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## Chapter 23

# Anime and Manga Fandom in the 21st Century: A Close-Up View

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Anime (animated films) and manga (comic books) fans are easily misunderstood and can even face prejudice. In fact, they are considered nerds or weirdoes in the eye of many people. This is an unfortunate happenstance for two simple reasons. First, it is a gross misperception of fans, which is fundamentally unfair to them. Second, with a growing fan base, this ever-expansive population presents ample opportunities for businesses. However, any biased view toward those fans may likely hinder marketers' efforts to serve them in an effective manner. We would like to show people what anime and manga fans are all about. This chapter aims to introduce readers to the world of anime and manga fandom and to its fans, in particular. It will present and explain specific terms such as weeaboo, otaku, waifu, husbando, fujoshi, and critic. We will also describe the different characters of anime and manga fans and explain how these characters can affect marketing.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2019), *fan* is an enthusiastic devotee (as of a sport or performing art) usually as a spectator, or an ardent admirer or enthusiast (as of a celebrity or a pursuit). *Fan* is a shorten version of fanatic, which comes from the Latin word *fanum*, meaning “sanctuary, temple.” As the definition indicates, people that have an intense passion or love for, or dedication to an object, sport, art, or activity may be considered fans of those things. Fans of a particular pursuit do not necessarily have a direct face-to-face contact. However, fans have a long history of publishing fan magazines, at-

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tending cons, writing fanfic and making fanvids to create and interact together in self-contained bubbles. That is, fans have a desire to interconnect to and socialize with other like-minded people. Consequently, fandom emerges, which is “a subculture composed of fans characterized by a feeling of empathy and camaraderie with others who share a common interest” (Wikipedia, 2018). Simply speaking, fandom is the interconnected networks of individual fans sharing the same interest. Since the explosion of the internet, fandom has become a very modern online phenomenon. For example, the internet has turned politics into fandom (Ditum, 2018). Fandom draws on popular contexts from all around the world, from media such as Hollywood blockbuster films to local programming such as *Afghan Idol*, Afghanistan’s adaption of *American Idol* (Gray et al., 2007).

This chapter aims to introduce readers to the world of anime and manga fandom and explore the marketing implications for this industry. It will present and explain many specific terms used in this fandom. To better understand anime and manga fandom, this chapter will begin with a description of its origins and history.

The chapter will then introduce different types of fans like *otaku*, *fujoshi* and *waifu* and explain their characters in order to better understand them and their behaviours. Finally, this chapter will explore the relationship between anime and manga fandom and consumption and discuss implications for marketing.

## **ANIME AND MANGA FANDOM: A PRIMER**

### **Fandom in Modern Society**

Today, it is normal to see people standing in line waiting for a new product or to meet a celebrity. For example, Apple draws a long line at its stores every time when it launches a new model of its iPhone (Hein, 2018). The fans of Taylor Swift, which are called “swifties,” sang along with the singer and some even cried in her Reputation Tour concert (Florio, 2018). Or we see groups of people dressed in ‘strange’ cosplay (condensed version of costume play) outfits, communicating and hanging out together. Some movie or TV characters including Disney Channel are different to cosplay, but this does not dampen fans’ enthusiasm for trying it out and pulling it off (Mitchell, 2018). Or, on the internet, we can find many virtual communities discussing anime and using words that are not familiar to us (Commander, 2019). We can easily identify all of these people as fans of something or someone.

Fans and fandom are daily words in modern life. As mentioned earlier, a fan can be described as an enthusiastic follower of something or someone, including films, books, games, celebrities, anime and manga.

Thanks to the internet, fans can now communicate with each other everywhere at any time. The frequency of interactions between fans significantly increases the number and variety of fans’ activities. Because of the internet, fans can communicate faster and with an increasing number of other fans. Before the internet, fans had limited ways to ‘meet’ each other: letters, phones and meeting in real locations. This limited the number of people that could meet, which in turn limited the speed at which fandom could spread. The internet and social media have solved these problems. Fans can now meet and talk to each other in virtual rooms, like Twitter, Facebook and blogs. They can talk to thousands of other fans at once and get feedback in a second. Also, they can attract many new fans at an unbelievable speed.

