

IMPACT OF JAPANESE ANIME ON TOURISM ANALYSIS OF REFASHIONING OF TOURISM AND SIGHTSEEING WITH THE RISE OF ANIME IN JAPAN

Ahmad Shadaan*

*Department of East Asian Studies Faculty of Social Sciences, University of
Delhi, India.*

Received 14 August 2024; Revised 21 August 2024; Accepted 29 August 2024

ABSTRACT

Popular media has a considerable influence in any society. Cultural theorists have acknowledged the significant role of media in shaping the history, culture and society. Visual media like Japanese animation (anime) and comics (manga) has proved its impact on its consumers. This paper mainly focuses on how Japanese popular culture (manga and anime) has significant impact on tourism sector. By taking the examples of anime pilgrimage (seiche junrei) and theme parks based on the popular anime and manga like Kimi no na wa, Naruto and Kimetsu no yaiba, this paper will examine this new type of tourism based on pop cultural phenomenon. This paper will look into the role of consumers and producers in the expansion of anime induced tourism through collaborative efforts like social media, collaborative events, merchandise and theme parks. The paper examines how the devotion and enthusiasm of fans towards the particular media text has led to the phenomenon like anime pilgrimage which is visiting real life locations depicted in the anime. Popular culture like anime and manga has become a quite influential in today's world for promoting tourism, contributing to economic growth, cultural exchange, and the global spread of Japanese culture. This paper also briefly looks into how popular culture has an influence on society and also on tourism through literature review.

Keywords: Anime, Manga, Pop culture, Tourism, Media, Fandom, Themed park, Anime pilgrimage

INTRODUCTION

Popular culture is an important aspect of any society as it influences and affects large section of population. In modern world, media is available to the large section of the society and how it shapes the behavior and ideas of people through its mediums of communication is an important force to reckon with. Cultural theorists have acknowledged the extensive role of media in shaping the history, culture and society because of its widespread penetration around the world which has given rise to media studies. The reach of popular

***Correspondence to:** Ahmad Shadaan, Department of East Asian Studies Faculty of Social Sciences University of Delhi, India, Tel: 8700305152; E-mail: ahmadshadaan@yahoo.in

media is so much that according to Stout and Buddenbaum it unconsciously shapes the behavior of people (Powell, 2012). Hollywood, as a pop cultural phenomenon can be considered dominant throughout the world impacting the regional cultures and elements of a society through dissemination of ideas and cultures and incorporation of regional elements (often stereotyping those elements in the process). Hollywood over a long period of time has emerged as major pop cultural force worldwide and has significant influence globally. Anime (Japanese animation) and Manga (Japanese comics) which emerged in Japan as an answer to American animation and comics achieved global prominence in recent times and is emerging pop cultural phenomenon around the world.

In the recent times digital mediums like streaming platforms (Netflix, Amazon Prime) have been gaining immense popularity worldwide in the post pandemic era. Contents available on these platforms are accessible all around the world. Before digital age, Hollywood held a dominant position around the world. However, with the rise of digital media contents have become decentralized as good visual contents can emerge from anywhere. Japanese anime, although popular, has too benefitted as streaming platforms increased its reach to wider audience. Anime like Kimetsu no Yaiba (Demon slayer), Jujutsu kaisen, Spy X family, one punch man, my hero academia, Tokyo revengers, and Hunter x hunter have gained immense popularity since then. It even led to the creation of live action movies of several popular anime like One piece, Fullmetal alchemist and Deathnote etc. Anime for instance, Kimetsu no Yaiba, Naruto, spirited away, Dragon ball Z, one piece, Kimi no na wa (your name) has emerged as pop cultural phenomenon influencing other elements of the society and cultures. The concept of transmedia storytelling as popularized by Henry Jenkins refers to immersive experience of storytelling across several platforms like comics, television, cinema, social media, blogs, merchandise, video games, cosplay and tourism (anime pilgrimage and themed parks). Audience and fans often get engaged in these immersive experiences of their favorite artforms through these platforms and they go a step ahead by physical involvement like attending cosplays, Comicon, live events and performances and even tourism. Anime has had a significant impact on the tourism sector in Japan even attracting international tourists through anime tourism. This paper will take the case study of popular anime namely Kimi no na wa (your name), Naruto and Kimetsu no Yaiba (demon slayer) to examine the tourism in Japan propagated by anime. Anime pilgrimage (seiche junrei) and themed parks are two aspects will be part of this analysis based on internet sources like blogs, social media and official websites of tourist sites along with my field survey.

