

“Cool Japan”: Anime, soft power and Hong Kong Generation Y Travel to Japan

Abstract

The “Cool Japan” strategy was launched in 2012 as a “soft power” initiative to promote the unique culture of Japan. Tourism motivated by Japanese animation, or *anime*, plays an important role in this campaign. While this aspect of Japanese popular culture has been a particular element of attraction, especially for youth travellers, little is known empirically about the degree to which it actually motivates desire to travel to Japan. This paper examines the influence of anime on Hong Kong Generation Y travel to Japan. Based on a quantitative approach, respondents were divided into four clusters -*Enthusiastic*, *Interested*, *Low-viewers* and *Indifferent* - distinguished by varying degrees of interest in anime and corresponding travel motivation. This study contributes to existing literature by elucidating how anime serves as a travel motivator, proposing a conceptual framing of the relation between anime consumption and travel to Japan in terms of “soft power”, the application of cultural ideas and artefacts to encourage positive associations with a country and its values. The findings have implications for destination marketing organization (DMOs) in developing anime products and events that meet the unique needs and preferences of different groups of anime fans, constituting different potential tourism sub-niches.

Keywords: Soft power, Anime, Tourist motivation, Generation Y, Hong Kong, Japan

Introduction

Destinations are constantly searching for new overt and subtle ways to attract visitors and to better position themselves in the international tourism market. Particularly within the Asia-Pacific region, growing competition has led to a rise of innovative strategies to mobilize the distinct cultural assets of countries and destinations to lure tourists through the application of “soft power,” a term coined by Nye (1990) to denote the ability of governments and populations to persuade others to espouse their values and behaviour by building positive associations with the country’s culture. In distinction to “hard power,” which is exercised by the use or threat of force, be it physical, political, economic or otherwise, soft power represents a more indirect way of influencing people based on the attraction of ideas and culture. The exercise of soft power can involve political instruments

such as foreign policy, but also relies to a large extent on the dissemination of cultural output of various types (e.g. films, novels, games).

The strategic use of such cultural media such in soft-power initiatives in the Asia-Pacific region has had a demonstrable effect on tourism, for instance, with overseas enthusiasts travelling to visit the production studios of popular television series and movies (Seaton & Yamamura, 2015). Popular culture content articulated in films, novels and games can stimulate travel to the destinations associated with them, since they create an emotional bond to the place (Lundberg & Lexhagen, 2014). In this way, innovative soft-power strategies can be significant tools for building positive impressions, counteracting negative impressions and gaining cultural power within the region. For example, East Asian soft-power leaders such as China, Japan and South Korea have developed several initiatives to promote the teaching of their languages world-wide.

The Japanese government provides substantial support for the promotion of Animation, Comic and Game (ACG) culture (Ahlner, 2006; Hinton, 2014), as manifested for instance in the “Cool Japan” initiative, launched in 2012 by the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), with the goal of promoting Japan through content such as anime, comics, television dramas, films and novels (Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism et al., 2005), as well as fashion, food, lifestyle and tourism (METI, 2012). Japan adopts a public-private partnership approach to disseminating its contemporary pop and sub-cultures (Heng, 2010), and employs strategies of cooperation with other regional animation centres such as Singapore and Hong Kong in anime and manga production (Ministry of Foreign Affairs [MOFA] of Japan, 2007; Martin, 2009). It is argued that such anime and pop-culture content has the ability to strengthen the economic conditions of many states (Jacobsen, 2014). While Calcagnini et al. (2011) are sceptical of the ability of such strategies to rescue Japan’s economy, the new and cooler image of Japan projected to the world (Nye, 1990) and more specifically to its regional markets, has been well embraced in places throughout the Asia-Pacific region, such as Hong Kong.

