

How to Cite:

Mamat, R., Rashid, R. A., Pae, R., & Ahmad, N. (2022). VTubers and anime culture: A case study of Japanese learners in two public universities in Malaysia. *International Journal of Health Sciences*, 6(S2), 11958-11974.
<https://doi.org/10.53730/ijhs.v6nS2.8231>

VTubers and anime culture: A case study of Japanese learners in two public universities in Malaysia

Roslina Mamat

Universiti Putra Malaysia

Corresponding author email: linamm@upm.edu.my

Roswati Abdul Rashid

Universiti Malaysia Terengganu

Email: roswati@umt.edu.my

Rokiah Pae

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

Email: prokiah@unimas.my

Normah Ahmad

Universiti Teknologi MARA

Email: normah698@uitm.edu.my

Abstract--This study attempts to identify Malaysian youth's interest in anime culture and one of its subcultures, Virtual YouTubers (VTubers). Anime, manga and drama series count amongst the most popular and well-received types of Japanese popular culture since the 1990s, where their translation into various languages have rendered them globally renowned. A plethora of studies have been done on anime and manga globally. However, studies on its subculture, VTubers, an online platform that uses a digital avatar generated using computer graphics, are still scarce, particularly in the Malaysian context. A total of 104 respondents participated in an online survey conducted using Google Forms. The respondents comprised Japanese language students from two public universities in Malaysia. Some of the respondents are members of a Japanese Cultural Club from one of the universities. The survey was divided into three sections: respondents' background, respondents' interest in anime culture, and their interest in VTubers. The results showed that the most popular culture is anime, followed by manga, song and seiyuu (voice actor/actress). The most well-liked anime genre is fantasy, followed by humour, love stories (romance), and mystery. Most of the respondents knew the word "VTuber" from anime, friends, and

internet platforms such as YouTube. The numbers proved that VTubers are a significant and famous product of Japanese culture among Japanese culture enthusiasts, and will likely gain extensive traction in the future.

Keywords---anime, Japanese, Malaysian youth, popular culture, VTuber.

Introduction

According to Craig (2000), one sign of the level of interest in Japanese popular culture was a conference held in Victoria, Canada, in 1997. The conference drew a strong international response, which evolved into a three-day event with forty presentations by scholars, writers, practitioners, and fans from four continents on Japanese pop music, comics and animation, TV drama and commercials, movies, stand-up comedies, popular literature, and sumo wrestling. Issues such as social change, women's roles, and the spread of Japanese popular culture in the world were also discussed.

Numerous studies have shown that interest in anime has led students to learn the Japanese language. Manga and anime are very useful for learning and improving Japanese language skills, especially speaking and listening. Previous studies by Mamat et al. (2018) and Mamat et al. (2019) showed that manga and anime consumption among high school and university students has led them to better communication and immersion of Japanese language and culture. One of the more pronounced effects of manga and anime in improving students' Japanese language skills include improved ability to converse in the language naturally. This ranges from adopting almost perfect pronunciation, using fillers like *anou-*, *eeto*, *ne-* and more variations of verb forms that are specialised in Japanese conversation, such as *ndesu*. They also use *aizuchi* or back-channels like *ee*, *hai*, and body language to respond to the current speaker. In other words, their reading of manga and watching anime completes their pragmatic skills in conversation. In Japanese lectures, students learn vocabulary, grammar, conversation, writing, and pronunciation. Japanese language teachers may touch a little on culture, but rarely touch on pragmatic elements in conversation such as body language, fillers, and *aizuchi*. Anime and manga allow them to create conversational dialogue more naturally. Foreign elements such as anime have always been a sensitive issue in Malaysia. However, these days, light novels and VTubers are getting more attention among *Nihongojin* and *Nihon bunkajin*. *Nihongojin* refers to individuals primarily interested in the Japanese language, and is further defined by the Japan Foundation in *Wochi Kochi Magazine* as people who desire to use Japanese to achieve some purpose in the international community and communicate in Japanese to reach that goal. *Nihon bunkajin* on the other hand refers to individuals that are primarily interested in Japanese culture. They are a group of people interested in products of Japanese culture such as *manga*, *anime*, cosplay, VTubers, music, *seiyu* (voice actors), and food. Depending on the context, they may or may not be able to converse in Japanese fluently, but are simply obsessed with Japanese culture.

Nowadays, social media has evolved into a two-way form of communication, reflecting the significant interest of youngsters to relate to the media that they proactively consume. Before this, the main mediums to communicate with friends and family were through Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. According to *Kalaisilven and Sukimi (2019)*, social media has led to social media addiction issues among children that need parents control. Accessive social media usage may harm children and youngsters behaviour, learning time, and social skill with others. However, media evolution has seen YouTube influencers or YouTubers who share information, lifestyle, culture, or activities to be one of the main defining acts that attracts crowds of followers. They get a lucrative salary from YouTube based on the number of content views for each video. Although some YouTube influencers post content that directly conflicts with facts, social values, or religion, they still provide an authentic transfer of information that at least resonates with their targeted audience, making it impossible to request their content to be blocked.