ANIME PILGRIMAGE (SEICHE JUNREI)

Anime pilgrimage (seiche junrei) is the term associated with tourism based on anime where the tourists and fans seek real-life locations depicted in the anime. Japanese animators and mangaka often take and use inspirations from real life locations in their artworks and these sites becomes

the site for fans for real experience, fun and ecstasy. Dedicated fans sometimes go for searching for the scenes or locations from the anime and manga known as butaitanbou (scene hunting). The sacred nature of dedicated fans to visit and enthusiastically finding and clicking pictures of these real-life locations and comparing them to their counterpart in the anime has apparently led to the emergence of the term anime pilgrimage (seiche junrei). For instance, Yakushima in Kagoshima prefecture is one of the first UNESCO world natural heritage site of Japan has inspired Hayao Miyazaki's popular anime, Princess Mononoke's enchanted and mystical wilderness. Yakushima has become a popular hiking trail for the fans of the anime (Wong, 2020). The popular anime and manga series Sailor moon have popularized the Azabu locality in Tokyo like Azabu-Hikawa shrine which is depicted throughout the series as Hikawa shrine where the protagonist work as Shrine priestess (Serena, 2022). Azabu has become synonymous with Sailor moon attracting tourists through its popularity. Takayoshi Yamamura's case study of anime induced tourism of Washimiya in Saitama prefecture. According to this case study, fans started to visit Washimiya after the airing of anime Lucky star in 2007 which led to the growth of regional promotion by the collaboration of local communities, fans and contents copyright holders to increase tourism. 'Washinomiya shrine became a popular attraction for anime pilgrimage which can be estimated from the increase in the number of people making hatsumode (New Year's shrine visits) was only 90,000 prior to the airing of the anime, but, according to a survey by the Saitama Prefectural Police, it increased by about 3.5-fold in three years to 300,000 in 2008, 420,000 in 2009 and 450,000 in 2010' (Yamamura 62).

Makoto Shinkai, a Japanese animator and mangaka who achieved great success and huge worldwide popularity after his 2016 romantic fantasy anime movie *Kimi no na wa* (Your name) became a huge box-office hit and achieved much love around the world and which he continued to his next work *Tenki no ko* (Weathering with you) and *Suzume no tojimari*. Shinkai, too utilized real locations in *Kimi no na wa* mostly from Tokyo and Hida in Gifu prefecture like Shinjuku station; stairs of Suga shrine in the neighborhood of Shinjuku where protagonists, Mitsuha and Taki, meet in the end; Hie shrine in Takayama, Gifu has inspired Miyamizu shrine; Hida Furukawa railway station; Hida city library and Keta Wakamiya shrine in Hida and it is mentioned in an online blog by a photographer by comparing real and reel photos (Sakurai, 2021) along with several other online blogs by enthusiastic anime tourists. There are several official and unofficial blogs of this kind for other anime too. The release of the anime led to anime pilgrimages by the fans to Hida region and the local community tried to capitalize, though there was likely any support from copyright holders because of immense success of the anime (Koyama & Shiraiwa, 2016). like providing maps for anime pilgrims by local tourist information centers and souvenir shops related to anime like local sake is sold in the same bottles which appear in the anime (Khoikhina, 2021). There are quite a number of blogs, travel blogs and vlogs on the internet for instance by the official

tourism blog of Gifu prefecture, gogifu.wordpress.com. They talk about these real-life locations like mentioning all the locations used in the anime and also providing the travel experiences to the Hida region which all can be utilized by the anime fans to explore. Anime pilgrimage has become an important part of Japanese popular culture which has significant economic, cultural and social consequences where fans play connecting force between anime and the places which they popularize. For example, shrines and temples which become site of anime pilgrimage reconfigure themselves to cater to the fans to reap the benefits which shows the symbiotic relationship.

