

# Sport, Hobby, and Symbolic Communication on Local 'Federal' Bikers

<sup>1</sup> DIAN WARDIANA SJUCHRO, <sup>2</sup> PETRUS ANA ANDUNG

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Communication Science University of Padjadjaran,

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Social and Political Science, University of Nusa  
Cendana, Indonesian

email: diansjuchro@yahoo.com

**Abstract.** Federal Bandung Indonesia (FBI) is a bicycle hobbyist community which uses Indonesia's-federal type-bicycle. Although those type of bike is no longer in production, the FBI members keep promoting the existence of federal bicycle as Indonesian pride. This article discusses the meaning and symbolic world of FBI members. Using phenomenological method, it is found that the meaning built by members of the community referred to expression of inclination toward domestic products, a place to build social solidarity, a forum to accept others, and a space to strengthen their capacity. Meanwhile, in order to promote group solidarity and also to overcome the tension within the group, members of the FBI community shared fantasy themes in the form word games such as gowes, gobar, federalist, bike-pecker, bike-liwet, bike-culinary, bike-fishing, bike to work, bike to kampung, hanging out together, and TiKum. In the perspective of symbolic interaction theory, the self-concept of members of the FBI community is communicated through their declaration as community that cares for environment and loves the products of Indonesia. The use of symbols in this community within the context of symbolic convergence theory implies that FBI members seek to exchange fantasies in order to strengthen group cohesiveness.

*Keywords:* Bike hobbyist, FBI, Community, SymbolicWorld, Meaning

## Introduction

One of the well-known bike hobbyist community in Bandung, the capital of West Java, is Federal Bandung Indonesia community--commonly abbreviated as FBI. This community began when Endra Ginanjar, a bank employee, took initiative to build Federal Bandung Indonesia in Bandung. Starting from a long-idle bike in his warehouse, he used a social networking site to spread it. He even intercepted Federal users on the street. This way was effective to recruit users to be a member of the FBI especially for those who are not familiar with Internet or new media. Since 2015, he worked with Mohammad Yusuf, a television cameraman, to approach Federal users who previously

hesitated to get involved. Thus, FBI was officially born.

FBI community is a bicycle community formed by Bandung people who have a mountain penchant. Riding Indonesia federal bicycle is one of community's uniqueness. As previously stated, federal bikes are currently no longer in production. Even so, the FBI members keep promoting the existence of federal bicycle as a pride of Indonesian. This article discusses the meaning and symbolic world of cyclists through the members of FBI Bandung community.

## Symbolic Interaction Theory

Symbolic interaction is a theory based on the idea that social structures and meanings are

created and maintained in and through social interactions (Littlejohn, 2002: 144-145). Symbolic interactionism begins with basic assumptions that human beings are the first and foremost of social beings, and that individual identity is also a social and symbolic product. Human beings are conceptualized as actors, necessarily engaged with others in a communal, symbolic world that is always already meaningful (Littlejohn & Foss, 2014 : 622).

According to symbolic interactionists, meanings are never individual. They are social or communal agreements regarding the proper use of words. So, the meaning of a word is not an object, but the response it generates. To understand the meaning of a word or thing, it needs to understand how to act or behave toward it. It also needs to draw the object into one's own future conduct—not to have an accurate reflection of a preexisting reality. Indeed, meanings are social products which can be learned, used, and generated in interaction with others. These meanings are then drawn upon by individual actors as they navigate the world of everyday life and activity (Littlejohn & Foss, 2014 : 622).

According to Mulyana (2013: 68), the essence of symbolic interaction characterizes human communication and exchange of symbols that are given meaning. A similar opinion expressed by Syam (2012: 48) stated that symbol is the essence of Symbolic Interactionism Theory. Symbolic Interaction is a framework of reference in understanding how humans create a symbolic world, and how in turn those symbols constitute human behavior.

### **Symbolic Convergence Theory**

Bormann (Griffin, 2015: 251) suggested that the fantasy themes shared by group members implies meanings, emotions, motives, and actions validated by the community. The Symbolic Convergence Theory of Bormann advocates that many fantasy themes are indexed by a symbolic cue (an agreed-upon trigger that sets off the group members to respond as they did when they first shared the fantasy). A symbolic cue could be a code word, nonverbal gesture, phrase, slogan, inside joke, bumper sticker, or any shorthand way of re-establishing the full force of shared fantasy.

Bourmann as stated in Venus (2007: 95), argues that the Theory of Symbolic Convergence is built on two different terms. First, the term 'convergence' is defined as a way in which the personal symbolic world of two or more individuals meets each other, approaching each

other, or then coinciding with one another. Second, the term symbolic refers to human tendencies in giving interpretation and imparting meaning to various symbols, signs, occurrences experienced, or even actions performed by other human beings.

