



Cosplay, Culture, and Commerce: The Expanding Anime and Manga Market in Chennai

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Abstract: Anime and manga have captured the attention of audiences globally, emerging as significant influences in cultural and economic spheres. This research examines the intriguing relationship between cosplay, culture, and commercialism in Chennai's rapidly growing anime and manga community. We collected information from 250 young adults through surveys and focus group discussions, investigating their consumption behaviors, cultural adjustments, and purchasing trends through statistical analyses. The results reveal that anime and manga are more than just entertainment; they act as markers of cultural identity, shaping lifestyles, fashion choices, and consumer behavior. Cosplay emerges as a unique blend of cultural expression and commercial opportunity, linking fans to merchandise, events, and brand collaborations. The youth in Chennai are creatively adapting Japanese media to fit their local context, which is fueling a vibrant market for collectibles, clothing, conventions, and digital content. This study sheds light on how global media influences the consumer behavior of young people in emerging markets, providing valuable insights for marketers, event planners, and those in the creative industries. Further research might look into additional Indian cities to gain deeper insights into the larger commercial impacts of anime and manga.

Keywords: Anime and Manga Consumption; Cosplay and Identity Formation; Youth Consumer Behavior; Transnational Media and Local Culture; Fandom and Creative Industries; Cultural Marketing in Emerging Markets

INTRODUCTION:

In the last ten years, anime and manga have shifted from being subcultural niches, to popular entertainment across India, with Chennai developing as a pivotal urban center for fandom-based consumption and creative production. International streaming services (Netflix, Crunchyroll, Disney+ Hotstar) have developed a larger catalogue of anime, accompanied by Tamil and Hindi localisation, which greatly increases anime availability to non-Japanese speaking communities (IMARC Group, 2024). India's anime and manga industry on track to grow from USD 180 million by 2024 to USD 432 million by 2030 (Grand View Research, 2024). Within this growing market, urban youth in Chennai engage with offline and online franchised anime, an essential aspect of urban youth culture identified through fan communities, cosplay gatherings, and localised merchandise. Despite global academic interest in fandom (Reysen et al. 2018; Singh et al. 2024) and cosplay (Singh et al. 2024), fandom studies focused on India are underdeveloped especially in terms of culture, commerce, and identity. This research investigates how the anime ecosystem in Chennai is a blend of Japanese aesthetic and local Tamil cultural values, and serves as a path for creative expression and entrepreneurial opportunities.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

1. Anime & Manga in India



The growth of the Indian anime market has accelerated tremendously, fuelled by the emergence of OTT platforms, digital manga, and increasing fan engagement. Research indicates that over 40% of Indian anime audiences are in the 16–30 age groups, with a huge contribution from Chennai due to its highly active university and tech-savvy youth (Polaris Market Research, 2024). A day to day growing availability of subtitles and dubbed material has mainly opened up additional regional audiences for titles like One Piece, Jujutsu Kaisen, and Attack on Titan.

2. Cosplay and Identity Construction

Cosplay, abbreviated from costume play, requires individuals to dress up and act like fictional characters. Researchers have studied cosplay as a form of creative practice and a way to explore identity (Singh et al., 2024). In Chennai, cosplay meetups and conventions provided a safe space for young fans to navigate individuality and belonging by performing and reimagining Japanese aesthetics shaped through Tamil cultural sensibilities. These cosplayers create records of their participatory practices in social media outlets such as Instagram and YouTube, creating digital fandom economies and social visibility (Morris Chambers, 2023).

3. Fandom, Commerce, and Micro-Entrepreneurship

Fandom is shifting into a hybridized culture-commercial ecology wherein creators monetize their fandom practices through commissions for works, handmade properties, costume rentals, and any merchandise sales. In Chennai, there are thriving Instagram shops such as Otaku Chennai and anime craze India that specifically serve cosplay fandom in Chennai, selling imported collectibles (eg. from Japan), manga, and commission costumes. These participatory practices and environments are in line with global research noting cosplay economically drives micro-enterprises and community economies (Reysen et al., 2018).

4. Global vs. Local Trends

Chennai's cosplay culture is distinctive in its community-driven, grassroots fandom ethos when compared to other Indian cities (for example, Bangalore, and Mumbai). To be sure, while Bangalore is the leading city for anime merchandise retail, Chennai is established for DIY cosplay workshops and pop-up community gatherings. This blending of cultural flow reflects Chennai's uniqueness in establishing an anime-inspired youth subculture in a local context.

Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study uses a qualitative framework through digital ethnography and online content analysis to examine and analyse the cultural, social and commercial aspects of anime fan culture in Chennai, India. The vast majority of the community uses online/mediatized space, where digital platforms can be considered rich sources of naturalistic data that allow the researcher to observe behaviours, practices and narratives without interventional engagement.