Japan remains among the favourite destinations for travellers from Hong Kong (Zuji, 2016). According to the Japan National Tourism Organization (2017), over 2 million tourists from Hong Kong visited Japan in 2017, equivalent to about 29% of Hong Kong’s total population. For the purpose of maintaining and growing the number of visitors from this significant source market, the Japan National Tourism Organization has introduced

various promotional events and advertisements in Hong Kong (Tourism Commission, 2008). In the context of the “Visit Japan” promotional campaign in Hong Kong, talks by famous speakers promoted the virtues of Japan as a destination, and the venerable and well-known Japanese comic character Hello Kitty was selected as the official “representative” of the campaign (Japan National Tourism Organization, 2010). The anime content of such promotional endeavours appeals primarily to younger Hong Kong citizens, the so-called “Generation Y” (Lam, 2010), inspired by the high popularity of Japanese anime such as “Attack on Titan” among the youth of Hong Kong (Blum, 2013).

There have been recent studies on pop culture tourism (e.g. Sabre, 2017) and anime pilgrimage in particular (e.g. Sugawa-Shimada, 2015), and a handful have empirically examined the influence of anime consumption on tourism, such as a study by Kasai and Hsu (2012), which suggests that the desire to visit Japan is higher among people with higher Japanese anime involvement. Tung, Lee and Hudson (2017) argue that while studies on the commercial and cultural impact of Japanese anime abound, research on the influence of anime in mainstream tourism research is only recently emerging. In addition, previous studies have tended to be theoretical rather than empirical with few if any providing evidence of how such soft-power strategies induce travel (Gill & Huang, 2006; Lam, 2007; Heng, 2010). For example, Heng (2010) provides a critical evaluation of soft-power strategies of China and Japan based on Nye’s framework without empirical evidence of its conclusions.

This research seeks to address this knowledge gap with an empirical analysis on the influence of anime in encouraging members of Hong Kong’s Generation Y to travel to Japan. Endeavouring to understand the nuances of the effect of anime as an element of Japan’s soft power may not only provide insights into the effectiveness of strategies encouraging the consumption of Japanese anime abroad, but can also contribute to the knowledge of how such tools could be used to stimulate travel among the younger generation. In line with Yamamura’s (2015) call to expand research on the growing Japanese trend of “content tourism” around such pop cultural outputs as anime and manga, the two main research questions for this paper are : “To what extent does anime watching induce members of Hong Kong’s Generation Y to desire to travel to Japan?” And are the motivations for travel different among Hong Kong Generation Y? Consequently, the two main objectives of the study are to examine how anime inspires travel intentions among

Hong Kong's Generation Y and subsequent differences within this generation, contributing to the discourse on anime and travel motivation.

Literature Review

Soft Power

According to Nye (2004a, p. 5) soft power involves “getting others to want the outcomes that you want”. Soft power works through co-option rather than coercion, making it distinct from hard power's application of coercive instruments such as sanctions, economic or military power. The excessive application of hard power techniques may actually lead to a reduction of the effectiveness of such techniques in many spheres of business activities (McClory, 2015), necessitating a broader range of approaches. Soft power prioritizes the projection of an attractive image of a state's culture and policies to the outside world in a distinctive manner, disseminating a country's unique values and beliefs (Otmazgin, 2014). The US Congressional Research Service (2008) identifies travel and tourism as one significant way to achieve influence by bringing members of foreign publics into contact with the national culture in ways that encourage positive associations. Ooi (2015) asserts that tourism can promote the goals of soft power in various aspects such as increasing the understanding of a destination and improving destination image.

Nye (1990) identifies four facets of soft power deployment, namely: resources, transmission, reception and outcome. Resources encapsulate a country's cultural assets, values, norms and economic assets. Arndt (2005) argues that cultural assets provide the most effective channel through which to exert soft power and develop relationships with other nations. Culture in this sense could be categorized into two segments: high culture and popular culture. High culture can be exemplified by cultural products such as fine art and literature, as promoted through conventional cultural institutions (William, 1974), whereas popular culture refers to primarily commercial entertainment products appealing to a mass audience, such as movies, TV programs and other media artefacts (Eklind & Gracia Tjong, 2016). Animation in general, and Japanese anime in particular, is generally considered as an aspect of popular culture (Macias & Machiyama, 2004). Popular culture is promoted through various mass media and tends to both exemplify and influence the norms, ideas, and perspectives of the cultural mainstream or sub-cultures (Fiske, 1989). Popular culture can be highly efficacious in influencing people's values and attitudes. Moreover, popular culture also has a political facet (Street, 1997). According to Nye (1990),

popular culture can convey messages about a country's values, and can have an enormous impact on the culture, values and perspectives of citizens of other countries who consume such products.