### **Research Method**

This research employed phenomenology approach. In phenomenology, science is always based on the 'experiential', means that human consciousness actively contains the objects of experience (Holsten & Gubrum, 2009: 236). Phenomenology as a method aims to explore the world from the point of view of those who experience it directly or in connection with the nature of human experience, along with the meaning attached to the translation (Kuswarno, 2009: 35).

### **Research Results and Discussion**

#### **Federal Bandung Indonesia (FBI): Biker Hobbyist Community at Glance**

Federal Bandung Indonesia is a community of Indonesia old bicycles lovers which established on January 16, 2009. Started from a Facebook group, from year to year, the group members are increasingly grown due to frequent gathering events called "Tunjukkan Federalmu (Show Your Federal Bike)". Afterwards, Endra Ginanjar (46), a bank clerk, promoted the event on the social networking site trying to evoke and start the Federal Bandung Indonesia community (FBI).

Over the years, the Federalist (a term dedicated for the community) is divided into two groups. The first group is one that maintained classic look and preserved the originality of the Federal type bike. Another group is consisted of members who already modify their Federal bikes with new components. Interesting enough, the community has its own way of determining the originality of Federal bikes owned by members. On the third anniversary of the Federal Community of Indonesia, 30 people attended community event in the moment of Car Free Day in Merdeka area, precisely in front of Bank Danamon opposite Bandung City Hall. Instead of that official moment, there were randomly cycling activities around Bandung held spontaneously by members.

FBI has neither organizational structure nor fixed dues. Amazingly, members of this community are crowded enough. Currently, it estimated about 1,500 people registered

themselves as members of FBI, among those are 20 brave females. As an unstructured organization, FBI runs its operation smoothly due to the spirit of each member. Their activities is coordinated by a leader commonly referred as "Kumendan" (Commandant). However, anyone can be a Kumendan anytime based on member agreement. Those who served mainly as members, or those who incessantly ride Federal every day, is commonly called "Federalist".

### **The Meaning Constructed by FBI Member Regarding The Community**

Being part of a community, taking part of its activities, and exchanging intense communication build some sense of meaning among members. There are 4 (four) meanings being members of FBI community which could be identified as below.

#### **Expressing the Love of Domestic Products**

For members of FBI, the community is a place to express their love toward Indonesia products. As Kintardi (50 years old) said, "I really like touring. I love Federal as pure Indonesian products. Moreover, compared with foreign products, Fed's quality is highly competitive."

The same opinion was conveyed by Yolli Purnama. The IT department employee at ITB Bandung said that "It was originally the only bike I had from 1990 in Sala Tiga, Central Java. I already had a federal bike since I was a child. This federal bike was originally made in Indonesia. By joining the FBI community, we are increasingly advocating that we love our domestic products more than foreign products."

Based on statements made by these two informants, it is clear that the meaning of joining FBI bike community is to express love of federal bicycles as products or made in Indonesia. The fact that this type of bike is currently no longer produced in Indonesia marked a quite unique status nowadays.

#### **Build Social Solidarity**

Members of FBI interpreted their membership status as a forum to foster kinship relations among them. They also recognize that their friendship is become stronger by joining the group.

As Jafar Sidik said:

"I am a businessman. I am not in touch with my neighbors very much. My neighbors are generally ignorant, that's why I feel inferior. After joining the FBI community, I feel accepted and cared for by my friends in the group. It

make me feel that this bike community means a lot to me. I feel a sense of brotherhood in the community."

The sense of brotherhood in this group are manifested in various forms such as a joint visit to members or family's member experiencing illness, or any form of calamity. Yadi Riadi, one of senior member, stated:

"Cycling is encouraged by the City Government of Bandung. Biking is now getting more fans. The bicycle community is also diversely larger. Riding a bicycle, I feel belong to a family with other fellow members. We get along so well. We could visit a sick friend, or wife of a friend who gave birth."

Of course, there are community recreational activities as well, such as fishing (called 'Bike Fishing'), eatery party ('Bike-Culinary'), camping out of town ('Bike-Camp'), and so on. These entertaining activities are conducted by relying on bicycles as the main vehicle. As Wawan Hermawan stressed:

"FBI community is now very famous in Jawa Barat. A strong bond of brotherhood unite us and enable all cyclists know each other. We can do *gobar* ('Gowes Bareng' or cycling together), Bike-Fishing, Bike-Culinary, even Bike-Camp. All activities are provided in the community and resulted on stronger bond of brotherhood."

Some informants' opinions as previously mentioned above indicates how important and meaningful the presence of the FBI community is for every member. It build strong solidarity among members. The solidarity, in turn, enable them to be more sensitive to each other's feelings and fostered a sense of togetherness and of brotherhood as well.