Being a fan means being a member of a fandom, or subculture. As fandoms spread increasingly faster, fans groups are becoming stronger and larger and fandom is becoming ever more powerful in our daily

lives. From a business point of view, fandoms are now a qualified consumer target group and one of the most engaged subcultures in the digital and social space (Netzer, 2016). In other words, fans have become loyal consumers in many industries, such as Apple fans. In some cases, passionate fans turn into advocates for the product/company (Feldman, 2018). Having a deep understanding of this kind of consumer target group would help companies to succeed in their markets. One of the best ways to ‘make friends’ with fandoms is to learn about them.

## **Fandom and its Origin**

We usually see fans as people who are crazy about something or someone and who spend a lot, maybe too much, time and money on their idols. However, every one of us has our own favourite thing or person. If we extend the meaning of ‘fan’, we are all a fan of something in a variety of perspectives (Fiske, 1992).

In this chapter, ‘fans’ refers to more specific groups. These groups have more passion, more emotion and more action than others. The fans in these groups are obsessed with a particular star, celebrity, film, TV program or band and they can produce reams of information about them and quote their favorite lines or lyrics, chapter and verse (Hills, 2002). For example, true fans of the comic *Slam Dunk*, one of the most famous basketball comics in the world, would know that the words ‘I want to play basketball’ are said by the character Hisashi Mitsui.

Normally, people do not like to be alone, so they find other fans. There are many ways fans can get together to share interests, such as writing fanfic, cosplaying in an event, publishing magazines and interacting on the internet. Through these activities, fans gradually form subcultures of their own. We call these subcultures a ‘fandom’, from the word ‘fan’ with the suffix ‘-dom’ (as in ‘kingdom’).

Considering the fanatic features of all kinds of fans, the first thing that comes to mind would probably be congregation. Looking at history, it is not surprising that the word ‘fandom’ has some relationship with religion. It started with a very old word: ‘fanatic’. Fanatic arose from the Latin word *fānāticus*, which in turn came from the word *fanum*, meaning ‘temple’ or ‘shrine’. The word ‘fanatic’ first appeared in 1644 and in the second half of the 17th century, the English used the word as an insult to refer to nonconformists. Soon after, people shortened this word to ‘fan’. The word ‘fandom’ was first used in 1903 when the *Cincinnati Enquirer* printed: ‘fandom puzzled over Johnsonian statements’ (Rutherford-Morrison, 2016).

## **Anime and Manga Fandom: A Biography**

Anime and manga fandom are now seeping into our daily lives, affecting our thoughts and behaviours. Anime usually refers to Japanese animation, while manga is a Japanese term that refers to ‘comic’. Researchers argue about the origins of anime and manga. Many of them believe that anime began in 1917 with the first films by the ‘fathers’ of anime: Shimokawa Ōtaen (sometimes Shimokawa Hekoten; 1892–1973), Kitayama Seitarō (1888–1945) and Kōuchi Jun’ichi (sometimes Kōuchi Sumikazu; 1886–1970) (Litten, 2013). Similarly, it is difficult to identify the exact date when manga emerged. Some believe it originates from scrolls by Buddhist monks dating back to the 12th century, but whether these scrolls are actually manga is debatable. Others believe its origins are closer to the 18th century.

Reading manga and watching anime is a significant part of daily life for people all over the world, especially for millions of Japanese. Not surprisingly, Japan, as the birthplace and ‘kingdom’ of its fandom, has the highest literacy, newspaper circulation and TV viewing rates of anime and manga in the world (Macwilliams, 2008). But anime and manga have not always been as popular as they are now.

## **Anime and Manga Fandom in the 21st Century**

Historically, anime and manga are always connected after anime appears. People treat them as the same art for entertainment. However, people did not always view anime and manga as we do now. The status and views of anime and manga have changed over time and anime and manga fandom has appeared as this has developed. Osamu Tezuka, one of the most famous Japanese cartoonists, divided the Japanese modern comic into six stages.

