

Exploring the Role of Anime and Manga in Shaping Social Attitudes among Animation Students

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Abstract

Manga & Anime subculture exported from Japan to globally sometimes called "Animanga" for ease of discussion. Today the impact of this visual popular culture so immense that almost every country has been witnessing Comic Con Events, Cosplay and communities which further resulted into a shaping cultural participation and social behavioural attitude. Today this has been become a one sided relation known as "Parasocial Phenomena" and potential sources of emotional attachment, inspiration, and social learning. Earlier research has explored anime fandom, media consumption and market trends. However, it seems there is little research on the significance of emotional attachments with anime and manga characters on the development of Social Attitudes among the youth. The present study attempts to fill this gap, and examines the role of exposure to anime and manga in the development of emotional attachment to fictional characters, and in the development of attitudes related to empathy, cultural diversity, cooperation, responsible citizenship and Sustainable values. The research design included a structured questionnaire measuring quantitative and qualitative insights. The study also provides insights for policy makers from academia and researchers regarding the educational and social possibilities of anime and manga in developing sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

Japan's soft power policy succeeded with the global recognition of anime and manga visual sub culture and today established as an international cultural phenomena that cross geographical, language and cultural boundaries. In the last few decades, advances in digital technology, international media distribution and online streaming platforms have greatly widened access, so that audiences in Southeast Asia, Europe, North America and elsewhere can consume Japanese animated content. Today, anime and manga are not just entertainment but also powerful cultural products that contribute to creative industries, international cultural exchange and Japan's soft power.

The popularity of this Japanese pop culture is not limited to visual media but the merchandising model includes fashion attire, miniature character models and games also have been shaping the fiscal ecosystem and popularity (Research & Markets, 2026).

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As considered a “Soft Power” tool, anime and manga has established as positive medium of propagating social & cultural campaigning where an individual learns through interaction.

Culture & sub-culture atmosphere influences emotional and cognitive processes. Intercultural psychology has shown that identity and a sense of belonging are constructed by participation in social actions and cultural values throughout time (Dreher, 2015). Socialization is an important process by which beliefs, values, patterns of behavior, and cultural identities are formed. In an increasingly globalised culture, exposure to other cultural products helps develop intercultural awareness, identity and social norms. During the post-war period in Japan, Anime and manga had become an agitation tools for young citizens to show their perspective, preferences and frustrations and later decades it established as pop culture of expressing common interest, cosplay and creative engagement.

The one sided bond, known as parasocial relation resulted because of regular engagement with animated fictional characters shaping behavioural traits and media consumption patterns. Without any responsive attributes and one sided emotional bonds from the side of audience exhibit more pronounced parasocial inclinations (Liebers & Schramm, 2019). These psychological and sociological effects have created many questions to be answer by academic inquires.

These emotional ties may cause one to see imaginary characters as friends, role models or inspirations, thereby expanding the impact of anime beyond amusement. At the same time, social attitudes are taught psychological and social predispositions that affect how people perceive, evaluate, and respond to other people, social groups, institutions, and societal concerns. Social views are not innate but are ever-changing through socialization, education, family, peer contact, culture, media and everyday life.

Anime and manga are booming worldwide and study in media psychology is rising, although the role of parasocial relationships with anime and manga characters in the development of social attitudes has received only little attention. Up to now, research has mainly focused on fandom, media

consumption, identity formation, and consumer behaviour, but few studies have integrated exposure to anime and manga, parasocial relationships and social attitudes in a single conceptual framework, especially for anime fans and animation students.

This project aims to advance understanding of anime as a cultural force that impacts the emotional resonance and social growth of modern youth audiences, through the interdisciplinary fusion of media psychology, communication science, and animation studies.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES (RO)

- RO1: To explore the engagement of animation students with anime.
- RO1: To investigate parasocial associations between animation
- RO1: To examine the effect of anime characters on the social attitude of animation students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The localization strategies, and cross-media franchising multilingual releases are the other contributors to rapid audience growth worldwide (Nair, 2025; Times of India Entertainment Desk, 2025). With 15 million paid users Crunchyroll has been dominating as the biggest Anime content provider and on the other hand Netflix has opened its own animation studio to meet the market demand.

The authors of ‘The Anime Boom in the United States: Lessons for Global Creative Industries’ Daliot-Bul & Nissim Otmazgin, (2017) whose prior research have been focused with the “dialectic of the transnational consumption of Japanese culture in the West”, found the important components of success are robust industrial and institutional frameworks other than the support of American audience despite of absent of an eco-system for smooth production, distribution and fair entrepreneurial support in America. They recognized the significance of the Japanese government in promoting culture through Anime, fan communities and market presence at local level.