My field survey in Japan attest to the popularity of the depicted real locations in the anime among the tourists. I spent some time in and around Suga shrine in Yotsuya near Shinjuku, Tokyo in December last year, talked to people and took pictures. Though the shrine seems to be located rather in a secluded place in a residential area, unlike a touristy spot like Sensō-ji temple in Asakusa, there were ample tourists, even foreigners, clicking pictures (I clicked photos of some of them) and buying amulets and souvenirs. I spotted several visitors including couples, families and tourists in groups and I clicked pictures of some of them, also got my pictures clicked as I was alone (**Figure 1**). The popular spot for clicking the pictures was the red stairs of the shrine where the protagonists, Mitsuha and Taki, finally meet in the end, the stairs symbolize romantic sentiments, therefore popular among couples who try to enact the final pose of protagonists of the anime. I talked to some of the tourists at the shrine particularly asking them for the reason to visit the shrine, the most common answer for the visit was the anime and for clicking the pictures by recreating the iconic Mitsuha and Taki scene. Therefore, the most crowded space of the shrine was near the stairs where at one time tourists made queue to click pictures on the stairs. Another influence of *Kimi no na wa* on the Suga shrine was that the shrine tried to attract the tourists by utilizing anime images and artworks on the souvenirs available inside the shrine. The ema votive tablet are used for writing wishes and hanging it at a space allocated in the shrine, was imprinted with anime scenes and artworks. Omamori amulets and other souvenirs too were embedded with *Kimi no na wa* artworks (**Figure 2**). Anime pilgrimage has led to the popularity of many places lesser known earlier just like Suga shrine and Hida prefecture because of *Kimi no na wa* which led to the boost in tourism to these sites depicted in the anime.

I also visited the Chofu city which is believed to be the birthplace of popular manga and anime series, *GeGeGe no Kitaro* created by legendary Shigeru Mizuki. I visited Fudaten Jinja which is depicted in the series as the abode of Kitaro, the shrine earlier had a statue of Kitaro and other yokai (ghosts and demons) of Mizuki, now scrapped. Nevertheless, their too I found ema boards, amulets and other souvenirs with Kitaro's artworks (**Figure 3**). There is a Kitaro park dedicated to the series and Mizuki where one can find objects and playground equipment of yokai and other characters including *GeGeGe no Kitaro* and other Mizuki's characters. There is café in Chofu market area based on Kitaro theme too. Chofu has become synonymous with

Shigeru Mizuki and Kitaro and the series has played a role in popularizing and inducing tourism in Chofu. The region too has acknowledged this influence and has tried to capitalize on it.



Figure 1. Fudaten Jinja.

Note: Souvenirs and amulets with GeGeGe no Kitaro (Photo taken by me on 23rd December, 2023)