The first stage (the first ten years after the Second World War) is called the Toy Age, when comics were just props for children's entertainment. The second stage is the Clear Times, when comics were seen as vulgar, shallow reading. The third stage is the Snack Time, when parents and teachers reluctantly allowed children to use comics. The fourth stage is the Staple Food Age, when continuous TV screening such as the 1963 animation *Astro Boy* allowed many adults and children to watch cartoons, socially affirming them. The fifth stage (mid-1970s to mid-1980s) is the Air Age, when comics became an integral part of young people's lives. The sixth stage (mid-1980s onwards) is Mark the Times, when comic dialogue between young people became the mark (Chen, 2009).

The development of manga shows that anime and manga is becoming increasingly important in modern life, especially for fans. It has had a huge effect on the lives of anime and manga fans. For example, people have probably heard of *Dragonball Z*, *Sailor Moon*, *Gundam Wing* and the ever so popular *Pokémon*. Fans of these cartoons are not just familiar with the stories; they use inside terms to communicate with their friends and even use the lessons in these stories to evaluate their lives. For people who have never seen these cartoons, it is like they are talking in another language.

During the Air Age, comics were an integral part of young people's lives and anime and fandom were widely accepted. Therefore, it is not surprising that anime and manga fandom, known as the worldwide community for fans of anime and manga, can be traced back to at least the 1970s when fans of the Japanese TV series *Space Battleship Yamato* banded together to get it back on the air after it was dropped (Eldred, 2013).

Moreover, right now in Mark the Times, anime and manga is a huge industry and anime and manga fandom provides important subcultures for fans, especially young people.

### **Importance of Anime and Manga Fandom to Marketers**

Marketers rely on research about the target market for their products and brands to design advertising campaigns. Market research helps the marketer understand the psychology, motivations, behaviors and needs of consumers. This kind of research is effective in developing a marketing strategy to reach the people in their target market. However, it cannot well predict and follow the cultural trends of changing consumer needs and behaviors over time.

In contrast, companies in the anime and manga industry are leading the cultural trends that change consumer needs and behaviors over time. Normally, a marketing strategy that does not pay attention to cultural shifts will be incomplete and susceptible to large cultural changes in consumer behavior. Cultural marketing allows companies to get ahead of the curve. They can anticipate and participate in cultural changes that will shape the future of our society. By riding these movements, they can gain a serious competitive advantage and position their products and brands for future success (Klepik, 2014).

In the anime and manga industry and fandom, the key elements are the anime and manga that are created by different authors and companies. So the fandom, or subcultures, can be controlled by the companies. In other words, companies have the power to influence the market trend. For example, traditional companies that design clothes for consumers usually study what consumers need and like,

then design the products for the consumers. However, as times change, these products might not remain suitable for consumers. But in the anime and manga industry, companies create a range of clothes not for the consumers, but for the comic characters. If the anime or manga has a lot of fans, they will follow the characters and buy similar clothes for themselves.

Simply speaking, anime or manga sells. Top brands use anime to keep consumers involved. For example, Sony Pictures and Universal studios were interested in buying Funimation studios, which owns many popular anime series, including very profitable *Dragon Ball* (Branding in Asia, 2017).

In this way, companies save a lot of money in research, but pay more attention to the fandom. This is why marketers should want to know the fandom's value, especially in the anime and manga industry.

## **FANS IN ANIME AND MANGA FANDOM: A PORTRAIT**

### **Characteristics and Behaviors of Fans**

As mentioned previously, the word 'fandom' comes from 'fanatic', so it is no surprise that anime and manga fans are passionate about specific anime, manga, or characters.

Anime and manga images make products seem friendlier to fans. Companies always use the image of a certain character that reminds customers of the anime or manga. It has a special meaning for fans. For example, at the supermarket, you can find many pens and pencils printed with a cartoon image. For functional purposes, the pens and pencils with a cartoon are the same as those without, but the image makes fans more inclined to buy them.

There are usually key terms or words that easily describe the image's meaning or feeling to fans. For example, when many Hello Kitty fans see any related product, the first word that comes to their mind is probably 'cute'. Hello Kitty, full name Kitty White, is a cartoon character created by Yuko Shimizu. Created for children, she is a third-grade student with a red bow but no mouth and live outside London. Not only are Hello Kitty products popular among children and teens, mostly girls, but are gaining popularity among female adults as well around the global (Wikipedia, 2019a). Similarly, *Slam Dunk* products with images on them remind fans of youth, passion and a love of basketball. *Slam Dunk* is a Japanese manga series created by Takehiko Inoue, which is about a high school basketball team (Wikipedia, 2019b). Even the basketball great Michael Jordan piggy rode the Japanese manga to market the Air Jordan "Slam Dunk" collection (So, 2014).