Next Generation Technologies, (2026) in their recent research and market analysis report, has shared the insight of “Anime Market” for the



“2026-2033 period. Which shows the projection of estimated growth of around \$77.3 billion with overall compound annual growth rate of (CAGR) of 9.2% The Asia-Pacific region remains the largest market for anime, while North America and Europe remain strong growth markets and underline the global entertainment nature of anime”.

Anime & Manga Culture

In a society that is becoming increasingly globalized, it is important to be aware of cultural variety if we want to promote cooperation, reduce prejudice and achieve social harmony. A culture comes out from a common belief system, language, and religion and value system from the common shared identities of a large group of people in the form of socialization (Naik et al., 2023). That socialization helps an individual to establish a belongingness with a culture and adopting their social norms and practices and the cultural environment create an impact on emotional & mental states of an individual's cultural psychology (Dreher, 2015).

Time to time evolving is the key attribute of a culture and causes in developing the new ideas, practices, living conditions. This attribute further develops into sub-culture by a group of people who have adopted a style, unique values, lifestyles, and forms of expression. These subcultures often make use of style and symbolic behaviors to express identity, opposition or dislike of the standards of the wider culture. In the end these practices are often blended into the wider culture. Global digitalisation has converted world into an interconnect world where we found our self-connected with any individual with different culture, language, behaviour and ethnicity. For universal harmony it is must to avoid discrimination, bias, and conflict while promoting mutual respect, cooperation and social harmony (Hebdige, 1979).

What is important about this period is that youth culture became a major driver for societal change, while hippie culture emphasized peace, spirituality, and anti-materialist values, anime-related subcultures foster creativity, fandom, and transcultural connections (Lutfi, 2018). The cultural innovations young people created subsequently had long-term effects. Popular culture and new forms

of expression, such as manga, became important industries and served to establish modern Japanese identity

In Japan the fandom also called as “Otaku Culture” as pointed out by Gushiken & Hirata, (2014) mostly in negative context, and heavily obsessed with anime, manga, or games but outside Japan viewed as young people looking for new ways to connect, share information, and socialize in cities like comic con and cosplay culture where participant present themselves in a form of fictional characters from comics and animation media (Abramova et al., 2021).

Media Characters Fanaticism

Liebers, N., & Schramm, H. (2019) found in their research “Parasocial Interactions and Relationships with Media Characters—An Inventory of 60 Years of Research” that academic work on media characters is mostly present in the film and television domains, accounting for about 51.7% of all articles in both fictional, non-fictional and merged characters categories. Research on both fictional and non-fictional characters is especially relevant in this medium, suggesting that film and television have historically been the primary context for examining media-character influence. On the other hand, radio and music constitute roughly 3.4% of the overall literature, and print media constitutes around 3.1% which indicates that these topics have not been the focus of scholarly study. Their findings also show that research in new media comprises approximately 17.2% of the overall with a strong focus on non-fictional people such as celebrities, influencers and content providers excluding 24.5% of inter-media.

The behavioural traits, social behaviour and demography are the key reasons in development of an individuals’ “Parasocial Phenomena”. Other factors which confine an individual within social isolation like age, gender, physical ability, introverted nature, and non-communication also play a significant role as study reveals and these individuals tend to form stronger parasocial relationships (Liebers & Schramm, 2019).

Young individuals, especially boys, tend to be more associated with animated characters since they are least confident in human connections,

may see them as safe and as an alternative to real-life ties that might have been connected with fear, disappointment or mistrust (Rosaen et al., 2011).

Media and social behaviour

Social attitudes are the ideas, values, assessments and behavioral traits of an individual, which enable consistent responses to repeating social circumstances, and help social adjustment and interaction. They also perform crucial duties in helping people to organize social information, communicate personal beliefs, adjust to changing social settings and keep aspects of their self-identity. Social attitudes are fluid constructions which evolve via the constant interaction of individuals with their social and cultural contexts.

Several scholars agree that social views are learned, changeable, and socially constructed, rather than based on fundamental personality qualities. Murphy, Murphy, and Newcomb (1937) see them as socially acquired behavioral qualities that allow an individual to react in a consistent way to common events in society. Ajzen (1991) describes social attitudes as the learned views, assessments and traits of individuals to persons, social groupings, institutions and societal concerns. Katz (1960) emphasizes that attitudes enable individuals to structure social knowledge, reflect their personal values, adjust to changing contexts, and preserve self-identity. This is supported by Mahartini and Tristananda (2025) who describe social attitudes as learned behavioural dispositions, which encompass honesty, responsibility, cooperation, empathy, discipline, tolerance and respect. These are developed through meaningful learning experiences, contextual engagement and emotional involvement and not just the acquisition of knowledge.

