

Exploring Anime Consumers' Identity Construction in the Digital Era

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This paper delves into the intricate relationship between anime consumption and the construction of identity in the digital era, aiming to shed light on how anime enthusiasts negotiate their identities and the resulting socio-cultural implications. The study is structured around three pivotal themes: digitalization, identity construction, and community.

Methodology: Employing a qualitative approach through four semi-structured interviews, the paper explores these themes to elucidate how anime viewers shape their identities in the digital era.

Findings: The findings emphasize the significant influence of digitalization on anime consumption, making it more accessible, cost-effective, and globally pervasive.

Practical Implications: Regarding identity construction, the study reveals that individuals resonate with overarching themes in anime, influencing their self-perception in terms of personal growth, determination, and purpose. The role of the anime community in the digital space is underscored, emphasizing its pivotal contribution to enhancing enjoyment by providing a platform for interest sharing, show discussions, content discovery, and critical insights.

Originality/Value: This study illuminates the complex dynamics of anime consumption and its impact on identity construction, enriched by the advent of digitalization.

Limitations: While comprehensive, the paper suggests future research avenues, particularly exploring the influence of anime studios and marketers on the identity construction process.

1. Introduction

Anime, manga, and the broader realm of Japanese popular culture have experienced an unprecedented surge in global prominence. What was once a niche interest confined to Japan has now blossomed into a global phenomenon. This widespread reach has birthed a fascinating subculture (Kirillova et al., 2019), giving rise to terms such as "otaku," "fujoshi," "fudanshi," "shoujo," "shonen" and many more, each representing distinct facets of this diverse and dynamic cultural landscape (Mamat et al., 2022). The term "otaku" signifies individuals deeply engrossed in Japanese culture, particularly in anime, manga, and cosplay (Chambers, 2012). While this term carries a stigma in its home country, Japan, it has been embraced and proudly adopted by enthusiasts in various corners of the world (McKevitt, 2010). The otaku subculture extends beyond mere consumption, manifesting as a robust appreciation for the artistic and creative aspects of anime and manga, and its influence on individual identities in extension.

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The purpose of this paper is to delve into the complex interplay between anime consumption and the construction of identity within the digital era. Through a qualitative lens, this paper endeavors to gain a deeper understanding of the processes involved in identity formation among anime enthusiasts and the impact of digitalization on this process. The study of anime and the 'Otaku' subculture is a relatively recent area of investigation within the academic domain. However, there exists a notable research gap concerning the integration of Consumer Culture Theories (CCT) with themes of identity construction in anime consumption. Given this research gap, the author of this paper aims to investigate the phenomenon, which could potentially be the starting point of a series of research being conducted on anime consumption in the digital era. Investigating this research gap holds significance because the globalization of anime, facilitated by digital platforms, has led to the formation of a diverse and interconnected community of fans with unique and evolving identities. Understanding the mechanisms through which anime consumers negotiate their identities offers profound insights into the socio-cultural implications of media consumption in contemporary society.

Therefore, to unravel this intricate concept, the paper poses the following research question:

How do anime consumers construct their identity in the digital era?

The primary goal of this study is to investigate how anime consumers construct their identities in the digital era. Specific objectives are: to explore the impact of digitalization on anime consumption and identity construction, to understand the role of anime communities in shaping consumer identities, and to identify the socio-cultural implications of anime consumption on personal identity development.

2. Literature Review

The rise of consumer culture and postmodernism has highlighted that what people buy is not solely for survival but is deeply embedded in societal functions and personal desires (Warde, 2015). Anime, as a global cultural phenomenon, highlights this aspect, where people across the world consume it for various emotional and aesthetic reasons. Consuming anime is not bound within the limits of watching a show anymore, rather it is connected to the consumers' social belonging and self-development (Kirillova et al., 2019). Drawing from the insights provided by Warde (2015), it is evident that anime consumption is intertwined with broader sociological theories related to consumption, culture, globalization, and identity formation. Understanding how anime consumers construct their identities necessitates an exploration of these multifaceted dynamics. The interplay of consumer culture, digitalization, identity formation and community building provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing the impact of anime consumption on individual and collective identities. This literature review aims to delve deeper into the complex dimensions of anime culture, exploring its connection to digitalization, identity construction and community building.