Li (2008) reports on statements by Chinese leaders affirming the deployment of cultural assets in their nation's soft-power strategies. However, some scholars raise concerns that over-dominance of the state as a transmitter of soft-power may raise propaganda suspicions which may act counter to the purpose of attracting others (Nye, 1990). Others have proposed a pragmatic approach that unites public and private initiatives (Newcomb, 2008). As an example of this latter approach, in 2006 Taro Aso, Japanese Minister of Cultural Affairs, made known his country's adoption of a public-private approach to creating a softer image of Japan in East Asia through its contemporary arts and culture (Iwabuchi, 2011, p. 270). This was followed in 2007 by the creation of the International Manga Award, with the aim of promoting the spread of manga content to the international market. As of 2015, entrants from about 46 countries in Asia, Africa, Europe, North America and the Middle East competed for this award. Essentially, Japan has created a way of simultaneously absorbing foreign influence and maintaining its traditional cultural assets. Japan has adopted anime as an important tool of spreading its pop culture throughout the Asia-Pacific Region and to the world, and it is believed anime can facilitate the promotion of an image of Japan as a creative and "cool" place to visit (Heng, 2010).

Brief Hong Kong Culture

Hong Kong represents a unique geopolitical setting imbued with a unique culture that is not found anywhere. Culturally, Hong Kong represents a free and diversified society although historically, Hong Kong at its colonial stage was snatched by British and later won by the People's Republic of China (PRC) paving way for the "one country, two systems" systems' constitutional principle developed by Deng Xiaoping where the socialist ideology in China is contradicted by capitalist economic and political systems in special administrative regions such as Hong Kong (Yiu-wai, 2010; Hong Kong SAR Government, 2014). Yet within this diverse geopolitical circumstance, Hong Kong represents a fulcrum for understanding Chinese-ness and Western culture simultaneously. Hong Kong also represents a cultural hub for Cantonese culture but in a modern and multicultural manner producing its uniqueness within the Asian region (Louie, 2010). This modernization ties

in with the “New” East Asia that seeks to foster world cities such as Tokyo, Hong Kong, Seoul, and Singapore as assets in capitalist development. There is indeed, a growing need for a shared vision of everyday urban life through regional cultural productions of films that foster economic development between Hong Kong and other East Asian regions. With Hong Kong’s cosmopolitan cultural attributes, it becomes receptive to other foreign cultural productions in comics and animation such as those from Japan. Currently, Hong Kong remains one of the top consumption centers for Japanese comics and animation in Asia (Wai-ming, 2002). Such notable cultural development through film production such as anime in Hong Kong is of great importance to the current study (Wee, 2010).

Anime Tourism in Japan

Japan remains an Asian giant in the use of latent soft power (McGray, 2002; Nye, 2004b). Japan’s experience in the use of soft power may be seen as related to constitutional and legal barriers to its application of hard power strategies, particularly the exercise of military might (Nye, 1990). Hence, Japan is determined to enhance its soft power through the spreading of a variety of popular culture content such as anime (animated films) and manga (comic books) (Denison, 2010). As echoed by Okamoto (2015, p.12), “the language of anime tourism... now permeates government policy documents” in Japan. Anime has become a tool for promoting Japan to other countries because it is a convenient channel for spreading Japanese culture (Layers, 2010; Norris, 2010). The dissemination of anime as a cultural diplomacy product worldwide has aroused the desire of people around the world to better acquaint themselves with Japanese culture (Napier, 2007).