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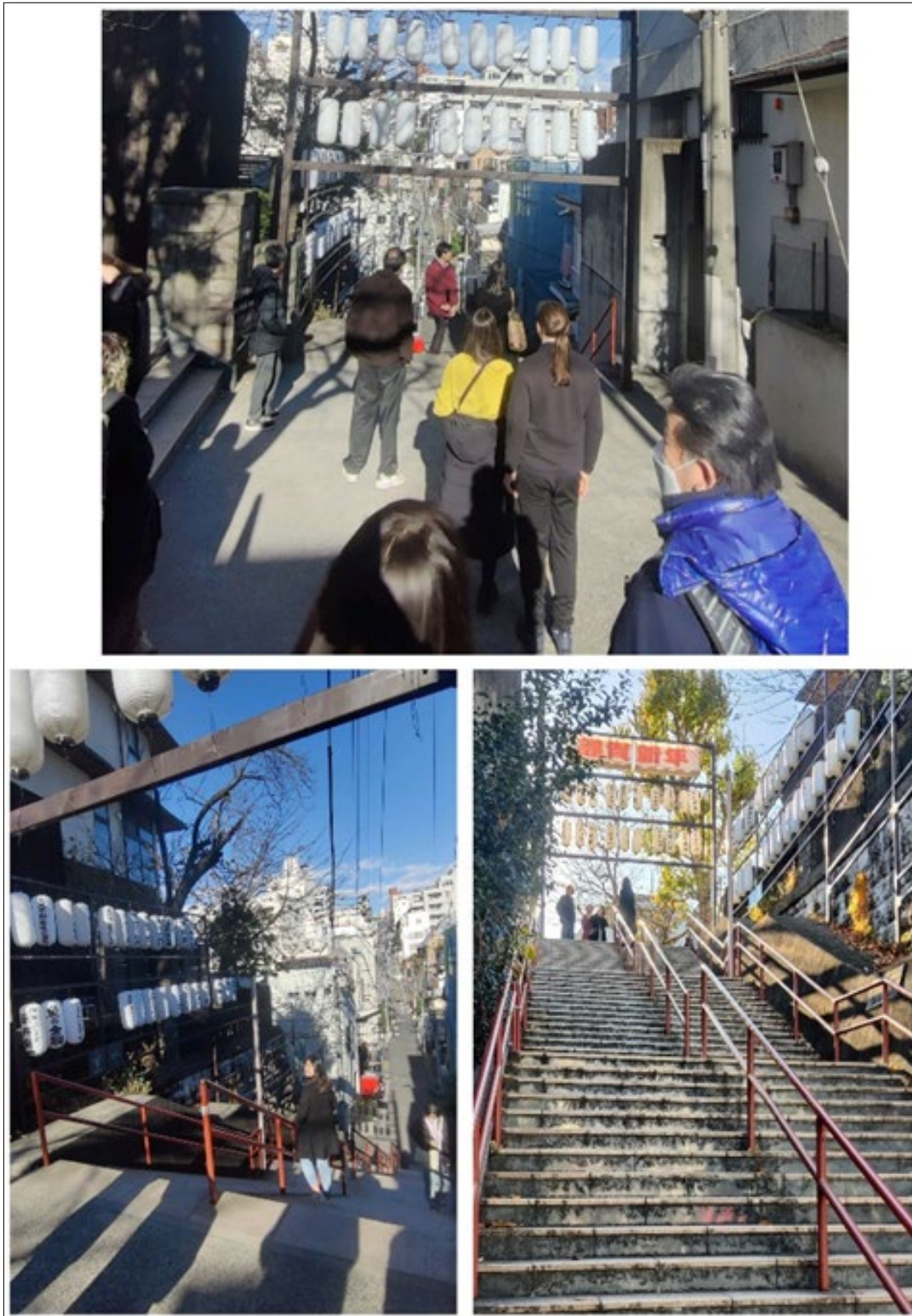


Figure 2. Stairs of Suga shrine.

Note: Tourists clicking pictures on the stairs. (Photo taken by me on 21st December, 2023)



Figure 3. Ema tablets and amulets at Suga Shrine.

