

# ANIME AND MANGA FAN CULTURE



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# THE OTAKU LIFESTYLE

Expressing an interest in, respect for, and bond with a popular form of entertainment is a time-honored tradition that goes back at least one hundred years with the hero worship of figures like baseball player Babe Ruth, movie star Charlie Chaplin, and cartoon character Mickey Mouse. Fans often surround themselves with mementos of their idols—such as collectible cards, dolls, posters, and clothing. For example, sports fans often wear their favorite team’s jerseys to show their loyalty to the franchise or to certain players. The consumer data company Statista reports that in 2024, the sales of sports jerseys in the United States surpassed \$14 billion. Fans of anime and manga are no different, but their ranks among Americans aged twelve to twenty-five are even larger than those of the three largest professional sports. According to a 2022 survey by the Japanese public relations company Dentsu, 37.9 percent of American Gen Z survey respondents said they like action anime, 35.6 percent like family anime, and 34.3 percent like heroine anime. When asked about their interest in professional football, basketball, baseball, the percentages were lower—ranging from 30.2 percent to 21.7 percent.

In their survey, the Dentsu researchers asked their Gen Z sample group whether they considered themselves to be an otaku. The term *otaku* was coined in 1983 by humorist and editor Akio Nakamori to describe people with consuming interests, particularly in manga, anime, video games, or computers, often to the detriment of their social skills. Nakamori applied the term not only to fans of anime and manga but also to science-fiction fans and those who idolize pop stars.



*According to a recent survey, more American Gen Z respondents said they like anime more than they did professional football, basketball, or baseball.*

As the popularity of anime and manga spread around the world, the word *otaku* began to lose its negative connotations, especially outside Japan. Being known as an *otaku* became a badge of honor for many anime and manga fans. Now it is an affectionate term for people outside Japan who love Japanese products, art forms, and culture. In the Dentsu survey, 34 percent of respondents identified as an *otaku*. The researchers were taken aback. “In other words, an astounding 34% of America’s Gen Z, or around 15 million people, acknowledge themselves as anime *otaku*. Amazing, isn’t it?”<sup>48</sup>

Like sports fans, anime and manga fans like to show their solidarity in their favorite pastime. Otakus often express their enthusiasm for their favorite characters and series in their entire lifestyle—what they wear, how they decorate their room or home, and sometimes even how they customize their cars. “I am a girl, I love anime, and I am not ashamed of it,” says Taylor Hall, a student at the University of Connecticut. “Being an Otaku is a part of who I am.”<sup>49</sup>

## **A MASSIVE MARKET**

Commercial entities are happy to satisfy the customer demands of anime and manga fans, creating an endless stream of anime- and manga-related products, including clothing, jewelry, posters, figures, backpacks, notebooks, stickers, and decals. This, in turn, feeds more consumer demand. When fans of one character or series see a product featuring another, they often want the same item for themselves but emblazoned with their preferred manga or anime artwork.

Because of the fragmentation of the anime and manga worlds into various categories, it might seem impossible for manufacturers to satisfy such diverse demand. After all, there are hundreds of popular characters and series. It might seem unlikely that each one would have enough followers to create a viable market for anime- and manga-themed merchandise. Thanks to the internet, however, fans around the world can search for and find items from any supplier, no matter how small or specialized. Stephen Reysen, a professor in the Department of Psychology and Special Education at East Texas A&M University, writes:

**“I am a girl, I love anime, and I am not ashamed of it. . . . Being an Otaku is a part of who I am.”<sup>49</sup>**  
—Taylor Hall, student at the University of Connecticut

New digital technology facilitated online shopping for anime, especially as it became more common for teens and young adults to have their own computers and access to

the internet, allowing them to watch their shows without needing to put them on the family television. . . . Technology also increased the ease with which fans could digitally download anime and contributed to the makers' profit margins.<sup>50</sup>

Another reason niche products can be successful is that the overall anime and manga market is huge. Konvoy Ventures, a gaming venture capital firm, reports that there are about 600 million anime and manga fans outside of China. Crunchyroll estimates that there were more than 800 million anime and manga fans globally by 2025. Since Crunchyroll excludes China and Japan from its estimate, the actual number of anime and manga fans is likely to be more than 1 billion people by 2025. Because anime and manga are visual media, the related products are not restricted by language. Konvoy Ventures estimated that the global anime market was \$31 billion in 2024 and would grow to \$44 billion by 2027. In such a huge marketplace, the makers of niche



*The global anime market is expected to grow to \$44 billion by 2027. In such a huge marketplace, niche anime products like action figures can still find enough buyers to make their production viable.*

## THE IMPACT OF ANIME ON AN ATHLETE'S LIFE

An anonymous contributor to the *My Anime Story* blog tells how anime has provided him with inspiration to become a better sports competitor.

Anime isn't just a form of entertainment; it's a source of inspiration that has enriched my life as a sports player. . . .

The story of Naruto Uzumaki, a young ninja determined to become the Hokage, struck a chord with me. His undying spirit and relentless determination taught me the value of pushing beyond my limits on the field. When I face a tough opponent or a challenging practice session, Naruto's unwavering spirit reminds me to never give up, no matter the odds. This determination has made me a more resilient and committed sports player. . . .

Anime often immerses us in surreal worlds, but it also teaches us the power of focus and visualization. Characters like Saitama from *One Punch Man* and Takumi Fujiwara from *Initial D* demonstrate unwavering focus on their goals. Their dedication to mastering their skills has inspired me to set clear objectives in sports and visualize my success.

Before a game, I take a moment to mentally rehearse my moves and imagine myself excelling. This newfound mental preparation has boosted my confidence and performance in a range of sports.

Anonymous, "How My Passion for Anime Transformed My Journey as a Sports Player," *My Anime Story* (blog), October 22, 2023. <https://myanimestory.org>.

series that aired on Kids' WB. Taco Bell also had a multiyear promotion of *Digimon* collectible cards and toys. One of the more distinctive Taco Bell collectibles were the *Digimon* collector cels—translucent cards that allow light to shine through them like movie film. The cels featured still frames from *Digimon: The Movie*.

### ANIME CAFÉS

Fast-food chains are not the only restaurants catering to otaku diners. Anime-themed cafés have long been a staple in Japan and are now popping up all around the world. Pokémon Cafe in Tokyo

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### WEBSITES

#### **Anime News Network**

[www.animenewsnetwork.com](http://www.animenewsnetwork.com)

This website provides news, reviews, and feature reports on anime, manga, and video games, as well as brief bios of manga and anime artists.

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