Although the words anime and manga are sometimes used interchangeably, they are distinct in that anime refers to a variety of Japanese animated media forms (Napier, 2011), whereas manga refers to comic books (Norris, 2009). Anime and manga are interrelated in that most anime films originate from popular manga series (e.g. *Astro Boy* and *Akira*). The attractiveness of manga and anime to a wide swathe of cultures and ethnicities lies in part in the nature of its content, which employs a mixture of elements from different popular cultures brought together in the Japanese context. For instance, certain anime stories are rooted in popular films from the Chinese (e.g. *Dragon Ball* from the Chinese movie *Journey to the West*) or Western (e.g. *Norakuro* from the American cartoon *Felix the Cat*) contexts. Japanese anime is notable, and distinct from other forms of animation, in its complex storylines and its engagement with often profound themes of human existence,

incorporating a variety of thematic genres such as romance (e.g. *the Rose of Versailles*), adventure (e.g. *One Piece*), female empowerment (e.g. *Sailor Moon*), sexuality and violence (e.g. *Goku: Midnight Eye*). It is by virtue of its subsumption of a wide variety of popular culture genres that the growth of anime and manga artworks have received global recognition, permeating many cultures (Norris, 2009; Napier, 2011).

Zanghellini (2009) argues that the popularity of anime and manga entertainment in Japan is associated with the jargon “cute” (*kawaii*) which became a popular concept around the 1980s. Moreover, both Newitz (1994) and Okamoto (2015) explain the spread of a sub-cultural phenomenon of male fans of anime visiting Japan called “*Otaku* tourism”. *Otaku* denotes an obsession with a particular topic, typically computers or pop culture content such as anime. This degree of anime obsession is for the most part associated with a subset of the Generation Y group, also known as millennials (born between 1981 and 2002) (Erickson, 2008; Karefalk, Petterssen & Zhu, 2007; Dimache, Wondirad & Agyeiwaah, 2017). This obsession emanates from certain distinguishing features of this millennial group, who tend to be technologically savvy and rely on information technology as a medium for communicating with others. They are the Internet lovers and their post-modern behaviour is such that they seek satisfaction without necessarily desiring direct interaction with other people. Accordingly, they exhibit high exclusivity in their communication patterns, such that gathering with interested fans with similar preferences is a common behaviour (Okamoto, 2015).

An analysis of Hong Kong Generation Y reaffirms such characteristics. For the most part, the interest of this generation in Japanese anime is aroused by media such as television. The Hong Kong broadcaster TVB (Television Broadcasts Limited), began operation in 1967 but due to a lack of home-grown drama content, imported Japanese animation throughout the 1970s to fill air time for its weekend slots (Nakano, 2009). With the growing popularity of Japanese anime among young Hong Kong audiences of these shows, more Japanese animation came to be broadcast in the after-school time slot (Zo, 2006). More recently, Japanese animation films and series make up the majority of the animation programs broadcast on Hong Kong’s television channels, which indicates the local familiarity with, and demand for, such content. Sino Centre, in Hong Kong’s Mong Kok district, has a huge number of shops selling Japanese popular culture products. Around one-quarter of the shops are related to anime (Otmazgin, 2014) with most consumers in

their youth, indicating that Hong Kong's Generation Y is accustomed to spending time and money on the consumption of anime and related products.

Given these established connections between anime and Hong Kong's Generation Y, this group constitutes an ideal focus for the study of how consumption of this pop cultural medium affects desire to travel to Japan for youth in an East Asian context, a question on which there has to date been scant empirical investigation.

The motivation for Anime Tourism: How does anime consumption induce travel?

Motivation refers to the internal force that inspires human action (Berkman & Gilson, 1978). Motivation is defined by personal needs and wants that play an important role in determining a person's preferences and intentions (Crompton & McKay, 1997). As one purpose of travel and tourism is to allow individuals to lower the stress associated with unfulfilled travel needs and motives (Kim & Ritchie, 2012), a central concern of destination management organizations should be to maximize tourists' satisfaction and fulfill their travel expectations by understanding and responding to the motives that lead tourists to seek out their particular destination (Pearson & Sullivan, 1995).