Note: Ema tablets with Kimi no na wa artworks. (Photo taken by me on 21st December, 2023)

Kimetsu no yaiba (Demon slayer) created by Koyoharu Gotouge, another popular anime and manga in the age of streaming platforms has led to

pop cultural phenomenon. *Kimetsu no yaiba* was released directly on Netflix in 2019 in several languages around the world, has become one of the most popular anime series in recent times. *Kimetsu no yaiba* too has contributed to tourism through anime pilgrimage and themed parks and exhibitions. Several sites have been discovered by the fans who have established either genuine or imaginary connections to the series which has resulted in fans and tourists reaching to these spots for the anime pilgrimage. There are several online blogs, travel websites and even academic field surveys which identify the real locations related to the series for anime pilgrimage. Two major sites almost similar in every reference is Hachiman Kamado Shrine in Beppu, Oita; Hōmangu Kamado Shrine in Dazaifu, Fukuoka. Another pilgrimage site rather difficult to reach is the Mount Kumotori, highest mountain around Tokyo is depicted in the series where the protagonist's (Tanjiro) family reside. The travelogue site called *donnykimball*, mentions about Mount Kumotori which is less known among tourists but came into notice after the series, the blog is a guide for the tourists for attempting the trek to the mountain (Kimball, 2021). There are several fan blogs and travelogues on the internet which talk about anime pilgrimage sites. For example, the tourist website *Omotenashi* mentions several places to visit linked to the series like mount Kumotori; Kamado shrine; Ashikaga flower park in Tochigi prefecture where one can enjoy the sight of wisteria flower in spring resembling Mount Fujikasane's Wisteria flowers in the series; Ashinomaki onsen, Aizuwakamatsu city, Fukushima resembles the aesthetics of infinity castle in the series is attracting lot of attention of the fans; Amanoiwatate shrine in Nara has large split rock which seems to be inspiration of the rock which was split into half by the Tanjiro in the series (Satomi, 2023). The similar locations and some additional locations too are referred to in numerous other fan blogs like on the blog website, *medium*.

Academic studies have been conducted too on these sites to gauge the influence of anime on the tourism of those particular places like the field survey of the two Kamado shrines along with the questionnaire mentioned above was conducted by Hoest Madsen (2023) for his master's thesis in which he concluded that most of the tourists were aware of the connection of the shrines with *Kimetsu no yaiba*, also he spotted many fans during his stay. Another academic paper by Siyuan Li (2021) in which he identified the sacred places induced by *Kimetsu no yaiba* like the Kamado shrines, Mount Kumotori, JR Gunma and JR Kyushu offered themed tour and other places mentioned above. Li (2021) analyzes how fans' actions of identifying sacred spots connected to popular anime like *Kimetsu no yaiba* has induced tourism. Anime pilgrimage has become a familiar term, has played a role in inducing tourism showcasing the influence of popular culture in tourism sector. These locations too take advantage of the opportunity to attract tourists like offering merchandise, artworks and anime themed stores and cafes.

ANIME THEME PARKS

Theme parks or amusement parks are well-known spaces for amusement and entertainment found in numerous cities around the world. Majority of us are familiar with Disneyland theme parks which are based on Disney characters and its universe. Similarity, anime themed spaces are common in Japan and also in other parts of the world. There several anime and manga themed spaces like Naruto x Baruto theme park nijigen no mori along with themes of Shinchan and Godzilla in Awaji Island, Hyogo; One piece Tokyo tower in Tokyo; Ghibli museum in Mitaka, Tokyo showcasing the works and universe of Ghibli studios and Hayao Miyazaki; Fujiko Fujio museum, Kawasaki showing the artworks and universe created by Fujio most notably Doraemon; JR themed train tours for Kimetsu no yaiba; and Akihabara in Tokyo, earlier popular for electronics, is now emerging as one of the popular market place and visiting sites for anime and manga enthusiasts (**Figure 4**). Nijigen no mori, Awaji island is based on Naruto and its universe where one can get into touch with the Naruto universe and its characters through several games like solving puzzles and physical games. Kimetsu no yaiba too organized themed tours in Awaji island and also at other.



Figure 4. Akihabara, Tokyo.