Parents need to educate their values, social boundaries, religion, culture, and manners in an increasingly challenging world. Parents may need to expose other religions or cultures and values of other races so that children are awake and not easily trapped. As the study of Rahman et al. (2020) explains the need to understand religious harmonization in Malaysia. We can no longer ban children's activities without explanation because all the good and bad information are already at the children's fingertips. Therefore the newly widespread VTuber phenomenon among these children also needs to be given due attention. After YouTubers, Virtual YouTubers or VTubers are currently very popular among young people who love the Japanese language and culture. VTubers are very new on social media, but have nonetheless gained a large audience around the world. VTubers is an online platform that uses a digital avatar generated using computer graphics. They use computer graphics-generated avatars that are usually anime-inspired with a character designed by online artists. Physical limitations do not bind them. Many of them engage in activities that are not constrained by real-world gender and appearance. The characters of Vtubers are unique because they are free from political agenda, nationality, gender discrimination, or sexual orientation. For example, some Vtubers use *kawaii* (cute) and sexy anime girl characters, but in reality they are men.

Japanese language and culture really began to spread across the world in the 1990s, and continues to grow until today, with the obsession with Japanese culture by international fans being known worldwide. Anime culture or sub anime culture has many robust fans outside Japan. The first VTuber was Kizuna Ai, who started creating content on YouTube in 2016. She is amongst the top five VTubers in Japan, and is still popular around the globe as of today. In a pre-study conducted by Dwina and Arie (2019) in Indonesia, out of 100 respondents who were Japanese famous culture fans, 96 respondents knew about Kizuna Ai: 86 had watched her vlogs, and 53 had subscribed to her YouTube channel. Further study was conducted on six Japanese popular culture fans in Indonesia to understand the motives and meaning behind watching Kizuna Ai's Vlogs using the phenomenology approach. Five of the respondents' criterion was that they had to have been following the YouTube Vlog Kizuna Ai channel for a minimum of one year, and were still watching actively. The remaining one respondent was well-

informed, and was writing an article on VTubers. Data was collected via semi-structured interview, focus group discussion, and passive participant observation. The findings showed that the participants watched Kizuna Ai's vlogs due to interest and curiosity. They watched it for information, the need for self-actualisation, escape from problems, interest in Japanese pop-culture representation, role-model for interacting with others, and the importance of being expressive and expressing opinions.

As the two biggest Muslim and Islamic countries in South East Asia, Malaysia and Indonesia are very close to Japan and its culture. Even Arabic countries cannot stop the wave of their peoples' interest in J-Pop or K-Pop. Social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, various forums, and YouTube play a crucial role in spreading the positivity and negativity of specific issues. So, it is understandable if these countries are aware of LGBTQ culture in their country. According to Tuah and Mazlan (2020), Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) Youths in Malaysia use Twitter as a safe space for self-disclosure. Social media such as Twitter enables them to remain private when expressing their inner-self. Malaysia is a predominantly Muslim country that shapes societal norms to a certain degree. Hence, not everyone can freely express their opinion on sexual orientation and religion and share their interest in particular topics. However, as a multiracial and multifaith country, it is vital to strike a balance to maintain harmony between religion and race. The writer collected information and articles from social media because of the wealth of information from various social media types.

A study by Hamdani et al (2021) in Indonesia compared LGBT presence in the country using two new online portals, Republica, and Tempo. According to them, the news portal Republika shared a negative perception towards LGBT. At the same time, Tempo saw LGBT as normal behaviour and part of human rights. It shows that issues of LGBT are discussed, and people in Islamic countries are concerned about the issue. It can threaten a country if the government or politicians cannot manage the issue well, especially in multicultural, multireligious and multiethnic countries like Malaysia and Indonesia.

The information or data shows how anime enthusiasts share their activities, post information, and even write articles about their interests. The information is reliable because the writer does not refer to only one source, but various sources online. Respondents in this study also supported the information. However, due to language, religion, or cultural barriers, in-depth studies on anime culture such as VTubers in Malaysia are scarce. Therefore, this study aims to take a closer look at Malaysian youngsters' minds in the context of anime culture and VTubers through the following objectives:

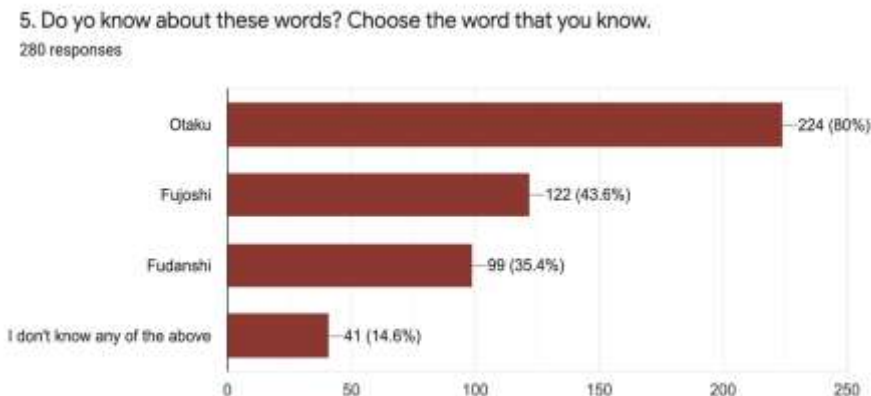
1. To investigate anime culture among Malaysian Japanese language learners and Japanese culture enthusiasts.
2. To identify VTuber fans among Malaysian Japanese language learners and Japanese culture enthusiasts.
3. To explore the positive and negative effects of VTubers on Malaysian Japanese language learners and Japanese culture enthusiasts.