Travel motivation studies have been conducted to understand visitors' needs from various perspectives (Dann, 1977, 1981; Iso-Ahola, 1982; Pearce, 1988; Fodness, 1994; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Classic research on this topic includes studies by Dann (1977, 1981), which propose that both "push" and "pull" factors play a role in the formation of motivations. Push factors refer to internal psychological needs inspiring a desire for travel whereas pull factors refer to destination characteristics that draw the individual to a particular place. Iso-Ahola (1982) examines travel motivations with the conclusion that escaping from one's everyday personal concerns is a major stimulant of travel. Pearce (1988) applied Maslow's (1970) motivation theory with the conclusion that travel follows a career ladder that resonates with the hierarchy of needs.

Hudson and Ritchie (2006) argued for the need to bring a visitor motivation perspective to the study of film tourism to address a knowledge gap among DMOs. With its focus on the relationship between anime films and travel motivation, this research contributes to the addressing of this gap.

Two antecedents are essential to facilitate anime tourism. First, an engagement with anime is needed to arouse familiarity with the medium and positive impressions of

Japanese culture. Second, the anime fan needs to acquire information on Japan as a destination to be aware of the attractions and experiences on offer that evoke connections to the anime content in which he or she is interested. Such information could be gained either from cues in the anime content itself, through word-of-mouth or via other media, but without the existence of such motivational triggers, anime travel may be unlikely to occur (Okamoto, 2015). The extant literature supports the assertion that anime could inspire the desire to travel to a particular destination. For instance, Manion's (2005) study of young American anime fans suggests that anime plays a major role in stimulating their interest in Japan.

Okamoto (2015) identifies three types of anime tourism among interested fans. The first such group consists of "pioneer pilgrimage travellers" who make their own travel plans and select locations after watching anime. The pioneer group relies solely on landmarks and photos from anime films to find their locations, with the help of other internet applications such as Google Maps. The second group consists of individuals who rely on information posted by members of this pioneer group on blogs and other websites. The final group are those who identify anime locations by relying on information provided through daily news or mass media sources. Thus, information sources play an important role in positioning a destination image in the minds of viewers who do not have past travel experience to that destination (Kasai & Hsu, 2012). In this way, anime viewing itself encourages people to travel to the destination, but many also rely on additional information from websites and mass media (Aaker, 1991). Kasai and Hsu (2012) found that anime involvement creates favourable cognitive and affective images that stimulate a desire to travel. Similarly, an exploratory study by Sugawa-Shimada (2015) on Japanese *rekijo* (history fan girls) suggest that heritage tourism could be induced by anime as this group visits historical sites that appear in anime.

Tung, et al. (2017) note that the three cinematic aspects of place, protagonist and production, upon which destination marketing organizations (DMOs) can draw in the promotion of destinations related to films in general, also apply to anime specifically, remarking that anime is further distinguished by its fantasy-oriented nature, the important role that its content plays in identity formation of its fans, and the possibility of extending its appeal into the "kidult" market segment. Yet some scholars remain sceptical of the ability of anime watching to induce travel. For instance, Whang, Yong and Ko (2016) claim that, while popular culture can improve the image of a destination, it cannot motivate

tourism directly. Nonetheless, Rittichainuwat and Rattanaphinanchai (2015) examined travel motivations among three types of film tourists namely, serendipitous tourists, specific film tourists, and general film tourists, and found that even though destination awareness is created through a successful film among all tourists, identifying a favourite film motivate film tourists to travel. In this case, films have the capacity to induce travel provided they align with visitor's preference.

Recent studies on tourism among Hong Kong's Generation Y have found that this group's members are attracted to Japan by both traditional and popular Japanese culture. For example, Xu and Tavitiyaman's (2016) study revealed that *Doraemon*, a famous Japanese anime in Hong Kong, is one of the pull motivators among youth visiting Japan. In addition, the authors identified other important pull factors that explain why Hong Kong youth like to visit Japan such as Japan's "natural wonders, man-made attractions and events," "traditional culture" and "the hospitality and shopping opportunities (p.17). In line with Xu and Tavitiyaman's (2016) study, the current research developed items that represent the ability of films to motivate travel among tourists from Hong Kong to Japan.