2.1 Digitalization and Anime Consumption

Digitalization has profoundly impacted modern society, reshaping consumption patterns and behaviors (Cochoy et al., 2017). In the realm of anime consumption and communities, digitalization has similarly ushered in transformative changes. Online platforms, streaming services, and social media have democratized access to media content (Fuentes et al., 2019), allowing anime fans to view and discuss their favorite shows easily. Fans can now engage with anime on diverse devices, including smartphones and tablets, providing a flexible and personalized viewing experience (Cochoy et al., 2017). Much like smartphones have become integral to shopping (Fuentes, Bäckström and Svingstedt, 2017), digital platforms like Crunchyroll, Netflix, and Funimation have become essential for anime enthusiasts. This digitalization has made anime content more accessible and interactive. Moreover, digital platforms and devices become extensions of the audience's mind, enhancing their access to and interaction with anime content (Jenkins & Denegri-Knott, 2017). Apps and online platforms help organize tasks, aid memory, and influence our consumption patterns by providing a convenient and organized way to access a wide array of anime content, influencing how and what anime the viewers choose to consume.

Furthermore, digitalization enhances integration by inspiring desires and influencing choices based on the content seen on digital devices (Jenkins & Denegri-Knott, 2017). For instance, recommendation algorithms play a significant role in suggesting new anime titles to viewers based on their preferences, expanding their anime-watching horizons (Cochoy et al., 2017). This personalization has the potential to shape individual tastes and influence the dynamics of anime communities, as viewers may be exposed to a broader range of genres and styles. Not only that, but also, anime fans often play anime opening or closing themes, or just general anime music accompanying various daily activities through "soundtracking", embedding various aspects on anime to their daily lives (Fuentes et al., 2019).

2.2 Anime Consumption and Identity Construction

Consumer Culture Theory delves into consumer identity projects, which entail how individuals shape their sense of self through their purchases and consumption practices (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Anime consumption, as a cultural phenomenon, reveals how people use market resources to shape identities and build consumer communities (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011). In the world of anime, viewers not only find entertainment but also express culture and construct their identities. Drawing on the discussion by Arnould and Thompson (2005), it can be stated that viewers often construct their identities by aligning with specific anime genres, characters, or themes that resonate with their personal values and experiences. For example, someone who identifies with themes of resilience and perseverance may be drawn to 'shonen' anime like "Naruto" or "My Hero Academia," where characters overcome challenges and grow stronger.

Consumer identity projects, as discussed by Larsen and Patterson (2018), elucidate how consumption choices are integral to shaping personal and group identities. This aligns with the broader trend where consumer choices in terms of anime consumption are seen as a means of articulating uniqueness and distinctiveness in a consumer-driven society. Moreover, considering the internal, external, and psychological contexts of consumption is essential in comprehending the broader social and cultural influences on anime consumption (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011). The internal context encompasses how various elements within an anime, such as animation style or storyline, affect consumers' perceptions and choices. The external context involves the impact of broader societal norms and trends on anime preferences. The psychological context delves into the mental processes and intentions that drive anime consumption choices.

Anime consumption, as a facet of contemporary consumer culture, reflects the evolution of consumer preferences and values. Historically, economics has analyzed these preferences, yet paid limited attention to their formation, an oversight corrected by interdisciplinary fields such as history, sociology, and anthropology (Gurova, 2018). These disciplines underscore that consumer identities are molded by political and moral projects, highlighting the social and political dimensions of consumption. Hatami (2018) referred to this sort of influence of anime, and Japanese culture in a broader sense, as a form of 'soft power' to influence the world, and influence the identity construction of international consumers, especially the youth.

2.3 Anime Consumption and the 'Otaku' Community

Consumer behavior in the realm of anime consumption has become increasingly unpredictable and complex (Cova, 1997). The rejection of excessive materialism is observed, with individuals valuing meaningful connections over mere possessions. This rejection aligns with the idea of "consciousness of kind" where members within a certain group feel a distinct connection with each other (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001). Therefore, one way to understand anime consumption is through the lens of subcultures of consumption (Canniford, 2011). The term "otaku" denotes a subculture of dedicated individuals primarily interested in Japanese anime and manga. (Chambers, 2012). These individuals are highly passionate about animated media, investing a significant amount of time and resources in

activities like watching anime, reading manga, attending conventions, collecting merchandise, and engaging in online communities to discuss and share their interests. The otaku community has grown globally, contributing to the dissemination of Japanese pop culture beyond its borders (Kirillova et al., 2019).