Literature Review and Research Background

According to MacWilliams (2008), the famous anime 'Sazaesan' became a fixture in postwar Japanese life after it first debuted in the Asahi Shimbun in 1946. Until now, the sazaesan anime still broadcasting on Japanese television. There is a growing trend in the world that has seen a cultural phenomenon in the increased usage of many Japanese words interspersed among Japanese cultural enthusiasts' vocabulary in their daily conversations. Otaku, fudanshi, fujoshi and hololive are keywords to be able to understand VTuber or anime culture. It is interesting to study how manga and anime start to invade the United States of America in 1963 by way of Japan's animation (anime) "Atomu," as found in a study by Drazen (2003). Since then, anime and manga has spread all over the world and internationalised their 'terms' in anime culture such as otaku, fujoshi, fudanshi, kawaii, oishii, and many more.

Research by Mamat et al. (2021) demonstrated that 14.6% or 41 respondents from 280 respondents claimed that their preferred Japanese popular culture is VTuber. The respondents were students learning the Japanese language at five universities: Universiti Putra Malaysia, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, and Universiti Malaya. The most preferred popular culture among the respondents was anime (92.1%), followed by music (72.1%), manga (62.9%), drama or movies (50.4%), cosplay (27.1%), and fashion (18.2%). In contrast, other popular culture like video games, stage plays and light novels got less than one per cent. The following Chart 1 from a study by Mamat et al (2021) shows that almost 80% of the respondents knew the term *otaku*, while 43.6% knew the term *fujoshi*, and 35.4% knew the term *fudanshi*. Only 14.6% or 41 respondents out of 280 respondents did not know any of the terms. We can therefore conclude how Japanese language learning and popular culture are related to each other. Mamat et al (2018) stated that Japanese popular culture helps them learn Japanese writing, pronunciation, grammar, phrases, sentences, and how to converse naturally in the Japanese language.

Chart 1: Terms of Anime culture



Source: Mamat et al (2021)

Otaku

Otaku is one of the words used to describe this trend. It connotes an inordinate passion for a particular culture. Otaku refers to a person obsessed with Japanese culture such as anime, manga, and cosplay, which carries negative connotations such as nerd, shy, or introvert. Among the Japanese, this word is ascribed to a person in derogatory terms. Galbraith (2009) defines otaku as “nerd, geek, fanboy, a hardcore or cult fan”. There are also terms like otagei (a combination of otaku and arts or geinou in Japanese), otaken (otaku certificate exam), otaking (the king of otaku) and otakkii (the adjective to describe otaku-like people or activities). These terms show how being an otaku in Japan and other countries is a normal thing. Malaysians view the term of otaku as fashionable. According to Mamat et al (2019), otaku does not negatively connote Malaysian Japanese culture fans. They are proud of their identity as Otaku. They have collections of many books, C.D.s, artworks, and cosplay costumes. Their respondents defined Otaku as Japanese famous culture fans who share the same interests and values in Japanese popular culture. In the Malaysian context, Otaku means 'Nihon bunkajin'. There are also train otaku, who “memorized everything about trains, specs, routes, schedule, and so on. Japan is really interesting because the transportation infrastructure is also complex, even though the country itself is so small” (Galbraith, 2012:58).

Fujoshi

Fujoshi is a word following this growing trend alongside Otaku to describe fans of Japanese culture's anime. When used in conversations, Fujoshi has dual meanings, depending on which kanji characters the word is made up of. One is to denote a woman 腐女子, while the other usage of this term is to denote a 'rotten woman' 腐女子 considered unfit for marriage because of her love for unsavoury kinds of literature. It gains a sense of self-deprecating humour due to its dual homonym meaning, the good and the worst. This dual meaning perhaps reflects the standing of fujoshi culture to the rest of society (Emma, 2015). Fujoshi often hide their media preferences, relying instead on coded language to communicate with other Fujoshi in the public sphere. In this way, Fujoshi can be said to have a dual nature: their "fujoshi" woman side and their "fujoshi" rotten side (Okabe and Ishida, 2012). According to Galbraith (2009), “these days the term fujoshi is the common term for female otaku, but this term fails to acknowledge their ‘unique’ interest. They are different from ‘josei no otaku’ (translated also as female otaku) who has similar interests to a man”.

Galbraith (2011), who studied the Fujoshi phenomenon, examined how women that identify themselves as Fujoshi can express their collective interest, which has been made possible across physical and virtual space by producing, consuming, sharing fiction, discussing, or relating to gay practices. His focus is on playful interactions with the media and other Fujoshi, which contributes to "getting out of hand" and exploring what he called "transgressive intimacy," which is imagined between characters and between Fujoshi themselves. He applied the theory of "neta communication" and developed an alternative, "moe communication," to explain this phenomenon.