There is also a considerable body of literature to support the thesis that media are influential actors in affecting societal attitudes and behaviour. Yoo et al. (2016) suggest that the media's influence is mostly conveyed via perceived peer norms and social expectations, but Shmueli et al. (2010) highlight the direct impact of frequent media exposure, behavioral modelling and normalizing processes on attitudes and immediate behaviour. Similarly,

Parrott et al. (2019) claim that media rarely have a direct influence on the audience, but emotional involvement, cognitive interpretation, and message framing are mediators of attitude formation. In sum, these views imply that media affect social attitudes via direct and indirect routes, such as observational learning, repetitive exposure, emotional processing, and perceived social acceptance.

Lester et al., (2022) contends visual media are systems of communication that generate meaning through visual representation, but Mayer (2009) claims their multimodal nature improves attention, understanding and memory retention. Jenkins (2007) links the rapid growth of digital technologies with the increasing importance of visual media in contemporary society. Hall (1997), on the other hand, views visual media as important tools in the construction of social reality, cultural identity and collective meanings through representation and storytelling.

The studies reveals the societal attitudes as a psychological factors appeared as the learned attitudes from observations, interpretation and application and a visual media equally plays a significant role in shaping social traits and patterns. Above mentioned all the studies more focused on consumer behaviour in context of role of various media and least explored about animated and graphical characters.

This study aims to address this gap by examining the effect of exposure to anime and manga on parasocial relationships and social attitudes among animation students and understand how repeated interaction with anime characters can lead to emotional attachment, observational learning, and the development of positive social attitudes, thus augmenting the overall understanding of anime as a powerful cultural and educational force.

RESEARCH GAP

Previous studies have shown that visual media such as comics, animation, social media and anime are powerful in altering people's perceptions, beliefs, values and actions. This is generated by repeated exposure, emotional engagement, observational learning and media framing. The



influence of anime on cultural identity, gender roles, fandom, and consumer-behavior and media involvement have been widely investigated in previous studies. Research on parasocial interactions has concentrated on emotional attachment, identity formation, psychological well-being, and audience involvement. In the meantime, research on social attitudes has concentrated on the effects of media, education and socialization on attitude formation and behavioral dispositions. But these lines of investigation have mostly diverged.

Thus, the psychological mechanisms via which emotional attachments with fictional characters may play a role in attitudes towards empathy, friendship, cultural diversity, justice, inclusivity and responsible citizenship are still under-explored. This study aims to fill this vacuum by exploring the relationship between parasocial relationships and social attitudes among anime fans and animation students in an effort to contribute to the literature of media effects, fandom and audience psychology.

Purpose of the Study

The study aims to investigate the potential power anime and manga in shaping the personal, cultural and behavioural patterns among youth and its social and educational value. It also seeks to expand anime beyond entertainment as a visual storytelling medium that may help young people develop personally and socially. The findings may help researchers, animation educators, policymakers, the anime business, and society understand how anime and manga might promote beneficial social values and educational and youth development projects.

Zafira et al. (2024) also pointed out that environmental, cultural, and habitual factors affect behavior further resulted into cultivating values, attitudes, and social interactions of an individual.

Theoretical Framework

Parasocial Interaction Theory

In general, “Parasocial Phenomena” a personality trait among the individual where they established a one sided relation with fictional or non-fictional characters from Radio, TV, Film, Social Media and games. The theoretical frameworks laid by Horton

& Wohl, (1956) in their study “Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance.”

An anime character with high pro-social attributes can develop a strong wishful identification and become a role model as revealed by Ramasubramanian and Kornfield (2012) in their research “Japanese Anime Heroines as Role Models for U.S. Youth: Wishful Identification, Parasocial Interaction, and Intercultural Entertainment Effects”. For many viewers, these bonds provide role models that shape identity, reinforce positive values, and offer a sense of companionship, highlighting the cultural and educational impact of anime heroines as figures of empowerment.