Anime enthusiasts often form distinct social connections and relationships through their consumption habits, aligning with the idea of consumption communities enhancing the value of products through user connections (Canniford, 2011). They often seek a sense of belonging within online communities that share common interests and emotions, especially in a fragmented society (Cova, 1997). The Otaku subculture provides the anime fans with a community that fulfills their need of belongingness and provides them with a community where they can uphold their identity (Kirillova et al., 2019). However, subcultures sometimes face challenges due to fragmentation, or dilution of their original values over time (Canniford, 2011). The Otaku community often experiences internal divisions, resulting in distinct subgroups engaging in debates and occasional jests directed at individuals belonging to groups with differing anime genre preferences (Reysen et al., 2018).

The rationale behind this study is to explore the intricate relationship between anime consumption and identity construction in the digital era. As anime has evolved from a niche interest to a global phenomenon, it has significantly influenced cultural and social identities. This study aims to fill the existing research gap by integrating Consumer Culture Theories (CCT) with themes of identity construction in anime consumption. Understanding these dynamics offers profound insights into the socio-cultural implications of media consumption in contemporary society.

3. Methodology

The objective of the paper is to investigate the fundamental process and rationale involved in forming one's identity while watching anime. Employing an interpretivist epistemology and a constructivist ontology, the author delved into the viewers' behavior while watching anime and how it contributes to their identity construction. This exploration was conducted through an inductive research method, wherein data was gathered prior to identifying prevailing themes, and the selected research method was semi-structured in-depth interviews. This particular type of interview was selected to gather rich data with thick descriptions which has the potential to aid the goal of the paper. Four interviews were conducted in total, taking 1 hour 20 minutes on average. Purposive sampling was used to select interviewees who have been watching anime and have been watching anime for at least more than 5 years. All four participants were selected from varying age groups and cultural backgrounds to avoid biases and increase the validity and reliability of the study.

Table 1.
Demographic Information of Interviewees

	Interviewee A	Interviewee B	Interviewee C	Interviewee D
Age	42	30	25	32
Gender	Male	Male	Female	Male
Occupation	Industrial Engineer	Unemployed	Student	Software Engineer
Education level	Bachelor's Degree	High school	Master's	Bachelor's Degree
Nationality	American	Swedish	Bangladeshi	Filipino

Source: Authors Created.

Prior to the interview, a comprehensive interview guide was created, encompassing a total of 35 questions (APPENDIX-1). However, supplementary probing and indirect questions were incorporated, tailored to each interviewee. At the beginning of the interview, the interviewer highlighted the significance of the topic and upheld ethical principles by guaranteeing confidentiality and obtaining informed consent for recording the discussions. All participants agreed to be recorded and shared their

basic information, including gender, without any concerns. Therefore, their provided pronouns will be used in the findings and analysis section. While the author held a preference for delving into local and micro-histories rather than seeking overarching truths, interesting patterns of thinking emerged during the coding and thematic analysis stages, which will be discussed in the following section.

4. Discussions

This qualitative study aimed to gather rich data and thick descriptions related to the research question through four interviews. The subsequent analysis and identified patterns from these interviews will provide insights into the research question.