Fudanshi

For the Fujoshi counterpart, the word used is Fudanshi. It means 'rotten boy' for his love of literature with homosexual content. A "fudanshi" is a slang term to refer to a man who enjoys reading yaoi (homosexual) manga or watching yaoi anime. It means "rotten boy" to connote that his ideal pastime is not so favourable, and enjoying it is supposed to be a guilty pleasure. The term is sometimes used in a derogatory manner. A fudanshi does not have to exclusively like yaoi (though it is automatically assumed they do); they will still be referred to as fudanshi even if they read or watch yuri (lesbian) material.

Nagaike (2019) studied the characteristics of fudanshi in Asian countries, including Japan, the Philippines, China, and South Korea. The study explores whether the kind of 'soft' masculinity exemplified by Japanese fudanshi is also seen in other Asian sociocultural contexts. The analysis is further enhanced by examining how Fujoshi communicate with fudanshi and how Fujoshi in other Asian countries respond to the desires of fudanshi to access the space within a specifically female-oriented cultural sphere.

Hololive

Hololive Production or hololive is an agency of Virtual YouTubers created by Cover Corporation, a virtual entertainment company from Japan, set up in 2016. Their primary services are managing VTubers, merchandise, and live entertainments. Their mission is to stoke Vtuber Talent I.P. around the world. According to the Hololive webpage, as of November 2019, the total number of subscribers to VTubers on YouTube and Bilibili are 2.6 million and 3.5 million, respectively, with four of the VTubers getting into the top 10 spots for VTubers on Bilibili: Shirakami Fubuki (2nd), Minato Aqua (5th), Natsuiro Matsuri (7th), and Akai Haato (9th). Bilibili is a website from China specialising in anime and videos and then expanded to various categories, including mobile gaming, e-commerce, and advertising. The following Image 1 is a screenshot from a YouTube channel, showing the first live concert held by Hololive in 2017. Hololive sold tickets and merchandise online. As of February 4 2021, this video has been viewed by 1,004,792 people with 3,436 comments. The video showcases characters or VTubers in hologram form, with the participants surprisingly made up entirely of men.



Image 1: Screenshot from a YouTube channel, VTubers performing a virtual concert

VTuber

As VTubers, anime, manga, and other Japanese popular culture products are widely spread and discussed among fans through social media, much information about it can be obtained through comments on Facebook, animepedia, forums, and online news portals. VTubers are a product using the YouTube platform, and manga and anime are also uploaded and downloaded through YouTube. Hence, the researchers included relevant facts from social media and believe that the facts are as relevant as other references. After all, the information about Japanese popular culture is much closer to the fans than academic researchers, who may not be involved in consuming popular culture.

The term "VTuber" has yet to be included in the Otaku Encyclopedia by Galbraith in 2009. Nevertheless, there was a term "Virtual Idol", and is defined as an idol (*aidoru*) that exists only in the digital realm, as they do not exist at all. The first idol was Date Kyoko in 1996 (Ben, 2018). She produced one single entitled "Love Communication" with her walking the streets of Tokyo and New York City. Date brought about colossal success, but it ended in 1997 when fans got tired of not seeing her perform live. The virtual idol trend first originated in Japan, where the I.P. industry has thrived. Hatsune Miku, a virtual idol pioneer, is an anime character who sings through a vocal synthesiser. Miku has performed multiple times in China, singing in Chinese and Japanese (Li, 2019). The same article stated that China debuted its Artificial Intelligent (A.I.) virtual idol, "Ling", leading the latest Chinese internet trend among positive influencers and cultural inheritors showcasing China's soft power and culture. It is interesting to know that even Japanese virtual idols disappeared soon after being released and replaced by VTuber characters; China produced an idol using the most recent technology, ahead of the country of origin.

The following are random pictures and introductions from virtuallyoutuber.fandom.com, which were taken on February 4, 2021. In Japan, the most popular VTubers are Kizuna Ai, Kaguya Luna, Nekomiya Hinata, Mirai Akari, and Siro. The respondents in this study mentioned many characters, but

the researchers only chose four of the most frequently mentioned characters. The characters' biodata from various fandom pages was then analysed to explain their popularity inside their fandom. Image 2 is Kizuna Ai, one of the most famous female VTubers in Japan, with more than two million subscribers. She is funny, loves to dance, talks about her life, and likes to explain the topic she talks about. She is always trying hard to converse in English with her fans from overseas. Her main channel A.I.Channel has attracted 2.97 million subscribers (on July 6th 2021). Every released content video by her can garner a hundred thousand views in only three days. Kizuna Ai's official website, kizuna.com released three projects in June 2021: Virtual U.S. Tour, A.I. Party, 2021 and released a new song for her 5th anniversary.



Image 2: Kizuna Ai, Debut date-November 29 2016, Appearance age- 16 years old.