There is no gender, age, or race limit to an anime or manga fan. In some anime and manga clubs, people talking about the anime and manga could be anyone of any age. Surprisingly, anime and manga encourage fans to talk. Even a quiet person will talk about their favorite characters with a passion that seems endless.

Fans are enthusiastic, ardent and loyal admirers of an interest (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010). Not all anime and manga fans are the same, but they do have something in common. The internet search 'anime and manga fans are...' gives results that include 'loser', 'weird', or even worse, 'ugly.' People outside the fan groups do not consider them attractive because the common folks hold false assumptions toward anime fans (Hall, 2017). Many of those assumptions are simply unfair and plainly prejudiced against anime and manga enthusiasts (Roget, 2019). The image of anime and manga fans is weird people who talk and act in an unusual way, although the fans themselves do not agree.

## **Anime and Manga Fandom in the 21st Century**

Anime and manga fans have a high passion for everything related to anime and manga. That makes them loyal customers in specific anime and manga and it means that the price of a product is not the first thing they think about. The profit margin for a product can therefore be very high. A company can be very successful if it has one good anime or manga that can attract a large number of fans. Once the fans fall in love with one anime or manga, they will not only spend a lot of time consuming it; they will also spend a lot of money on related merchandise. For example, by the age of 40 in 2014, Hello Kitty already was featured in over 50,000 products sold in more than 70 countries. As a brand, it is worth \$7 billion (Fitzpatrick, 2014). Sanrio, the owner of Hello Kitty, provides 12,000 to 15,000 licenses a year to other companies to take advantage of its star power (Otmazgin, 2014).

In addition, anime and manga fans are stereotypically associated with science or math, both as university majors and as technology industry employees (Reysen et al., 2016). Many of them wear glasses and are good at using computers. This might be one of the reasons why anime and manga fandom became more popular after the internet was born. It is easy to see why the fans do not usually like sports: wearing glasses does not make it easy to play and they spend time at home watching anime and manga or playing video games. It is no wonder that many people call the fans *otaku*, or those who will spend almost every minute at home.

Interestingly, however, many of the fans are socially awkward and lack social skills, but become attractive and passionate when talking endlessly with other anime and manga fans.

### **Types of Anime and Manga Fans**

Although anime and manga fans have some characteristics in common, they can be very different from each other based on what type of anime and manga they like, how they treat anime and manga, and what they are looking for in these works. Scholars have varying opinions on how to divide these fans into different types. Some divide them by age and gender. One of these is Esposito (2011), who divided anime and manga fans into five types: *shounen* (teen males), *shoujo* (teen females), *seinen* (adult males), *josei* (adult females) and *kodomomuke* (children). Other scholars divide fans based on the frequency with which they watch anime and manga. In the popular press, while Morlock (2016) discussed the ten types of anime fans, Lindwasser (2019) listed a total of 14 types.

Although there is no best way to define anime and manga fans types, for our purposes, we discuss the following six types of anime and manga fans based on their characters: *weeaboo*, *otaku*, *waifu*, *husbando*, *fujosh* and *critic*.

#### **The weeaboo**

According to Dictionary.com (2019), weeaboo is used to describe fans of anime and manga with obsessive characteristics, and those fans are not Japanese nationals. Weeaboo is a replacement word for Wapanese, which is combination of white with Japanese. As a result of its racial overtone, Wapanese is no longer in use. A *weeaboo* is someone who not only loves anime and manga, but worships pretty much anything that is Japanese or related to Japanese culture. The implication is very negative and is often an accusation of wanting to 'be Japanese' (or whatever their warped perception and idealisation of Japanese may be) (Lauren, 2015). Thus, the word *weeaboo* has a negative connotation of its own. The *weeaboo* has just discovered anime and considers every show and anime and manga to be great. They do not have much of an opinion on these works. They watch them because the anime or the manga is popular. They want

to learn as much as possible, so that they can talk with their friends who also watch these works. In this way, the *weeaboo* can be gregarious because they are afraid of being alone.