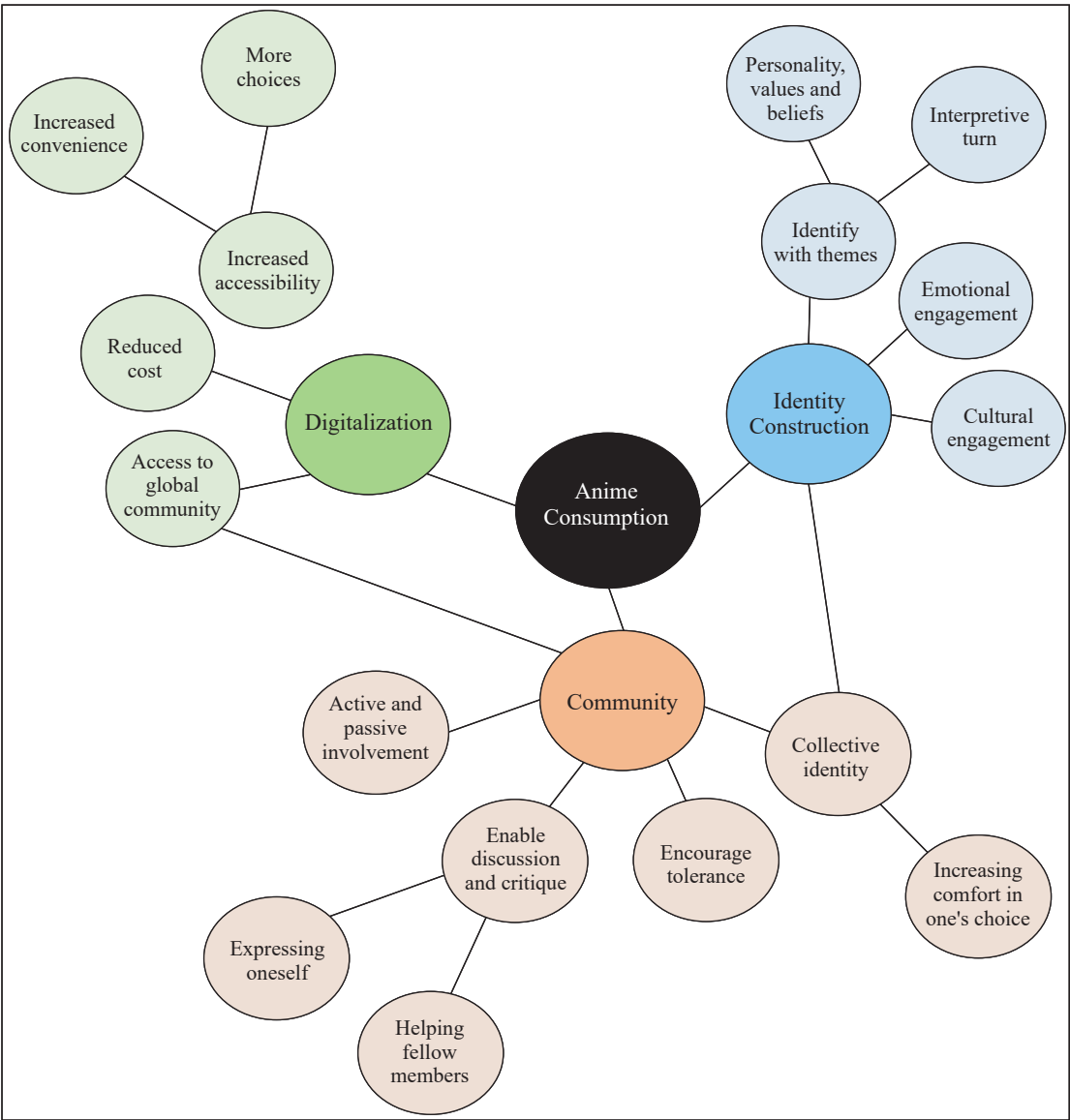


Figure 1.
Major Findings Regarding the Identity Construction of Anime Consumers in the Digital Era
Source: Authors Generated.

4.1 Digitalization and Anime Consumption

When it comes to digitalization and its impact on the consumption of anime, the responses from all four participants generally indicate that digital platforms have significantly influenced how participants access and watch anime. Digital platforms have made it more convenient, cost-effective, and accessible which aligns with the discussion of Cochoy et al. (2017), Fuentes et al. (2019) and Jenkins & Denegri-Knott (2017), where they discuss the increased accessibility facilitated by digitalization. Participant A stated,

"Digital platforms are now the predominant way I get to watch anime. As a result, streaming and digital platforms have massively reduced the cost of watching anime for me. The expense is less than 10% of what it once was."

The demise of media stores and the reduction in the availability of physical copies like DVDs have made streaming the predominant way to watch anime. It has also expanded the range of anime available, making it easier to find and watch a diverse selection. Digitalization has greatly affected Participant B, given that his primary avenue for consuming anime was limited to television viewing, imposing several constraints. He states,

"There was barely anime being shown on Swedish TV when I was growing up, so my choices were very limited. We used to record stuff when it was shown on TV, but now it's just kept online either way so in that sense it's much easier to watch it."