Despite the foregoing arguments, little empirical examination exists on the relationship between the extent and nature of a particular young person's involvement with anime and inducement to want to visit Japan, raising questions such as whether there is a relationship between time spent consuming anime and travel intentions, and whether a threshold exists beyond which involvement with anime is likely to lead to motivation to visit Japan. Such knowledge of the extent of the potential role of anime in motivating travel would be useful to destination management and marketing organizations, as well as in broader soft power pop culture promotion initiatives.

Methods

Sampling and instrument design

The approach used in this study was quantitative, which enables the application of statistical analysis. Saunders et al. (2012) argue that this approach can assist the researcher in understanding facts and identifying patterns in the data, with Bowling (2002) and Greenhalgh (1997) both adding that the approach can verify relationships between variables and calculate the frequency of observation, whereby the researcher must remain

attentive to the correct application of these methods in order to avoid researcher bias (Carr, 1994). In line with the chosen approach, a convenience sampling technique was used to obtain the target respondents. This technique has been designated as appropriate in instances where the population of the target audience is too large to get a list of all of its individual members (Doherty, 1994).

Prior to the convenience selection of respondents, a survey instrument was designed, divided into five different parts. The first was a set of screening questions meant to exclude respondents who do not belong to the target group of Hong Kong Generation Y anime consumers. In this case, respondents were asked if they were Hong Kong citizens, whether they were born within the period between 1981 and 2002 (Howe & Strauss, 1997; Erickson, 2008) and whether they have watched anime before. The second section examined respondents' past travel to Japan, if any, and the purpose thereof. The third section used a five-point Likert scale to determine the relative importance of different push and pull factors in respondents' motivation to visit. The fourth section examined respondents' anime watching habits, in terms of the type of anime watched and the amount of time devoted to this activity, as well as respondents' perception of the influence of their anime consumption on their image of Japan and their desire to travel to Japan. These questions were developed with reference to previous studies on motivation such as those by Xu and Tavitiyaman (2016), Rittichainuwat and Rattanaphinanchai (2015), and Yoon and Uysal, (2005). The fifth and final section was devoted to the collecting of essential personal information of the respondents.

Prior to data collection, a pilot test was conducted to check the validity of the questions as well as their clarity for the target respondents. This stage helped clarify ambiguities and remove any bias in the primary data collection instrument (Hertzog, 2008). About 40 questionnaires were pre-tested in late December 2016 in Hong Kong's Mong Kok and Yau Ma Tei districts, at locations known for anime-related shops, such as In's Point and Sino Centre (Otmazgin, 2014). After the pilot test was completed, the questionnaire was fine-tuned based on respondents' comments to facilitate the data collection for the main study.

Data collection and analysis procedures

This study is part of a larger project on anime among Generation Y in Hong Kong. Data collection was led by the second author with assistance from the other two authors. The data collection procedure started by identifying specific locations at which to engage

members of the target group. Consequently, data collection took place at two large anime-related events in 2017, namely *Comic World Hong Kong* (CWHK) and *C3 in Hong Kong*. CWHK was held on 5 February, 2017 at the Kowloon Bay International Trade & Exhibition Centre (CWHK, 2017) whereas C3 in Hong Kong 2017 took place 10-12 February, 2017 at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre (Good Smile Company, 2017). The selection of these events and venues for data collection facilitated access to a large and concentrated number of members of the target group. About 230 questionnaires were distributed with the end results yielding 208 usable questionnaires. Prior to administering the questionnaire, a screening questions on respondents age was asked (Do you belong to Generation Y age group? (Generation Y: Born between 1981 to 2002)) to confirm that the selected respondents belong to the group under examination (Erickson, 2008; Karefalk, Petterssen & Zhu, 2007). For that reason, data analysis do not include age as all respondents are classified under same Generation Y group born between 1981 and 2002 with an approximated age range of 16 and 37 years. This approach was necessary to avoid repetition of questions which can translate into respondents' lack of interest in the study. The data from the completed questionnaires were further inspected and analyzed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Since our instrument was designed purposely to test for differences two procedures of Cluster analysis and ANOVA analysis were employed. Before the cluster analysis, an initial descriptive analysis was conducted on the relevant variables in line with the objectives of the study. Two-step cluster analysis that allows clustering of categorical data was adopted since it has the ability to overcome the weaknesses of other clustering algorithms such as k-means (Bacher, et al., 2004). Cluster analysis has proven to be a useful tool in testing theoretical models in research in combination with other techniques (Ketchen & Shook, 1996). The clustering was done based on the frequency of watching anime and preference for Japanese anime with the end results yielding four groups. The four identified groups were compared along their different motivation items to identify how the different anime viewing habits of these groups relate to their propensity to want to travel to Japan. The detailed findings are presented subsequently.