Note: Akihabara filled with images of Anime and Manga. (Photo taken by me on 18th December, 2023)

LOCATIONS

Looking for or trying to touch or feel a part of fictional world in the actual world may induce some kind of divine ecstasy to the fans and other enthusiasts. This kind of cultural expression are result and effect of pop cultural phenomenon like Naruto and Kimetsu no yaiba. Nijigen no mori of Awaji island, features a dedicated Naruto and Boruto attraction. The park offers various Naruto-themed activities, including a life-sized replica of the Hokage Rock, characters and other stuffs from the series, an obstacle course modeled after the anime missions, and interactive displays where visitors can experience the Narutoverse directly. This attraction has gained major popularity among fans and tourists, combining conventional theme park elements with immersive anime experiences. Several blogs and vlogs on the internet regarding this theme park too have contributed to its popularity. Nijigen no mori had organized the second collaborative event based on the theme of Kimetsu no yaiba from July, 2023 to January, 2024 and the first collaboration took place in 2021. Several immersive events and activities were organized based on the anime like night walks designed after the anime storyline where visitors could participate in the interactive missions by solving puzzles or mysteries and navigating through themed areas. It also featured projection shows and life-sized recreations of famous anime scenes and locations where visitors could experience the physical or spatial embodiments of the anime, along with themed merchandise and foods. The theme parks based on popular anime have attracted a lot of attention among tourists and fans for its unique offering of immersive experience and interactive activities in contrast to conventional theme parks. Therefore, theme parks are emerging as a popular tourist destination in Japan too. JR Gunma and JR Kyushu organized themed tours in the fall of 2020 based on the theme successful Kimetsu no Yaiba: Mugen Ressha (Demon Slayer the Movie: Infinity Train, 2020). The tours were operated on the steam locomotive train similar to the train shown in the anime with the other arrangements like staff wearing costumes from the anime and stations had gone through Kimetsu no yaiba makeover along with merchandise available on the stations (Li, 2021). These kinds of collaborative events are becoming increasingly common as they are able to pull considerable audience for instance Universal Studios Japan, Toho studios, and several others often organize several anime-themed events. The role of social media and internet are quite influential in the dissemination of information which in this case, anime and travel enthusiasts and also promotional content, play and important role. For example, a public Id namely ymh_films, which I found on popular social media platform Instagram who majorly posts about recent events and tourist spots based on anime and manga along with other things related to Japanese tourism.

AUDIENCE'S ROLE IN ANIME-BASED TOURISM- REVIEW

The basis of anime-based tourism is emergence of pop cultural phenomenon of certain anime or manga where fans or audience play a huge part in its dissemination which in turn benefits the tourism sector. The enthusiasm or devotion of the fans towards their favorite characters and series and can be seen as casually as a religious practice which can be seen in their behavior and activities as they go extra mile to show the devotion like cosplaying, butaitanbou (scene hunting) or virtually by creating blogs and fan service. Orientalist scholars like A.A. Nakorchevsky talk about Shintoism which believe in every object in nature has a soul therefore, Shintoists worship everything in nature. The boundaries between animated and inanimated is blurred as can be seen in the devotional feeling of the fans towards their favorite characters and series therefore, they seek the part of those in real world. ‘Also, among the fans of anime, there is a phenomenon of creating a “temple at home” of character figures, manga, video files, posters, and other items. Some fans make characters a part of their life, family, creating their own comfortable virtual world for themselves. Therefore, the characters of “anime”, like many other cultural heroes of religious mythology, can be attributed not only to mythological, but also to folk “kami”’ (Burkhanov, 2019). Jolyon Baraka Thomas in his book talks about ‘religious frame of mind that is when a given narrative animates the audience, inspiring devotional or ritual activity such as composing devotional tablets (ema) at shrines addressed to favorite characters, or when a specific geographic location takes on sacred significance in fan discussions as the alleged inspiration for an animated world—a place that is simultaneously fictional and real, (the island of Yakushima as the putative model for the sacred forest featured in Princess Mononoke)’ (Thomas, 2012). Baraka defined religion as something towards which people show social inclination which can be observed in their rituals and shared belief towards unverifiable realities (Thomas, 2012). In the same way, fandom of particular media like display their religious frame of mind therefore, their ritualistic activities outside watching or reading particular anime like going to Naruto’s nijigen no mori or anime pilgrimage or buying merchandise can be deemed as religious or devotional. Fans play a major role in the popularization of anime-based tourism through their pursuit of favorite anime or manga in both virtual world and real world.