Social Learning Theory

“Social Learning Theory, founded by Albert Bandura (1977)”, states that people learn behavior, attitudes,

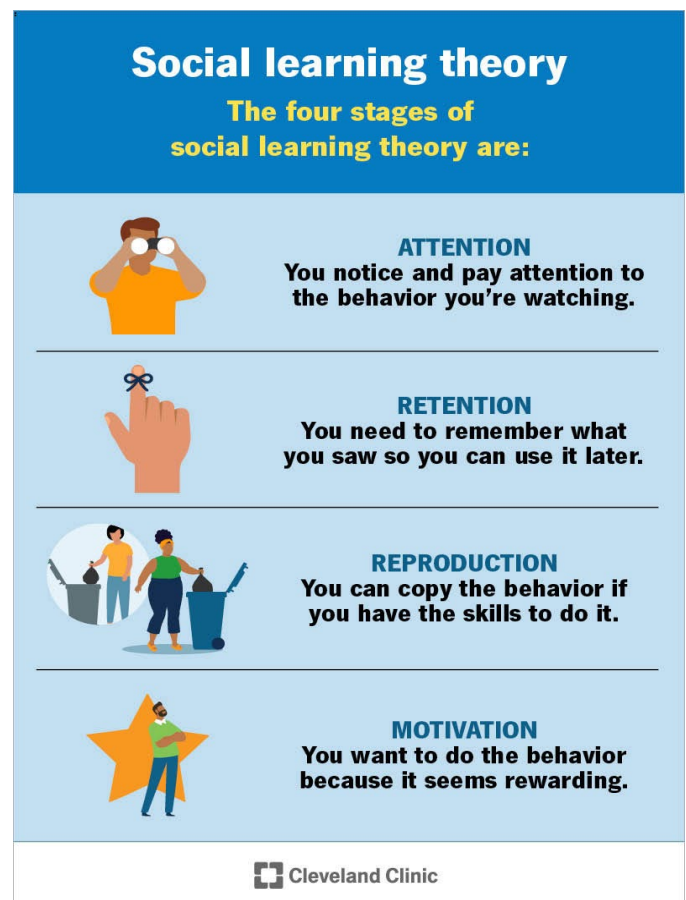


Figure 1: <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/-/scassets/images/org/health/articles/social-learning-theory>

values, and abilities by witnessing others and their outcomes. The theory states that learning is a cognitive and social process in which people actively notice, analyze, imitate, and internalize relevant environmental models. Learning is seen as a process including cognitive processes, behavioral reactions, and environmental effects rather than a passive response to external inputs. They recognized attention, memory, reproduction, and motivation as four interconnected processes that aid observational learning. Social Learning Theory, initially developed in psychology, has been used to communication, education, media studies, and sociology to describe how media environments foster observational learning. Viewers may adopt media characters' speech, attire, social etiquette, moral reasoning, and behavioural norms with frequent exposure, especially if they are attractive, successful, or socially rewarded (Smith et al., 2015).

Research Methodology

A mixed-method research design has been adopted including a structured questionnaire to evaluate quantitative insights and qualitative data are collected through open-ended questions. This descriptive-correlational design explores the association between one sided parasocial phenomena and social behavior among the animation fan and students.

RESULT & DISCUSSION

The finding from this study indicates the same emotional bonds with fictional characters as for real characters and more than entertainment. Participants also reported about an impact on their perspective about others change in personality, social behaviour and responsible sustainability.

The results reveal that the animation students interact with anime in ways that go beyond mere entertainment, and strongly indicate anime as a significant part of the participants' recreational, cultural, and social experiences. Fan communities, cosplay events, and anime-related merchandise collecting are signs of animation students' engagement with anime and support.

A large number of respondents said that they get inspirations, emotional attachments and

companionship from Manga & Anime fictional characters and narratives (RO1) which advocate the about parasocial associations(RO2). A mixed response has surfaced in the findings in response to about developing the social attitude which is credited to their family, education and life experiences apart from Fictional characters from Manga & Anime (RO3).

CONCLUSION

The purpose if this study is to examine how watching anime or manga affected social views and parasocial connections among animation students. However, the results of this study also suggest that anime is simply one among several variables that affect the formation of social attitudes. In reality, social attitudes are formed through the cumulative impact of many different agents of socialization, including one's family, schooling experiences, peer relationships, cultural background, and the media. In trying to explain how anime and manga fit into the larger social construct, both mediums serve as supplementary cultural/educational resources that uphold existing beliefs as well as provide opportunities for contemplation on societal and ethical issues, through the emotional content of the plots. This study contributes evidence to the growing fields of anime studies, media psychology, communication studies, and animation education, by showing how anime and manga act as a vehicle for meaningful socialization, with the potential for promoting positive personal and community development.

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