

## Social Influences as Determinants of *Anime* Pilgrimage.

### Abstract

**Research question:** Japanese animation, called *anime*, has long been regarded as a niche culture reserved for ‘nerds’ (*otaku*) in Japan. The word *otaku* refers to individuals who spend most of their time alone at home watching *anime*. However, in recent years, *otaku*, or *anime* viewers, have changed their behavioral patterns, resulting in a new movement called *anime* pilgrimage. *Anime* pilgrimage involves traveling to locations that resemble particular scenes in *anime* pieces, even though the locations themselves may be ordinary places. What drives *anime* pilgrimage? To answer this question, we conducted two studies.

**Modeling:** Research on ordinary tourism has focused mainly on destination attributes as determinants of visit intention and/or destination loyalty. Research on film tourism has placed an additional emphasis on the role of film involvement. In contrast, we focus here on social influences among two kinds of *anime* viewers, i.e., location seekers and the followers, and constructed two models to describe the determinants of visit intention and destination loyalty, respectively.

**Method:** To test the model, we conducted surveys. 178 questionnaires were collected from potential *anime* pilgrims to estimate the visit intention model, while 199 questionnaires were collected from actualized *anime* pilgrims to estimate the destination loyalty model.

**Results:** The results of structured regression analyses showed that our new models were superior to previous models. The results suggested that during the pre-tour period, *anime* nerds are motivated by interaction with other nerds to visit a new destination that an *anime* piece has been modeled after. Moreover, *anime* nerds enjoy interactions with the local people while traveling and such experiences result in higher destination loyalty during the post-tour period.

**Implications:** By modeling social influences among *anime* nerds as well as those between nerds and ordinary people in the destinations of *anime* pilgrimage, this research succeeded in describing what happens to *anime* pilgrims when they decide to go out of their house and continue to attach the destinations. It should be noted that locations that are deemed ‘sacred places’ for *anime* nerds are decided by *anime* nerds, not by the local tourist bureau. Destination marketers should not, therefore, promote the locations that *anime* pieces are modeled after. Also, interaction with the local people fosters *anime* nerds’ loyalty to the destination. Therefore, by warmly welcoming *anime* nerds to their towns, destination marketers may succeed in attracting *anime* pilgrims.

