticism from screen capture of the scene from the series using Roland Barthes Semiotic. To find out whether the strategy carried out by The Vought International succeeded in exploiting Fanaticism in The Boys series.

### **1.2 Research Questions**

This study must be able to answer the following three questions:

1. How is the attitude of fanaticism towards superheroes portrayed in the TV series The Boys?
2. How does The Vought International build the image of the superheroes and turn superheroes into a commodity for public consumption?

### **1.3 Purpose of The Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the portrayal of superhero fanaticism in the TV show 'The Boys,' specifically the attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of the characters in the story toward these superpowered beings. The aim of the study is to look into the strategies used by Vought International in constructing and influencing public images of superheroes ('supes') in order to preserve positive



perceptions in society. Additionally, this study intends to explore Vought International's commercialization and commodification of superheroes, examining how they transform these extraordinary creatures into marketable objects for public consumption. This research intends to shed insight on the connections of fanaticism, corporate manipulation, and public perception in the setting of superhero culture as shown in 'The Boys' through an in-depth examination of these themes.

#### **1.4 Scope of The Study**

This study focuses on analyzing how capitalism can exploit the fanaticism that can be seen in the scenes, script, and dialogues between the characters in the TV series "The Boys". The script and dialogue from the TV series selected from season one until season three indicated fanaticism and capitalism.

#### **1.5 Significance of The Study**

The writer hopes this study can be useful for the readers as a reference, especially in related fields such as cultural studies and literature on media analysis. Also, the result of this study is aimed at providing academic input to highlight the importance of analyzing media content to understand contemporary social and cultural issues.