Additionally, the abundance of available anime makes it easier to start enjoying, especially with multiple episodes on hand to delve into the storyline or concept at once. While discussing the advantages of digital platforms, one of the participants stated,

"It's much easier now to find anime you want to watch with good quality subtitles and stuff. You don't have to make sure to stay home at certain hours because you know this or that anime is shown at certain times or not, and it is also much cheaper as well. If you want to buy anime these days it might cost you as much as 600 SEK for 12 episodes whereas you can subscribe to Crunchyroll for about 120 SEK per month, getting pretty much unlimited anime viewing."

However, despite the evident cost efficiency, certain digital platforms are still not available in all regions and not affordable for some. Of the four participants, two prefer official services like Netflix or Crunchyroll, while the other two resort to piracy websites due to accessibility and affordability issues. Despite the ethical concerns, this aligns with Barnett et al.'s (2015) discussion on digitalization and ethical consumption, emphasizing how limited options and financial constraints can impede ethical choices. Although this can be considered a minor setback, participants still note that digital platforms have expanded their anime choices, allowing them to explore various genres and shows they wouldn't have had access to through traditional methods. It has also connected them with a broader online anime community, enabling engagement in discussions, fandoms, and interactions with like-minded individuals globally. Through digitalization, people use what they consume to highlight their preferences and interests, forming communities of like-minded individuals (Warde, 2015). Participant C states.

"Growing up in Bangladesh, access to anime was limited, but digital platforms have allowed me to explore different genres and discover anime that I wouldn't have been exposed to otherwise. Digital platforms have also connected me with like-minded individuals who share a passion for anime. I've been able to engage in online communities, participate in discussions, and even join fandoms dedicated to specific anime series."

Furthermore, the responses from the interviewees suggest that global accessibility through digital platforms has broadened the cultural influence of anime, which aligns with the article of Hatami (2018) that states that watching anime or certain shows might influence consumers and shift their values. Participants highlight that digital platforms have made anime a more significant cultural

phenomenon globally, breaking geographical barriers and connecting enthusiasts worldwide. The ability to access anime from different regions has made it easier to appreciate diverse cultural elements within the anime, the credit to which again goes to digitalization and advancement of technology (Fuentes et al., 2019). Additionally, the diverse range of anime available has made it a more inclusive and versatile form of entertainment, challenging previous perceptions of anime as a niche or children's-focused medium (McKevitt, 2010).

4.2 Anime Consumption and Identity Construction

Based on the responses provided by the four interview participants, some patterns and observations regarding the influence of anime on personal values, beliefs, personality, identification with characters or themes, and consumption habits can be identified. While participants initially denied significant influence of anime on their identity, they later revealed resonance and personal connection with characters in subtly framed questions. Participant B responded,

"I kind of identify with Aoi from Shirobako. Because all of her life she felt like she barely knew that she was doing, that she was surrounded with people with way more specific dreams whereas she was practically just running around trying to make sure that it all worked in the first place. For some reason, she is one of my favorite characters. I do not know if it is because I feel like I'm like her or that I just wish that I was that cool. I do not know if it made me realize that it was stuff I was feeling or if I liked her character because it was already my feelings about myself. I guess what one might say is that I'm very far from where I want to be."

This response clearly hints towards the fact that the participant can feel a deep personal connection to 'Aoi' as his life, and personality seems to resonate with her. Similarly, participant D had a similar resonance with another anime character that he felt reflects his identity and maybe even inspires him in a way. He responded,

"I resonate a little with Katsuki Bakugou from My Hero Academia, in that back in my younger years, I actually wasn't the nicest or friendliest person, and that I had something of an inflated ego. The way that Bakugou developed a sense of humility over time and a true sense of having analyzed his own flaws and worked to fix them is something I also had to go through myself."