The *weeaboo* is usually seasonal and changes whenever the popular and new works change. They might not like these works, but they are not picky and are easily manipulated into watching anything, good or bad. Although weeaboos are mostly white teenagers with a keen passion toward Japanese culture, but they can be any age or ethnicity. Not surprisingly, they want to move to Japan some day (Lindwasser, 2019).

## **The Otaku**

*Otaku* is a Japanese word for “nerd” or “geek,” and it refers to a person with an intense interest in anime, manga, and other form of Japanese culture. Similar to *weeaboo*, *otaku* also has a negative connotation (Yusuke, 2016). The *otaku* is usually male and generally between 18 and 40. The *otaku* fanatically consumes, produces and collects comic books (manga), animated films (anime) and other related products. They also participate in the production and sales of fan merchandise (Hall, 2011). This is the most typical type of anime and manga fan. When non-fans talk about anime and manga fans, they usually talk about *otaku*.

The *otaku* probably comes from the *weeaboo*, but is not a *weeaboo*. The *otaku* is more thoughtful and selective than *weeaboos*. The *otaku* has critical thoughts on the works and refuses to watch bad works or works they do not like. The *otaku* spends much of their time staying home to watch works that they like. They will collect many things related to these works. The *otaku* watches critically acclaimed shows, such as *Fate/Zero*, *Aldnoah.Zero*, and *Psycho-Pass* (Morlock, 2016), which are deep with well-developed plots. Some are not only reward-winning, but achieve great commercial success.

The *otaku* often has problems in social intercourse with females. The *otaku* is commonly nervously when talking with their female friends and probably even stutters when meeting new females.

## **The Waifu and the Husbando**

The *waifu* is used to describe an anime or manga fan who is dedicated to one character, and his/her obsession has no bounds (Morlock, 2016). More specifically, *Waifu* refers to an anime or manga character that a fan considers to be his/her wife or husband, while *husbando* is a male character that a female anime fan loves (Kincaid, 2015). Thus, different from others, the *waifu* and the *husbando* have a more focused interest in the anime and manga world.

This kind of fan loves all types of products related to their favourite character, especially the same goods that the character has in the anime or manga. They can spend all their time staying them. People probably view these behaviours as a mental illness because for the *waifu* and *husbando*, there are no boundaries between the virtual and real world. However, the *waifu* and *husbando*'s obsession with a fictional character is quite normal because fantasy is a large part of the attraction (Orsini, 2015). Fantasy does not have to be real and more often is not real.

## **The Fujoshi**

*Fujoshi* literally means “rotten girl.” As *otaku* usually refers to males, *fujoshi* usually refers to a specific type of female fan. According to a 2005 issue of *Eureka*, in recent times, *fujoshi* can refer to female *otaku*



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in general (Aoyama, 2009). However, *fujoshi* specifically refers to fans who love to watch BL (boy love) in anime and manga. But the *fujoshi* herself is a heterosexual female (Morlock, 2016).

The *fujoshi* loves men in anime and manga, but never touches men. As many *otaku* have problems in social intercourse with females, the *fujoshi* has problems in social intercourse with males. The *fujoshi* loves to imagine what it would be like when men love each other and always gravitates towards the nearest source of gay porn. Interestingly, many *fujoshi* are good artists, but they draw only gay men.

### **The Critic**

Critics are everywhere, including in anime and manga fandom. The critic carefully views and analyses all details in the anime and manga and they would come to many results or forecast for the anime and manga. The critic is also very picky about the accuracy of the details in anime and manga.

Many publishers and authors solicit comments from readers, mostly from the internet and especially from critics. In this way, publishers and authors can interact with readers and the critic can affect, or even anticipate, the creation of new anime and manga.

## **ANIME AND MANGA IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOR**

Although the popularity of anime and manga continues to rise not only in the U.S. but around the world as well, there is a lack of academic research on the cultural content of the phenomenon (Fennel, et. al, 2012). Are anime and manga mostly perceived by fans in the U.S. and around the world as Japanese products? If so, are they considered part of Japanese culture?