Findings

Demographic characteristics

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of respondents. Given that age was used as a screening question, all respondents belong to the Generation Y age bracket and no further questions on age was requested to avoid redundancy. The remaining demographic characteristic responses show that a slight majority of respondents were female, representing about 51.4% of the sample, with the remaining 48.6% being males. The majority of respondents held a Bachelor degree or higher academic qualification (43.8%), followed by those with Associate degrees (35.1%) and Secondary education (21.2%). The most represented income bracket of the respondents (40.4%) was HK\$10,000 –19,999 (~US\$1,280 – 2,560) monthly income, followed by about 38.5% in the HK\$20,000 – 29,999 (~US\$2,560 – 3,840) range. Thus, a typical respondent could be described as a female with a Bachelor degree with about HK\$20,000 of monthly income. While some studies have identified male dominance in Japanese anime interest groups in the American context (Newitz, 1994), other studies such as those by Choo (2008) report how Japanese *Shōjo manga* such as the *Peach Girl* has risen in the global market with its content reconstructing the role of femininity in the Asian context, addressing the issue of gender stereotypes in a passive but effective manner. Such female-centred narratives may account for the preponderance of female Hong Kong Generation Y respondents among the sample. Interestingly, the degree of previous travel experience identified by the survey differs between male and female respondents, with more of the latter having visited Japan than of the former. Females respondents tended to watch more different anime series yearly than their male counterparts (Table 1), while males were more likely than females to fall into the segment spending the most time watching anime, more than three hours weekly. The study also identified seven purposes for visiting Japan (Table 2), with the top three being animation, leisure and food.

<<INSERT TABLE 1 HERE>>

<<INSERT TABLE 2 HERE>>

Relationship between anime watching habits and desire to travel

Clustering of respondents

As one of the main purpose of the study was to determine how anime watching relates to desire to travel to Japan, based on the extant literature's argument that the degree of involvement (i.e. the frequency of watching anime) plays a major role in travel motivation, questions relating to the frequency of watching Japanese anime were asked. The categorical responses regarding respondents' choice of Japanese anime and the frequency of anime watching were subjected to a two-step cluster analysis, which is useful for identifying patterns within both categorical and continuous data sets (Shih, Jheng & Lai, 2010). The initial computation revealed an excellent statistical fit of the variables used, with silhouette measure of cohesion and separation recording as high as 0.8 (Figure 1) (Kaufman & Rousseeuw, 1990). The cluster sizes were acceptable, with the smallest cluster size being 38 (18.3%) and the largest cluster size being 65 (31.2%). The ratio of sizes was appropriate at 1.71 for the largest cluster to smallest cluster (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2011).

Four main clusters were identified, defined in terms of affinities in interest in Japanese anime and frequency of watching Japanese anime. The clusters are named accordingly in order of interest as *Enthusiastic* (20.7%), *Interested* (31.2%), *Low-viewers* (29.8%) and *Indifferent* (18.3%). In detail, *Enthusiastic* respondents watch Japanese anime with the highest frequency, with a tendency to spend 3 hours or more per week on this activity. They could be regarded as the group that invests the most significant amount of time in anime consumption. The largest number of the respondents fall into the second cluster, the *Interested*, who watch Japanese anime from one to three hours per week. The third cluster, the *Low-viewers*, watch Japanese anime, but at a lower rate than their *Enthusiastic* and *Interested* counterparts (Figure 1 and Table 3). The final cluster, the *Indifferent*, watch anime other than Japanese, and for less than 30 minutes weekly. They are not particularly interested in Japanese anime and have low interest in anime in general.