The majority of the participants view anime as a medium that presents a nuanced understanding of conflicts and the importance of cooperation and resolution. One important thing to note is that participants frequently identify with themes rather than specific characters, highlighting ideas such as personal growth, determination, hard work, and finding purpose in pursuing passions. Participant B stated,

"I think really pushing for your dreams and goals despite hardships is very, very admirable maybe. But I think that it is very human to find many main characters of Shonen anime to be very admirable. Because traits like never giving up, never quitting. Working because it is right rather than it being easy. I think it is very human to like those things, that it is pretty much something everyone is born with."

Characters who undergo transformations, face challenges, or exhibit perseverance resonate strongly with the participants, influencing their self-perception. These personal resonances can be connected to the 'interpretive turn' in consumer research, which focuses on experiences and feelings during consumption (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011), which is crucial in understanding how anime consumers connect with the content and the characters. One participant stated,

"I mostly resonate with sports/hobby anime. There's something genuinely interesting and even inspiring in seeing people work hard and compete, often together with peers, pursuing a goal that some might consider mundane compared to high-minded goals as saving the world; as a working adult, I've become more in tune with the reality of the mundane world we live in, and I think it's nice to find happiness and purpose in something even as small as wanting to get better at a sport or a hobby."

Slice-of-life is also something I enjoy as it gives a feeling of living one's everyday life as best and as well as one can, something that as an adult, I've learned to appreciate and value a lot."

Anime, often deeply experiential, allows fans to engage emotionally and culturally, shaping their identities through narratives, characters, and themes. Some participants seemed to connect more to the overall themes and the Japanese culture compared to the anime characters, which is not surprising, because sociohistorical patterning of consumption is another aspect explored in CCT, considering how historical and societal contexts influence consumer behavior (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). In the case of anime, the historical and cultural background of Japan profoundly shapes the narratives, aesthetics, and themes present in anime. Anime enthusiasts often appreciate and engage with these elements, enhancing their understanding and connection to the medium. One of the participants felt inspired by the Japanese culture and how hard work is appreciated there. He states,

"I recognize that hard work has a much bigger long term impact on outcomes than talent or luck. Talent and luck still have their place (and there are certain limitations to deal with) but a distinctly Japanese notion that I embrace not solely from anime is that there is no real upper limit on human achievement, only the degree of effort one can produce".

Another important thing to note from the responses is that older individuals tend to have a broader and more diverse interest in characters, genres, and ideas, potentially due to a more stable and established identity. Younger individuals, especially in the digital era, may use anime fandom as a way to construct their identity, with a tendency to identify strongly with anime characters, possibly for the purpose of bonding with like-minded individuals. Similar views have been expressed by Larsen and Patterson (2018) as they state that individuals use their purchases to express themselves and connect with others who share similar interests. To support this notion, one of the participants can be quoted here. He stated,

"These days you will see younger people base their identity completely on anime characters sometimes with profile pictures or usernames. Older people are much more comfortable with their identities, as far as I know at least whereas younger people, maybe especially younger men, want what they consume as far as media goes to be what actually makes up their character. Of course, younger people also very much prefer to rebel against status quo in general, one reason why you find younglings care more about slightly more edgy characters like Sasuke or Kaneki as far as I know."

4.3 Anime Consumption and the 'Otaku' Community

As the aim of the paper focuses on the identity construction process of anime consumers, in case of analyzing the community building aspect, the focus will be on how the community facilitates identity construction rather than the community itself. Analyzing the responses provided by the four interview participants regarding their engagement with the anime community in the digital space, their sense of identity influenced by this engagement, and the importance of the anime community to them, several patterns can be identified. Participants engage with the anime community in various ways, including online forums, social media, reading discussions on Reddit, watching YouTube essays, checking anime databases like MAL, enjoying fan projects (videos, essays, fanfiction), and reading opinions, theories, and discussions on forums. One of the participants was an online chat moderator for several years, but stopped engaging with the community once the platform was discontinued, which leads us to wonder if certain platforms have influences on the level of engagement people would have with certain anime communities, which could be investigated in future studies. He stated,

"I am not presently a member of any fan groups or community groups of any sort focused on anime as a subject. Between 1995 and 2002 I was a chat moderator on MSN for the primary anime chatroom and discussion newsgroups. Once that community disappeared when MSN discontinued its chat servers and news servers, I broadly detached from the online anime community."