Image 3 is Natsuiro Matsuri, a female Japanese Virtual YouTuber associated with Hololive as part of its first generation of VTubers alongside Yozora Mel, Aki Rosenthal, Shirakami Fubuki, and Akai Hato. Matsuri enjoys various types of games, likes to sing, and sometimes does karaoke streams. She appreciates her fans very much and interacts with them on Twitter. The interaction with the fans makes her relatable in fans daily life. On 6 July 2021, Matsuri celebrated her 1.05 subscribers.



Image 3: Natsuiro Matsuri, Debut Date-I June 2018, Appearance age- 16 years old.

Kaguya Luna (Image 4) debuted in 2017, and she has about 955,000 subscribers dated on July 6th 2021. She is always hyper and talkative, and her high-pitched voice is impressive. She also plays a live show as a pop singer. According to [virtuallyoutuber.fandom.com](https://www.virtuallyoutuber.fandom.com), she is energetic, vulgar, free-spirited, and in stark contrast to many popular female VTubers. The Japanese language has certain words and verb forms that are specific to men and women. The wrong choice of words by women can cause the language used to sound rude and impolite. Japanese women rarely converse using abusive language, so if Kaguya uses that language, it will sound weird but is entertaining, let alone among interracial fans who do not care about gender.



Image 4: Kaguya Luna, Debut date-September 12 2017, Age- 145 years old

Image 5 is Inugami Korone, a dog girl VTuber in the Hololive gamers. She works at a bakery, thus bread and pastry themes are constantly surrounding her. Korone is known for her endurance streams, where she streams the same game for a very long time, usually 5-12 hours, because she likes the game very much. Korone loves horror movies and everything about American music. Her famous word is 'yubi' (finger) for her greetings with her fans, and she also utters 'yubi' in the interaction with fans while playing games. She has 1.58 million subscribers till today.



Image 5: Inugami Korone, Debut date- April 13 2019, Age-90 years old (dog years)

This paper may not align with Ismail et al (2021) in the development of the nation-state. Nevertheless, in multi-ethnic Malaysia, fans of Japanese culture, especially the Malays and Chinese, are 'united' in learning the language and its culture. Thereby supporting products include VTuber. The issue is whether fans of anime culture are mature enough to select appropriate content not to obsess to abandon the pure values that the authorities are trying to impose.

Methodology

The survey is divided into three sections: respondents' background, respondents' interest in anime culture, and respondents' interest in and their consumption of VTuber content. The survey used Google Forms, and the structure of the survey consists of multiple-choice questions, open-ended questions, and the Likert scale, where scaling responses ranged from scale one to scale five, from strongly disagree to disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree.

This research used a simple random sampling method. The questionnaires were distributed to all Japanese language learners and Japanese culture fans in a university. The respondents in this research are from two categories: 1) students from two public universities in Malaysia who are learning the Japanese language on Semester One 2020/2021 and Semester Two 2019/2020, and 2) fans of Japanese culture who know a bit of the Japanese language. So, the respondents are made up of *nihongojin* and *bunkajin*. *Nihongojin* refers to Japanese language students from universities, and *bunkajin* refers to Japanese Cultural Club and Facebook group members related to anime or manga.

Although 104 respondents answered the questionnaire, there were a few parts with only 90-100 respondents. The writer believes that some respondents did not answer because the question was irrelevant to them. The number of respondents is small because this research is a pilot study on VTubers consumption in Malaysia. There is no research done by the local or international researcher on VTubers acceptance by Japanese culture fans in Malaysia. However, these VTubers are well known and have a strong base in Japan, United States and European countries. This sub-culture is new, and some Japanese language learners do not become familiar with the term yet.

Results and Discussion

The result showed that 60.6% of the respondents are Malay, 35.6% are Chinese, and 3.8% are Indian, Javanese, Bidayuh, or Indonesian. 71.2% are female, and 28.8% are male. 87.5% of respondents are 18-23 years old, 10.6 % are 24-30 years old. 95.2% of the respondents are students, and others are working in the private sector. 58.7% of the respondents are from the West Coast of Malaysia, and 26.9% of respondents are from the East Coast of Malaysia, with others from Sabah and Sarawak. 74.8 % of the respondents know how to speak and write in Japanese, while only 8.7% do not know the language. Other respondents, amounting to 16.5%, know how to write and speak the language a little. The respondents are mainly from Universiti Putra Malaysia and Universiti Malaysia Terengganu.

All respondents answered the questions related to their interest in popular culture. The respondents are interested in anime (86.5%), manga (68.3%), music (69.2%), and both manga and *seiyu* (37.5%). Other Japanese cultures that the respondents liked are *shodo* (15.4%), cosplay (17.3%), and fashion (23.1%). For the question "I am...", Ninety-four respondents answered. The respondents acknowledge that they are *otaku* (58.3%), 17.7% acknowledged they are *fujoshi*, and 4.2% respondents like *fudanshi*. The data shows that 80.2% of the respondents are obsessed with anime or manga. The other respondents (19.8%) answered that they are ordinary fans, love cute and beautiful things, and are Japanese culture enthusiasts. The respondents who claimed that they are *fujoshi* and *fudanshi* make up 21.9%, which is a percentage that is relatively high and worrisome.