### **Cultural Content of Anime and Manga**

Why are fans so interested in anime and manga? Academic scholars approach this question from the cultural perspective. Two major competing theories or schools of thought exist, one of which is anime and manga contain elements of Japanese culture. In fact, they reflect, to a large extent, the Japanese culture (Azuma, 2009; Price, 2001). Under this framework, fans around the world enjoy anime and manga simply because they love Japanese culture. Among the 14 types of anime fans, the weaboos not just love anime or manga, but anything Japanese is cool to them. They definitely want to move to Japan (Lindwasser, 2019).

The weaboos love every anime show (Morlock, 2016). To them, anime and manga is the best thing as a taste of Japanese culture they can enjoy before they move to Japan. For example, the “magical girl” subgenre in anime and manga products portrays subservient girls and women and elevates men’s dominant status in society (Newitz, 1995). This image of unequal status between men and women flies in the face of the Western value. Yet, it is yearned for by those weaboos, who are either Americans or other nationals but Japanese.

On the other hand, the other school of thought is anime and manga are not strictly Japanese. As such, they are culturally odorless, which refers to “cultural features of a country of origin and images or ideas of its national, in most cases stereotyped, way of life are associated positively with a particular product in the consumption process” (Iwabuchi, 2002, page 27). This view does not totally ignore the traces of Japanese culture in anime and manga products. Instead, creators or producers purposely down play cul-

tural references in those products thereby making them culturally neutral. Sometimes licensed versions replace original elements with locally fit, customized arrangements (Price 2001).

Furthermore, large-eyed, chesty-shaped, and blond-haired characters often seen in anime and manga products look “Western” or “White” (Iwabuchi, 2002; Knowles, 1996). This indicates anime and manga may reflect the culture of other groups rather than that of Japanese. As such, those fans other than the weeaboos enjoy anime and manga not because they are drawn to Japanese culture per se, but maybe the anime culture (Napier, 2005).

## **Attraction of Anime and Manga**

Put aside the debate on cultural content, why are fans drawn to anime and manga? One big attraction is fantasy (Fennell, et al., 2012). With many configurations in its repertoire, Anime and manga have a wide range of story-telling. While some stories are based on reality, many do not resemble a sense of the real world in which the fans live. Yet, the “fantasyscape” (Napier, 2005, page 293) nature of the show takes fans out of their daily mundane, so they can be detached from and relieved of their duties and obligations in real life. Subsequently, fans have the time and space for themselves for maximum relaxation, enjoyment, and pleasure.

For example, boys love, also known as “shounen-ai” or “yaoi” is a niche genre, but is rising quickly in popularity recently. The plots are normally about two young men falling in love and are created mostly for the consumption of a large female audience (Sauder, 2018). While female viewers derive satisfaction from such uniquely-constructed love scene and story, they are not likely to encounter nor get involved with such arrangement in real life. Hence, it is their fantasy.

Although the fantasyesque nature of the show appeals to fans worldwide (Napier, 2007, page 210), anime and manga are much more than a one-trick pony. In fact, they encompass many genres such as science fiction, comedy, sports, romance, and crime (Chandler-Olcott, 2008). For example, producers of science fiction in anime and manga have been on the forefront of cutting-edge technology to create imaginative, grand plots in their story-telling. The science fiction shows from anime are so advanced in technology and inspirational in plot configuration that they often become the victim of a copycat by Hollywood mainstream movie makers (Levesley, 2014).

## **Consumer Demand in Anime and Manga Products**

With myriad genres, anime and manga products target a number of niche markets. People from all walks of life always can find something of interest to match their needs. Needless to say, anime and manga is a very inclusive community where weirdoes, nerds, sexual deviants, and ordinary folks can co-exist and equally feel at home. Furthermore, this community of tolerance and love is constantly searching for and rolling out new products and services to fulfill its members’ existing and evolving needs. As such, not only is anime and manga fandom having a larger effect on business than ever before, but it also influences how businesses are run. By the same token, businesses can use anime and manga fandom to their advantage.

There are many ways that businesses use anime and manga fandom. Because they are subcultures, they can be used as elements of many products or services. Unlike specific products that companies produce, anime and manga are not only products; they are imaging cultures. These cultures in anime and manga fandom can be divided into four: works, derivatives, activities and thematic places.