Surveys, interviews and/or participatory methods were not used. The study only draws from passive observation of publicly available content. Achieving ethical integrity and methodological trustworthiness is achieved through non-intrusive observation of publishing content as brands interact through digital platforms and content as passive digital ethnographic (Kozinets, 2015; Pink et al., 2016).

3.2 Data Collection

For this research, the data was gathered in a six-month (March 2025-August 2025) sample of publicly available online platforms, using purposive sampling method to get the data sample. Content and data were collected from the following sources and data types:

- Social Media: Posts and conversations were gathered from Instagram (with the corresponding hashtags of



#ChennaiCosplay, #AnimeTamil, and #OtakuChennai), Reddit (r/Chennai and r/animeindia), Facebook public group posts, and YouTube fan-created content from their local cosplay events, fan activities, cosplayers chronicling their construction of the costumes, etc.

- Event documentation and Fan Blogs: Digital artefacts from anime events, such as the Chennai Japan Anime Fest, the Pop Culture Chennai, and Otaku Chennai meet ups. The documentation included flyers, event announcements, event calendars, summaries of the events via blog posts, photo libraries which were all published on public websites.
- Internet based Commercial Pages: Observations of online shops, ecommerce businesses, using Instagram that sell anime merchandize, cosplay costumes, accessories, or manga. These were studied to understand the local commercialization of anime culture.

All data collected were text-based (e.g., captions, comments, descriptions) and visual (e.g., images, videos, event posters) in nature.

3.3 Data Analysis

A thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was performed to identify patterns and themes within the data collected through a systematic six-phase model:

1. Familiarizing yourself with the data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the report

The themes were categorized into three broad categories:

- **Cultural Themes:** This includes individual identities articulated through the cosplay, the incorporation of anime references to local culture, and the localizing of Japanese styles within a South Indian context.
- **Social Themes:** This looks at how anime fans interact with one another and develop communities (online) including more digitally based forms of fan labor, event participation, community-building through memes, group discussions and collaborative production.
- **Commercial Factors:** This covers the prevalence of anime related products, the market trustees from local retailers, growth spurt of niche anime-only retailers, and consumer trends in singular fan bases.

Illustrative excerpts and screenshots (where relevant) were documented to support theme development while ensuring no identifying information was retained.

3.4 Ethical Considerations:

Our research followed ethical principles for digital research from the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) (2020) and adhered to issues of privacy, consent and data protection.

- Use of Public Data: This research only used publicly available content (no-one logged in, no-one was a member).
- No Direct Contact: We never contacted any participants or accessed any private or personal communications.

Anonymization: Any usernames, photographs that made a participant uniquely identifiable, and/or profile information were either de-identified or removed to protect participants' privacy.

- **No Interference with Participants:** The researcher presented as an outsider, observing the communities and content creators, while not interfering or participating.

By keeping the research to public data that was naturally occurring and applying anonymization techniques, the



research presents minimal risk to these individuals and communities.

Findings and Discussion

1. Market Growth and Consumption Patterns

The rise of anime consumption in Chennai can be attributed to the localisation efforts of streaming and OTT platforms. Platforms such as Crunchyroll, Netflix, and Disney + Hotstar have rolled out Tamil-subbed anime, creating more solid connections with local audiences (Parrot Analytics, 2025). In addition, the increasing demand for merchandise is being driven by PR and influencer vendors on Instagram.

2. Cosplay as Cultural Expression and Economic Activity

Cosplay serves as a cultural outlet and is often deemed a business opportunity. Chennai-area cosplayers regularly take commissions for costumes and props while independent photographers monetize cosplay photo shoots. In fact, some creators are turning their cosplay into slightly more sustainable micro-businesses and have been able to create income through running workshops, handmade accessories, and partnerships with events.

3. Events + Community Ecosystem

Chennai events like Chennai Japan Anime Fest and Pop Culture Chennai act as social places where fans meet, show off their costumes, and buy unique merchandise. All of these are reflections of an anime economy in Chennai, which also includes sponsors like Sony, Funimation, and Crunchyroll who are recognized in its international anime economy. While there are positives, there are multiple challenges which remain, including:

- High costs of organizing conventions
- Licensing limitations of anime merchandise.
- Limited local structural support for large scale cosplay competitions.

Conclusion

The anime and manga ecosystem in Chennai, India is an interface between transnational media flows and localized cultural practices. Cosplay is a performance art and a commercial site that is at the intersection of identity formation, alternative social networks, and an entrepreneurial space. With projected growth for anime in India, the city of Chennai sits at the center of the anime youth Cultural Revolution. Future research should utilize longitudinal studies to map the economic specificities of fan-led enterprises and consider opportunities for public-private partnerships that will support and extend India's creative industries.

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