#### **Accepting Others**

Another meaning implied in the community as sensed by FBI member is a feeling of being fully accepted within the community. As Jafar Sidik pointed out, being a trader made him hardly interacted with neighbors. As a consequence, he he felt inferior and less confident to interact with neighbors.

"I am not a sociable person. In my free time at home, I rarely interact with neighbors. I spent my spare time on every Sunday just for cycling. After joined FBI community, I found out that the community is so cohesive and being friendly to each other. I feel really welcome and be treated just like siblings," said Sidik.

The same comment was also expressed by Wawan Hermawan. According to Hermawan, the community taught him to treat others like his

brother. Through the community, he claimed to learn accepting others as they are.

"Every Sunday morning we gather around 6:00 AM to 10:00 AM to go on a bike trip (*gowes*) then return to the post together. There is no difference between the seniors and the juniors. Our relationship with fellow members is so warm. I feel comfortable and make more friends than ever before. I learned to accept others as (I accept) myself. This is what makes me so fond and enjoying this community," said Hermawan.

Both opinions suggest that the presence of community as well as the FBI become a space for self-acceptance and others. A community member can learn to accept the existence and presence of other members and vice versa. The process of acceptance is triggered by the frequent cycling trip and other activities as well. Further, the intensity of this interaction strengthened ties of similarity among members of community.

### **Empowering Self Capacity**

For some members, FBI community is a place to hone their skills and abilities. This is primarily concerned with making plan together, exchanging information and knowledge, as well as caring for others.

Yus Supriadi implied the meaning of the existence of the FBI community as follows:

"After *gobar* (cycling together), we usually gather in *Tikum* (gathering point, called *Posko*). There we exchanged experiences and had casual discussion. Well, for me, this session opens up opportunity to practice how to speak in a large audience. I learn from other friends very much. Moreover, profession of members are varies, so does the socioeconomic background. I got lots of information from them."

Similar opinion also came from Yadi Riadi. He pointed out that he FBI community is a place to train member's ability and social sensitivity.

"After *gowes* together, we gather at the *Posko*. Sometimes, we arrange a joint event. For example, in March 2016, we build a plan to raise funds for humanitarian aid as a contribution for disaster victims in South Bandung. We also donated funds to help orphanage facilities. Yes, by joining this community I learned a lot about how to be sensitive toward the environment, how to be aware of the needs of others. We realize that there are many people out there who need helping hands."

Those opinions were supported by a senior of FBI community, Kintardi. According to him, joining the community opens up an opportunity

for him to learn how to lead others. "During the trip, we often divided our group as needed. There are at least two formations when the road is wide and one-on-one formation sequentially on narrow streets. Often enough, I served as marshal or bodyguard. I learned to lead the group as well," Kintardi said with pride.

### **Symbolic World of the FBI Community**

However peculiar it might be, language as a game is a representation of symbols. The symbolic world of a community could be traced back through special and unique terms as part of language 'game' which characterizes certain community. A close observation and interview to several members of the group have identified certain terms served as symbolic cues to reveal the symbolic world of FBI Community.

#### **Gowes (Cycling) and Gobar (Biking)**

FBI community has a specific term understood only by its members. One of them is the word 'Gowes' which means cycling. "Gowes means to pedal a bicycle. Meanwhile, Gobar means cycling together. All members of the community have acknowledged the terms," said Yadi Riadi.

The term of Gowes itself is generally associated with an identity that unite individuals with a bicycle community.

#### **Tikum (Gathering)**

FBI community utilized a peculiar term in its activities. The term 'Tikum' refers to the place where FBI members meet and dismissed after Gobar. On 'Tikum' spot, they schedule some hangout events such as eating or drinking together, chatting or discussing, and arranging the next agenda. As Kintardi explained,

"Usually, after *gobar*, we stop at *tikum*, which means a gathering point. In this place, we hang out together, chat, sometimes discuss important agendas with friends. Anyway, every week, after finishing the *gowes*, there's always a hanging out session for fatigue release, or some sort of recreation as well."

#### **Bike-liwet: A Culinary Fiesta**

FBI community absorbs foreign terms and combines it with local terms and/or Indonesian terms referring to eatery-related activities. A 'Bike Liwet' means cooking by 'Liwet' method after a long ride is over. 'Liwet' is a Sundanese traditional way in cooking the rice along with spices and local comestibles such as stinky beans and dry salt fish.

There is also a 'Bike-Culinary' term which intended to perform culinary activities after

completion of cycling. If 'Bike-Liwet' is accompanied by activities to cook, this 'Bike-Culinary' simply means visiting certain culinary spot (often recommended by other members) after the trip is finished.

**Other Bike Related Activities: Bike-Camp, Bike-Packer, Bike to Work, Bike to Kampung, and Bike-Fishing**

If Bike-Liwet and Bike-Culinary refer to terms related with bike and food pedaling activities, there are also foreign terms used for traveling purposes as explained by Yolli Purnama.