Another participant viewed the anime community as a source of information as a passive member, compared to participant A. For him, the community adds value by discussing their thoughts and opinions about certain shows that he often reads about before and even after watching an anime. He stated,

"I very often read Japanese pop culture subreddits on Reddit, pretty much right after watching episodes of stuff, I read what others might have said about it. Me, brother used to watch YouTube essays on certain topics. Occasionally watch youtubers that just talk about anime. I very often check MAL (My Anime List) scores to see what people think before watching an anime."

The same participant also added that he engages with the community as he identifies as a "nerdy individual", which could also refer to his collective identity (Chessel & Dubuisson-Quellier, 2018),

"I suppose knowing that I'm kind of nerdy as far as anime goes makes me think of myself in certain ways. Like, that I do care about what studios it might be making shows etc. probably affects me somewhat, and I get that information from the online social platforms most of the time. It also helps me connect with other nerdy people who love anime like I do"

Most participants express a fluid and evolving sense of identity related to being anime fans, similar to how Miler (2017) discusses how people identify with certain groups, like anime fans, and use words and messages to connect with the members of the community. Previous research suggests that being a part of the anime fan community can boost a person's happiness and provide a way to express themselves (Reysen et al., 2018). To emphasize this, one of the participants stated,

"People can actually make cool fan things as far as anime goes to share them with others. Big forums where people can discuss ideas, recent episodes and stuff must have a tremendous impact on how people like their own media, some people are even confused to which others can then explain what's going on. What would people like that do if they were just by themselves? You can so easily now just find nerdy anime groups online now if you do not live close to someone that likes anime you can still make friends that do. It's much easier to just share media, your crafts online than it would ever be if social media online communities didn't exist."

One important finding is that the interests and priorities of anime enthusiasts have changed over time, and they do not define themselves solely as "anime fans." Still, the anime community is viewed as important by most participants, especially in enhancing their overall enjoyment of the medium (Canniford, 2011). For instance, participant D's strong connection to the anime community allows them to openly enjoy anime and various genres without embarrassment. This association has also fostered tolerance for differing preferences. Additionally, being part of the community has enhanced their comprehension of nuanced concepts within particular anime that would have otherwise remained elusive.

"I think it's helped me to become more comfortable with my enjoyment of the genre knowing that there are many like-minded individuals out there, and I think it's also helped me to be more accepting of the broad spectrum of tastes that fans of different genres enjoy even if I'm not a fan myself of certain themes or genres. Certain circles in the anime community have also helped me to engage with the genre more critically and to look at what I enjoy with a more critical lens, and I've learned to really identify and engage with many of the themes in anime through the community. Themes that might not have been something I would have been able to articulate and process on my own without more critical and analytical fans to break it down."

In conclusion, participants emphasize the significance of the community for sharing interests, discussing shows, finding new content, and gaining critical perspectives. It's seen as a place to connect with like-minded individuals, share fan creations, and stay updated with the latest anime news, which has been discussed by Reysen et al. (2018) as well that having friends who share your interests can make it easier and make you feel better about yourself.

This study acknowledges several limitations that may impact the generalizability of the findings. Firstly, the small sample size of four interviewees may not fully represent the diverse experiences of anime consumers globally. Secondly, potential biases in interview responses could influence the outcomes. Participants' personal experiences and perspectives may shape their responses, leading to subjective interpretations of the data.

5. Conclusion

This paper embarked on an exploration of the intricate interplay between anime consumption and the construction of identity within the digital era. In doing so, it aimed to uncover how anime consumers negotiate their identities, offering profound insights into the socio-cultural implications of media consumption in contemporary society. The paper outlined three major themes that are important in answering the research question- digitalization, identity construction and community. From four semi-structured qualitative interviews, the paper has gathered significant insights regarding all of the three themes priorly mentioned to answer how anime viewers construct their identity in the digital era and fulfills a portion of the research gap mentioned in the introduction.