In the last ten years, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) issues have become more prevalent in Malaysian social media. Malaysia is an Islamic country, and LGBT is generally a sensitive topic that generates debates due to its Islam-opposing nature. Since anime and manga portray LGBT issues, sexy characters and provocative adult genres such as *yaoi* that are not in line with Islamic teachings, this may affect the beliefs and values of Muslims, and has constantly received criticism from God-fearing Muslims. 21.9% of the respondents willingly claimed that they are *fujoshi* or *fudanshi*. This shows how their claim should be received to signal our communities and local animation industries.

Anime and Manga Cultures

For the question related to the genre of anime that they are interested in, the respondents liked fantasy (80.4%), humour (65.7%), love stories (romance) (64.7%), mystery (59.8%), horror (33.3%), mecha (24.5%), and eroticism (15.7%). The respondents are also interested in action, music, sport, slice of life, friendship, science fiction, adventure, supernatural, psychological, and martial arts. The type of manga and anime that they like are *shojo* (36.9%), *seinen* (61.2%), *kodomo* (15.5%), and adult (15.5%). The respondents who like the eroticism genre (15.7%) are consistent with the respondents who like the adult type of manga and anime (15.5%). In conclusion, the respondents who like the eroticism genre and the respondents who like adult-type anime or manga contributed to the percentage of *fujoshi* and *fudanshi* among Japanese popular culture fans.

VTuber Consumption

Out of 104 respondents, only 83 responded to this question. From 83 responses, the number of respondents who know the term VTuber is 26.9%, and 8.7% of respondents might know the term. 64.4% of respondents do not know about VTubers. The number of people who know the term is significant because VTubers just started gaining traction five years ago, and is still regarded as a new addition to the anime subculture. For VTuber consumption time, 16.9% or 14 respondents watched 1-5 hours per week, one respondent watched 6-10 hours per week, and watched during his/her free time.

The popular characters or VTubers among the respondents are Kizuna Ai, Natsuiro Matsuri, Kaguya Luna, Kizuna Ai, Amelia, Gawr Guraaaa, Nakiri Ayame, Kiryu Coco, Inugami Korone, Hoshimachi Suisei, Makoto no Onna no ko, Robocco, Shirakami Fubuki, Kamiko Kana, Minato Akua, and Kagura Mea. They like to watch the characters because of many reasons. However, it can be concluded that the characters' impressive image and voice boost them to do assignments and learn correct Japanese pronunciation. They also love the interaction between characters and the fans, where they can feel the characters' sincerity.

VTubers positively influence the respondents as they push them to be more knowledgeable, relaxed, motivated, creative, and energized to learn Japanese casually. This results in them becoming more fluent in speaking Japanese, understanding more Japanese and English conversation, and learning about the culture, which makes them feel accomplished.

On the contrary, the negative influences of watching VTubers are being addicted and the possibility of becoming *hentai*. *Hentai* refers to the type of person who is addicted to pornography and carries a negative connotation. It refers to a person who is obsessed with an abnormal sexual desire or act, as an abbreviation of *hentai seiyoku* (sexual perversion). One respondent wrote that watching VTubers made them addicted and want to watch more. Another respondent wrote that the negative influence is that they learn Japanese curse words. Some respondents acknowledge that watching VTubers is a waste of time. In its extreme, it took away their sleeping time. Some of the respondents wrote that there is no negative influence on them as long as they do not indulge excessively in the activity.

For the statement "I like VTuber very much. I like the technology used in making the character grow such as doing concerts and playing games", from 92 responses, four respondents (4.3%) strongly agree, and 11 respondents (12%) agree with the statement. The statistics show that 16.3% of the respondents admire how technology is used to make holograms or characters do concerts and play games. Only 15 respondents agreed with the statement, while 45 respondents disagreed. It is proof that the technology in making characters does not solely engage them with the VTubers. Among 91 responses, 23 respondents agreed that they were impressed with the Japanese fans' obsession with VTubers. In contrast, 32 respondents disagreed with the statements. This disagreement may be significant because VTubers are more prevalent among fans outside Japan, not inside Japan.

For the statement "I don't think VTubers will be recognized in Malaysia like in Japan", from 94 responses, 33 respondents agreed with the statement. On the contrary, 30 respondents, or 31.9% of respondents, disagreed with the statement. It shows that they think Malaysian VTubers will gain popularity globally. Another 33 respondents did not choose whether to agree or disagree with the statement.

For the statement, "my background, religion, culture, and upbringing does not allow me to be obsessed with the Japanese culture, especially VTubers", 44.5% disagreed, and 14.1% agreed with the statement. It shows that more respondents

believe that their religion, own culture, and upbringing are more deeply and firmly rooted, and Japanese culture would not alter it. They tend to watch Japanese popular culture products, including VTubers, adult or eroticism content, although there is a restriction from their background. This demonstrates how the fans strongly disagree with the statement and support their activity.