"'Bike Camp' means camping using federal bikes as the main vehicle of transportation. So, all members are invited to go camping to a place by riding bicycle together along with equipment needed for such nightover. The 'Bike-Packer' means traveling to distant places by bicycle as the main means of transportation with minimal funds. There is also a 'Bike to Work' activity for some members who committed to ride bicycle to their workplace. In the last three years, the participants are growing, and the ride is getting crowded. 'Bike to Kampung' refers to 'Mudik' –a home return activities commonly perpetuate by people (especially in big cities) back to their hometown (mostly to small cities around Java Island) following the dawn of Eid Mubarak. Heroic enough, the participants of 'Bike to Kampung' ride bicycle in a flock often for a long trip. Finally, we develop 'Bike-Fishing'. This is a call for participants who wants to share and enjoy moments of cycling and fishing together at a local pond."

These terms, along with its intensive usage, marked a unique phenomenon of FBI community. It was confirmed that these terms are understood only by those Federalist members of FBI community. "Outsiders, or other community may not familiar with typical terms exchanged much in the community," says Kintardi.

**Discussion**

Under perspective of Symbolic Interaction Theory, the self-concept of community members is identified when they declare themselves as a community that cares for environment and loves the products of Indonesia. They admire themselves and hang their status above any other transporter or highway user for being zero on air pollutant and preventing traffic congestion. Wherever travel, they incessantly promoting cycling. This is how they interpret the reality of cycling and the existence of being part of FBI community.

Such are the meaning of FBI community among its members: manifestation of advocating domestic products, a forum of acceptance others, a space to build social solidarity, and a place to empower their capacity. In addition, the symbols created and understood by members of the FBI community are symbols that bind their cohesiveness inside and outside the community. Thus, in the perspective of Symbolic Interaction Theory, those manifestations help explain how members of FBI community constructed their self-concept as a pro-environment and pro domestic products.

The Theory of Symbolic Convergence proposed by Ernest Bormann explain deeper regarding the presence of FBI community. According to Bormann, fantasy is a story or joke that contains or expresses emotion. Now, take a look at the terms exchanging frequently, but exclusively, in FBI community. To promote group solidarity as well as to overcome tension within the group, members of the community share fantasy themes in the form of word games such as *gowes, gobar, federalist, bike-pecker, bike-liwet, bike-culinary, bike-fishing, bike to work, bike to the village, hanging out together, TiKum*, and many more. These terms can only be understood by members of the bicycle community. The use of symbols in this community within the context of symbolic convergence theory implies that members in FBI groups or communities seek to exchange fantasies in order to form cohesive groups.

**Conclusion**

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that:

1. FBI community has successfully instilled significant meaning for its members, i.e. pride/love of domestic products, social solidarity, a forum to accept others, and a space to empower their capacity. Their interpretation of community's existence tends to affect their beliefs which put their community in a very distinct and prestigious status as a special community which preserve the environment (by zero pollutant transportation), and advocate domestic products.
2. To promote group solidarity and also to overcome the tension within the group, members of FBI community share fantasy themes in the form of word

games such as *gowes, gobar, federalist, bike-pecker, bike-liwet, bike-culinary, bike-Fishing, bike to work, bike to kampung, hanging out together, and TiKum*. These terms can only be understood by those who are members of the bicycle community, and help members to strengthening its cohesiveness as a group

## References

- Griffin, Em. 2012. *A First Look At Communication Theory*.—8th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.
- Holstein, James A. & Gubrum, Jaber F. 2009. *Fenomenologi, Etnometodologi, dan Praktik Interpretif*. In *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Denzin, Norman K. and Lincoln, Yvonna S. (Editors). Bahasa Indonesia Edition. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar.
- <http://www.pikiran-rakyat.com/horison/2012/02/02/175307/komunitas-federal-indonesia-bandung-mencintai-karya-anak-bangsa>; accessed in 25/05/2016 at 01.16 PM
- Kuswarno, Engkus. 2009. *Metodologi Penelitian Komunikasi Fenomenologi: Konsepsi, Pedoman, dan Contoh Penelitiannya*. Bandung: Widya Padjadjaran.
- Littlejohn, Stephen. 2002. *Theories of Human Communication*. Wadsworth Publishing Company, Belmont, California.
- Littlejohn, Stephen W., & Karen A. Foss. 2009. *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Mulyana, Deddy. 2013. *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif: Paradigma Baru Ilmu Komunikasi dan Ilmu Sosial Lainnya*. Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Syam, Nina Winangsih. 2012. *Sosiologi Sebagai Akar Ilmu Komunikasi*. Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Venus, Antar, 2007. Ernest Bormann dan Teori Konvergensi Sombolik (Symbolic Convergence Theory). *Jurnal ISKI*, Vol. 1 No. 1 Edisi Agustus 2007.