This paper underscores the significant impact of digitalization on anime consumption, making it more convenient, cost-effective, and accessible while broadening the cultural influence of anime on a global scale. Digital platforms have transformed the viewing experience, expanded the range of available anime, and facilitated community building among enthusiasts. When it comes to identity construction, the impact of anime consumption on identity construction was discerned through qualitative analysis, revealing that participants often resonate with overarching themes rather than specific characters. Themes such as personal growth, determination, and finding purpose strongly influence self-perception. Additionally, the sociohistorical context of Japan profoundly shapes the narratives, aesthetics, and themes present in anime, enhancing enthusiasts' understanding and connection to the medium. The research also highlighted age-related variations in consumption patterns, suggesting that younger individuals might use anime fandom to construct their identities and bond with like-minded individuals, which brings us to the final theme, community. Examining participants' engagement with the anime community in the digital space underscored its vital role in enhancing their overall enjoyment of the medium. The community serves as a platform for sharing interests, discussing shows, finding new content, and gaining critical perspectives. In conclusion, this study illuminates the complex and evolving dynamics of anime consumption and its profound influence on identity construction, enriched by the advent of digitalization.

The paper thoroughly examines how anime viewers form their identities from various angles, but it does have limitations. It couldn't encompass all perspectives from stakeholders like studios, artists, and marketers due to its restricted timeframe and scope. Investigating how these stakeholders influence consumer identity formation in anime consumption could be an interesting avenue for future research.

Future research could build on this study by exploring the influence of anime studios and marketers on the identity construction process. Additionally, examining the role of different digital platforms and their impact on anime consumption and community engagement would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Further studies could also consider a larger and more diverse sample size to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Survey Questionnaire

Interview Guide Introduction:

****Participant Information****

1. Age:
2. Gender:
3. Occupation:
4. Education level:
5. Nationality:

Section 1: Understanding Anime Consumption Behavior

****Anime Consumption Habits****

1. How long have you been a fan of anime?
2. What initially drew you to it?
3. What motivated you to continue consuming it?
4. How often do you watch anime in a typical week or month?
5. Are there specific platforms or streaming services you use to consume anime? If yes, which ones and why?
6. Which anime genres do you watch most and why?
7. Do you watch anime alone or with others?
8. How does this influence your viewing experience?

****Impact of Digital Platforms****

1. How has the rise of digital platforms affected how you access and watch anime?
2. What advantages do digital platforms offer in terms of anime consumption compared to traditional methods (watching it on TV for instance)?
3. Have digital platforms influenced your choice of anime and how you perceive the anime community?
4. In what ways has the global accessibility of anime through digital platforms impacted its cultural influence and your perception of it?
5. Do you think the international anime community constructs their identity differently compared to the traditional, localized anime consumer?

Section 2: Formation and Expression of Identity

****Identifying with Anime Characters and Themes****

1. Can you describe any instances where anime has influenced your personal values, beliefs, or personality?
2. Are there specific anime characters, themes, or storylines that had a significant impact on your values, beliefs or personality?
3. Have you ever identified with specific anime characters or themes? Please provide examples and elaboration.
4. How has this identification influenced your sense of identity or self-perception?
5. Do certain characters or themes resonate with different aspects of your identity?
6. Are there any particular genres or types of anime that you believe resonate more with your personal identity or values? Why?
7. Have you ever experienced changes in your anime consumption habits over time? If so, what influenced these changes?
8. Are there anime characters or series that you feel a strong personal connection to, and do you ever incorporate elements from them into your own self-expression?

9. Do you think there are differences in how people of different age groups or cultural backgrounds construct their identity through anime in the digital era? If so, could you elaborate on these differences?

****Social Interaction and Community****

1. How do you engage with the anime community in the digital space (e.g., online forums, social media, fan groups)?
2. In what ways has engaging with the anime community influenced your sense of identity?
3. Is the anime community important to you?
4. Do you identify with the other anime fans?
5. How do you think social media and online communities have influenced the way anime fans express their identity and share their interests?
6. Have you experienced any shifts in identity or self-perception through interactions within the anime community? (Did the interactions with the community make you stopwatch any particular anime, or introduce you to new ones?)

Section 3: Evolving Perceptions of Anime in the Digital Era

****Changing Perceptions****

1. How do you perceive the evolving role and significance of anime in the digital age compared to previous eras?
2. Have your perceptions of anime and its cultural influence shifted with the advent of digital platforms?

Conclusion:

Thank you so much for your insights. Is there anything else you would like to share or any additional insights you have regarding anime consumption and identity construction in the digital era?