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First and most important is the works of these anime and manga, including DVDs, VCDs, TV shows, films, books and magazines. These products are usually created, or their creation is assisted, by the original author. These are counted as the original and basic products for anime and manga fans and are usually viewed as the laws and foundations of anime and manga fandom. For example, one of the most successful characters in the anime and manga industry is Hello Kitty, who will turn into 45 years old in 2019. Designed by Yuko Shimizu in 1974 and owned by Sanrio, as a white cat without mouth, Hello Kitty has truly become a global icon with appearance in over 50,000 branded products across 130 countries (Woodgate, 2017). Not only is Hello Kitty a brand for kids, it is loved by pop singers, movie stars, and other celebrities, such as Lady Gaga, Mariah Carey, Britney Spears, Cameron Diaz, and Paris Hilton. More amazingly, Hello Kitty has achieved this lofty status without any advertising; it is mostly through word-of-mouth (Fitzpatrick, 2014).

The others are peripheral products and derivatives from works listed previously. They are usually produced by companies who obtain the copyrights and can include themed restaurants, hotels, parks, games, clothing and merchandise. In Japan, there are myriad of themed restaurants, cafes, food, and desserts that are based on anime or manga characters (Okamoto Kitchen, 2019).

Besides these, there are activities like anime conventions, cosplay and clubs that get fans together. Every year, there are lots of anime conventions all over the world that generate billions of dollars. One example is the anime convention San Diego Comic-Con. The projected regional economic boom tied to this event in 2015 was \$135.9 million, according to the Convention Center Corp (Halverstadt, 2015). In 2018, the San Diego International Comic-Con drew about 130,000 fans of anime, comic books, and fantasy from the U.S. and around the world. The largest convention, however, is the Comiket (known as the Comic Market) held in Tokyo, drawing around half million visitors (Kopf, 2018).

Also popular in the anime and manga industry is ‘theming’, which means putting many thematic elements together in one place. Theme places can be restaurants, clubs, malls and parks. Theme parks have the largest influence and have the largest income in the anime and manga industry.

One of the most famous theme parks is Walt Disney World. The Disney theme park differentiates itself from its competitors by using the anime fandom of ‘Disney World’. The Walt Disney Company’s revenue has increased each year, from \$48.81 billion in 2014 to \$55.63 billion in 2016 (source: Yahoo Finance). According to statistia.com (2019), the latest data indicates the company achieved a record revenue of \$59.43 billion in 2018. Walt Disney described the Disney theme park by saying: ‘the older generation can recapture the nostalgia of days gone by, and the younger generation can savor the challenge of the future’ (Mosley, 1986). The large anime and manga fandom market means that even more thematic places can be opened. In fact, not only is the Walt Disney Company aggressively expanding and upgrading its existing rides and attractions and building new ones on its current properties, but it is considering opening another theme park in the near future (Barnes, 2018).

Another interesting marketing product is maid cafes. Maid cafes were originally created to fulfil the fantasies of fans of maid-themed anime and manga. Many maid cafes have been opened in Akihabara, Tokyo, which makes it by far the best place to go for a maid cafe experience. Maid cafes have gained a worldwide popularity as they are popping up everywhere from Asia to Europe to North America, such as China, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Australia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, France, the Netherlands, Mexico, Canada, and the U.S. (Galbraith, 2017).

Not all ways of doing business in anime and manga fandom are listed here because anime and manga are included in the culture industry, in which the technology and needs of people change and grow. Ever more new and creative products and services related to anime and manga fandom are being developed.

For example, augmented reality technology, the material/virtual nexus mediated through technology, information and code and enacted in specific and individualised space/time configurations (Graham, Zook, & Boulton, 2012) has become very popular recently. It creates a visible but virtual world for fans using new technology (Dredge, 2016). Like many Apple apps, companies could sell virtual products in these worlds. One of the most popular virtual games is Avakin Life, a 3D world, where fans can choose their own avatar, dress up the perfect way as they wish from a large selection of clothes and accessories, and meet and chat with other fans (Avakin, 2019).

Interestingly, the scale of anime and manga fandom businesses is increasing: from a small themed restaurant to a heaven city for anime and manga fandom. The best example of the latter is the anime and manga city in Akihabara, a district in Tokyo. Fans of anime and manga, or even ordinary people cannot image a Tokyo without this unique landmark (Galbraith, 2017).