CONCLUSION

Visual media is a powerful means of communication since its inception, also because of its widespread reach around the world. Because the mode of expression is visual, it is quite penetrative and impactful. Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer in their chapter ‘Culture industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception’ of the book “Dialectic of Enlightenment (1944)”, have talked about how popular culture functions in a capitalist society where popular cultures are modified and created according to the needs of the capitalist system. It can be seen as a carefully controlled industry (Laughey, 2010). Such as how dominant class controls media according to its needs and in the process how it incorporates subcultures, non-dominant

traditions and religions in the mainstream cultures to integrate, indoctrinate and homogenize wider populace to its benefit. However, no one can control the mass completely although one can give them the direction. Therefore, we see this popular culture greatly depends on the masses and their reaction after the initial impetus is given. Marshal McLuhan's medium theory (medium is the message) states that media technologies available is the shaper of the human history, society and culture at that particular time. Also, his idea of 'technological determinism' is still seems relevant (Laughey, 2010). The Japanese popular media like anime, manga and games are potential shapers of society and culture. Stuart Hall's semiotic paradigm relies on how images like popular culture are transmitted and received. An object and its intended ideas are created and it is made available. Consumers then receive, interpret, and critique it in one way or another. Finally, later works are reproduced with new changes, and the cycle starts over. There is a mutual relationship between producer and consumer of popular culture. Postmodernist Jean Baudrillard in his work 'Simulacra and Simulation (1994)' coined the term 'hyperreality' which can be defined as media saturated simulations of reality of culture, places and people has replaced authentic representations of reality i.e., replacement of reality with images and illusion (Laughey, 2010, p.49). All these theories basically inform us how mass media affects masses imaginations, opinions and worldview. On the other hand, John Fiske_who gives consumers upper hand and they are not passive listeners as they use media according to their use and interpret it accordingly (Laughey, 2010). So, popular culture evolves with these producers and consumers interaction. These theories deal with influences of media and consumers on each other.

Emergence of any pop cultural phenomenon like Naruto or Kimi no na wa has to do with the interaction of producers and consumers of media which results in outdoor activities such as anime pilgrimage or cosplays where consumers show their devotion and enthusiasm and producers benefit from it financially and creatively. The audience is not just a passive receiver, but active participants who produce, share, and remix content according to Henry Jenkins who talks about participatory culture in his book, 'Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture' (2006). Jenkins, (2006) emphasizes the role of active consumers which is true in the case of anime pilgrimage or cosplays or fan clubs where consumers actively engage with media contents, often reinterpreting and expanding upon them. In anime tourism, fans do this by visiting real-world locations associated with their favorite anime, sharing their experiences online through blogs and social media posts encouraging others and spreading and creating kind of media mix related to the particular media content. On the other hand, producers promote the consumer engagement by giving impetus and creating platforms and opportunity, in turn they benefit financially or economically from it. Theme parks, Studio exhibitions, anime museums, collaborative events, and merchandise are the examples where producers collaborate and engage to attract consumers. Local economy and culture of the particular region associated with any anime or manga too gets the benefit of this interaction and pop cultural phenomenon.

Japanese government has unequivocally acknowledged the influence of anime and manga which led to the use of these popular culture as soft power for Japan internationally to promote Japanese culture and tourism. It's a collaborative effort of the producers, consumers and government which leads to the emergence of pop cultural phenomenon like Naruto or Kimetsu no yaiba, and anime tourism is a part of this phenomenon.

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