Conclusion

The first objective of the study is to investigate anime culture among *nihongojin* and *nihon bunkajin*. The result showed that the main Japanese popular culture among respondents include anime (86.5%), manga (68.3%), music (69.2%), manga (37.5) and *seiyu* (37.5%). They also have interest in other products like *shodo*, cosplay and fashion. The respondents also claimed that they are *otaku* (58.3%), *fujoshi* (17.7%) and *fudanshi* (4.2%), concluding that 80.2% of the respondents are obsessed with anime or manga. These results are consistent with previous studies by Roslina Mamat, Roswati Abdul Rashid dan Rokiah Pae (2021) which showed that the most preferred pop culture among the university students were anime, followed by music, manga and drama & movies.

As for the second research objective, the researcher had identified 83 responses among 104 respondents. The number of respondents who know the term VTuber is 22 people. The number of people who know the term is significant because VTubers, as one of the sub-cultures of anime, is considered new as it started only in 2016. For VTuber consumption, 14 respondents watched 1-5 hours per week, one respondent watched 6-10 hours per week, one person watched every day for at least 2 hours, and another watched during their free time. Compared to other anime subcultures such as music and *seiyuu*, VTuber is a very recent phenomenon in Malaysia that has started to gain popularity among high school and university students. While there is a concern that VTubers adversely affects society, most respondents indicated that their religion, culture, and upbringing are more vital in shaping their values. Through VTubers, Japanese language learners can naturally learn Japanese in a live setting, including adopting slang according to the context, such as trendy slang among young people.

For the third research objective, VTubers positively affect Japanese Language learners as they are more knowledgeable, relaxed, motivated, creative, energized, learn Japanese in a casual way, more fluent in speaking Japanese, entertained, improved in the Japanese language, more understanding of Japanese and English conversation, learn about the culture, and always make them feel great. On the contrary, the negative influences of watching VTubers are the possibility of being addicted and becoming a *hentai* person. There is also concern about the usage of curse words by VTubers and the time wasted watching VTuber. Fortunately, some of the respondents wrote that there is no negative influence on them as long as they do not indulge excessively in the activity. The unfortunate thing is, how can they be so sure that they will not become *hentai*, addicted or indulge in immoral activities in the future? As a practising Muslim or other religion, they should know that it is a sin to watch this kind of new anime culture. There are 'good' and 'bad' VTubers, depending on their content and language use. It is up to their intention and parents' guidance to avoid negative influences from outside or even inside their own house.

This study only focused on students from two public universities in Malaysia (95.2%) and private sector employees (4.8%) aged below 30 years. This study is seen as sufficient to see the anime culture found among young people in Malaysia. However, it is proposed to conduct a study on more samples consisting of young people from various walks of life in the future. Another thing that can be suggested is to include an in-depth interview to get more detailed information. The study also found that Malaysian teenagers are interested in sexual and LGBT elements in manga and anime. It would be interesting if a study were done on Malaysian teenagers to understand fans of this genre and how religion, culture, and parental education can curb immoral activities.

Acknowledgement

The Sumitomo Foundation research grants 2020/2021. "Understanding LGBT elements in manga and anime and its relation with Malaysian Otaku", Reference No. 208402.

References

- Ben, K. (2018). Ayano Date, Daughter of First Virtual Idol Kyoko Date, Makes Her Debut <https://grapee.jp/en/106025>. 2018-11-08 Thu, Accessed on 6 July 2021.
- Craig, T.J. (2000). *Japan Pop!: Inside the world of Japanese Popular culture*. New York: An East Gate Book.
- Drazen, P. (2003). *Anime Explosion: the what? Why? & wow! Of Japanese animation*. California Stone Bridge Press.
- Dwiana, R.P., & Arie, P. (2019). Fenomena "Virtual Youtuber" Kizuna Ai di Kalangan Penggemar Budaya. Populer Jepang di Indonesia. *MediaTor*, 12 (2), 128-140.
- Galbraith, P. W. (2012). *Otaku space*. Chin Music Press.
- Galbraith, P. W. (2011). *Fujoshi: Fantasy Play and Transgressive Intimacy among "Rotten Girls" in Contemporary Japan*. *Journal of women in culture and society*, 37(1).
<https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/660182?journalCode=sigms>. Accessed on 5 February 2021.
- Galbraith, P. W. (2009). *The otaku encyclopedia: The insider's guide to the subculture of cool Japan*. Kodansha.
- Inugami Korone YouTube Channel.
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UChAnqc_AY5_I3Px5dig3X1Q. Accessed on 6 July 2021.
- Ismail, M.M., Hassan, N.A., Abdullah, A., Othman, Z., Yunus, M.D., & Hairol Anuar Mak Din, H.A.M. (2021). Pembentukan Etos Nasional Belia Malaysia: Wadah Pembinaan Negara-Bangsa. *Akademika* 91(1).3-14.
<https://doi.org/10.17576/akad-2021-9101-01>
- Kaguya Luna Official Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCQYADFw7xEJ9oZSM5ZbqyBw>. Accessed on 6 July 2021.