For traditional companies, using anime and manga fandom differentiates them from their competitors, whereas consumers would view them as nearly the same. As mentioned, the Disney theme park uses anime and manga fandom to differentiate itself from traditional amusement parks. It really helps companies to compete effectively.

### **Anime and Manga: A Business Perspective**

Like other products, anime and manga also have endured the business cycles of ups and downs. From the mid-1990s, the sales of anime products in the U.S. continued to rise and plateaued in 2003 with \$4.84 billion in sales. Then the anime fever subsided to the annual sales of \$2.741 billion in 2009 (Otmazgin, 2014). On the other hand, manga sales mostly through bookstores and comics shops jumped from \$60 million in 2002 to \$210 million in 2007 (Alverson, 2013). Fast forward in time, both anime and manga are experiencing a new golden age of growth and prosperity (Aoki, 2017, 2018; Ressler & Hodgkins, 2018).

According to Otmazgin (2014), anime and manga have become a global culture, and entrepreneurs have played an indelible role in this process. First, entrepreneurs had a deep appreciation of anime and manga as they were impressed by the artistic elegance, sophisticated plot maneuvers, and futuristic imagination embodied in the work. Second, they used a try-and-error method to find out what worked and what not worked when it came to bringing in original anime and manga products from Japan to the U.S. That is, entrepreneurs understood how to adapt those products with a foreign ancestry to fit the local needs and market conditions in the U.S. They were risk-takers because they may lose money and time during this domesticating process, which could be drawn out. Oftentimes, we take those entrepreneurs for granted.

### **Anime and Manga: A Strategic View**

Fans around the world consume and enjoy anime and manga products in a number of ways. With a rising demand, companies have a golden opportunity to satisfy the needs of those fans while boosting their bottom line. For example, manga products were traditionally distributed through bookstores and comics shops. As Borders and many other outlets went under, the dynamics have changed. In recent years, manga sales in print in the U.S. have regained strength (Aoki, 2017). However, digital distribution of manga products via iPad app, iPhone/iPod Touch app, Android app, and the Internet is the future and poised to grow for years to come (Alverson, 2013). The same is true for anime products. Modern technology such as mobile devices and streaming services reduce the cost of anime and manga production as well as its distribution. At the same time, it also cuts the lag time between releases in Japan and the U.S. as

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simultaneous publication is made possible. In addition, adaptations of the program for different markets become relatively easier, much quicker, and thus less costly (Aoki, 2017). It seems anime and manga have grown to a truly globalized culture and industry.

In conclusion, anime and manga fandom permeates and influences our daily lives by affecting our values through different subcultures. In fact, the anime and manga subculture has become a popular, mainstream culture in the U.S. (Narutostar, 2018). This way of 'leading' the trend in needs is a good practice that other industries could learn from.

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### **KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS**

**Anime:** A style of Japanese film and TV animation.

**Cosplay:** A contraction of the term 'costume play', this is a performance art in which participants called cosplayers wear costumes and fashion accessories to represent a specific character.

**Digital distribution:** Anime and manga products are accessible to fans worldwide via modern technology such as smartphones, streaming, and the Internet.

**Fanfic:** Fan fiction about characters or settings from an original work of fiction written by fans of that work rather than by its creator.

**Fanvid:** A fan-made video consisting of clips from a film or TV series, usually set to music.

**Fantasyesque:** A plot or story in anime or manga that is unlikely to happen in the real world.

**Fantasyscape:** A wild story or genre in anime or manga that resembles little with the reality.

**Fujoshi:** The female fans who love to watch BL (boy love) in anime and manga.

**Globalized culture:** Consumption of anime and manga products is becoming a global phenomenon where fans reside in a number of countries.

**Manga:** A Japanese term that refers to 'comic'.

**Otaku:** A Japanese term for people with obsessive interests, commonly the anime and manga fandom, usually refers to young males.

**Shounen-ai or yaoi:** Boys love, which is a niche genre where two young boys or men fall in love. Its main target consists of female fans.

**Theming:** Putting thematic elements together in one place.

**Waifu/Husbando:** A fictional character whom an anime fan considers to be their wife or husband.

**Weeaboo:** Someone who worships pretty much anything that is Japanese or related to Japanese culture.