- Tuah, K.M., & Mazlan, U.S. (2020). Twitter as Safe Space for Self-Disclosure among Malaysian LGBTQ Youths. *Malaysian Journal of Communication*. 36(1). 436-448.
- Kalaisilven, S. & Sukimi, F. (2019). Kawalan Ibu Bapa terhadap Anak-Anak dalam Penggunaan Media Sosial. *Akademika*. 89(1). 111-124. <https://doi.org/10.17576/akad-2019-8901-09>.
- Kizuna Ai Official Website (2021). <https://kizunaai.com>. Accessed on 6 July 2021.
- Kizuna Ai YouTube Channel. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC4YaOtlyT-ZeyB0OmXHgolA>. Accessed on 6 July 2021.
- MacWilliam, M.W. (2008). Introduction. In MacWilliams (ed.). *Japanese visual culture: Explorations in the world of manga and anime*. 3-25. New York: An East Gate Book.
- Mamat, R., Rashid, R.A. & Pae, R(2021). Understanding LGBT elements in manga and anime and its relation with Malaysian Otaku. Unpublished research report.
- Mamat, R., Rahim, N.A. & Nik Rafidah Nik Muhamad Affendi (2019). Perkembangan Komik dan Animasi: Satu Kajian Perbandingan antara Melayu dan Jepun. *Malaysian Journal of Communication*. 35(2). 260-276.
- Mamat, R., Rashid, R.A., Halim, H.A. & Mansor, N.S. (2018). Penggunaan Manga dan Anime sebagai Media Pembelajaran dalam Kalangan Pelajar Bahasa Jepun di Universiti Awam Malaysia. *Malaysian Journal of Communication*. Jilid 34(3).298 -313.
- Nagaïke, K. (2019). Fudanshi (“Rotten Boys”) in Asia: A Cross.-Cultural Analysis of Male Readings of BL and Concepts of Masculinity. *Women’s Manga in Asia and Beyond*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331766908_Fudanshi_Rotten_Boys_in_Asia_A_Cross-Cultural_Analysis_of_Male_Rea. Accessed on 5 February 2021.
- Natsu Matsuri YouTube Channel. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCQ0UDLQCjY0rmuxCDE38FGg>.
- Okabe, D. & Ishida, K. (2012). “Making Fujoshi Identity Visible and Invisible.” In *Fandom Unbound: Otaku Culture in a Connected World*, 207–24. Yale University Press.
- Okuno, T. (2014). Roots of Cool Japan: From the Japanese Traditional Edo Culture to Anime and Manga. *Kwansei Gakuin University Social Science Review*. Vol. 19.
- Rahman, N.F.A., Hambali, K.M., Awang, J., Yaakob, Z.A. & Shapiee, N.S. (2020). Memahami Agama Lain: Tujuan dan Syarat dari Perspektif Pemimpin Agama di Malaysia. *Akademika*. 90 (2). 165-179. <https://doi.org/10.17576/akad-2020-9002-14>.
- Syam, H. M, Anisah, N., Saleh, R. and Lingga, M. (2021), Ideology and Media Framing: Stigmatisation of LGBT in Media Coverage in Indonesia. *Malaysian Journal of Communication*. 37(1) 2021: 59-73
- Xin, Z. (2020). *Virtual Youtuber Kizuna Ai: Co-creating human-non-human interaction and celebrity-audience relationship*. Unpublished Master’s Thesis. Lund University. <https://jw-webmagazine.com/hottest-girl-virtual-youtubers-in-japan-36bb215ec57c/> Accessed on 5 February 2021.
- Yogesh Hole et al 2019 J. Phys.: Conf. Ser. 1362 012121

- VTuber Wiki.
https://virtualyoutuber.fandom.com/wiki/Kizuna_Ai#Introduction_Video.
 Accessed on 5 February 2021.
- Hololive English Wiki. https://hololive.wiki/wiki/Natsuiro_Matsuri. Accessed on 5 February 2021.
- VTuber Wiki. https://virtualyoutuber.fandom.com/wiki/Natsuiro_Matsuri.
 Accessed on 5 February 2021.
- VTuber Wiki. https://virtualyoutuber.fandom.com/wiki/Kaguya_Luna. Accessed on 5 February 2021.
- VTuber Wiki. https://virtualyoutuber.fandom.com/wiki/Shirakami_Fubuki.
 Accessed on 5 February 2021.
- VTuberWiki. dongs_of_BL_and_Concepts_of_Masculinity. Accessed on 5 February 2021.
- Emma. (2015). Honey's Anime. What is Fujoshi? Definition, Meaning. September 16, 2015. <https://honeysanime.com/what-is-fujoshi-definition-meaning/>.
 Accessed on 10 February 2021.
- <http://yabai.com/p/2725>. Fudanshi: Men and the Consumption of Gay Themes in Manga and Anime. Accessed on 10 February 2021.
- <https://omr.com/en/vtubers-hololive-kizuna-ai/> *Vtubers have millions of subs and huge revenues—but the reality is, they don't exist. January 2021. Access on 5 March 2021.*
- Li, Y. (2019). China debuts AI virtual idol. <http://www.ecns.cn/news/2020-05-19/detail-ifzwknkv0963987.shtml>.