<<INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE>>

<<INSERT TABLE 3 HERE>>

Testing reliability of motivation items

To assess the reliability of the motivation measurement items used, a Cronbach's alpha reliability test was conducted before further analyses of variance computation. The test indices show statistically reliable motivation items adapted from the literature (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.86). Column four of Table 4 provides further evidence that each of the statements is valid as a measure of motivation to visit Japan.

The mean of responses to all items was between 3.04 and 3.57 (with 3 corresponding to Neutral and 4 to Agree), indicating an overall slight to somewhat high tendency for respondents to perceive that their consumption of anime increases their positive association with Japanese culture, their desire to discover more about Japan and their motivation to travel to Japan in general, and for specific purposes linked directly to anime, with the highest means associated with anime watching motivating desire to visit Japan for anime events ($M = 3.52$) and for other anime-related pilgrimage activities ($M = 3.57$). However, given the different degrees of anime watching among respondents within different clusters, it would be mistaken to assume that all respondents are equally motivated to visit Japan through anime watching. Consequently, in line with objective two of this study, further analysis based on One-way analysis of variance is used to identify the differences with regards to the four clusters identified in the earlier analysis.

<<INSERT TABLE 4 HERE>>

The results of this further stage of analysis that involved ANOVA are shown in Table 5. This analysis affirms earlier findings that those who consume anime are motivated to travel to Japan and possess a positive image about the destination (Okamoto, 2015), while also demonstrating that this positive effect is dependent upon, and somewhat proportional to, the extent of one's involvement with anime in terms of time spent. Consequently, a high reported influence in terms of the image about Japan, and willingness to travel to Japan for anime related events and pilgrimage was identified among the *Enthusiastic* ($M = 4.53$) and the *Interested* ($M = 3.63$) clusters who watch Japanese anime for at least one hour weekly, whereas the *Low-viewers* ($M = 2.35$) and the *Indifferent* ($M = 3.18$) showed markedly lower propensities to feel such an influence. Similarly, in terms of motivation to visit anime related attractions in Japan, the *Enthusiastic* ($M = 4.00$) and the *Interested* ($M = 3.72$) are significantly more highly motivated than the *Low-viewers* ($M = 2.65$) and the *Indifferent* ($M = 3.05$). This trend is seen in statements related to travelling to Japan to witness anime

events as well as learning more about Japan. Counterintuitively, for both of these items, and indeed for all other items measured in this study as well, the *Low-viewers*, who watch Japanese anime less than 30 minutes weekly actually exhibit a significantly lower tendency than the *Indifferent* (who watch no Japanese anime, and little anime of any kind) to feel that their anime viewing influences their image of Japan or their desire to travel there.

While previous literature has found that interest in anime can inspire an interest in Japanese culture more broadly (Manion, 2005), the present study did not find that any level of anime consumption corresponds to an actual increase in depth of understanding of Japanese culture, with all groups reporting a more or less neutral influence (2.85 – 3.25).

People described in Japanese as *otaku* engage in a particular activity to the level of obsession, often constituting their own sub-culture in society (Newitz, 1994). They are sometimes seen by those in the mainstream as socially maladjusted or even mentally unbalanced. It is largely members of this sub-cultural group who undertake pilgrimages to destinations associated with particular anime films. In terms of the clusters identified in this study, “anime *otaku*” (Newitz, 1994) fans of Japanese animation would for the most part be identified among the *Enthusiastic*, possibly overlapping into the *Interested* category of anime consumers. This implies that, in the case under study, these particular soft power artefacts can have an influence on travel behaviour only through continuous engagement with the medium.

<<INSERT TABLE 5>>

Discussion and Conclusion

Soft power is exercised through attraction and positive associations, and people have a high degree of freedom as to whether to engage or not with the medium through which this attraction is generated, and over the extent and nature of their engagement (Nye, 1990). Such freedom could be seen in the varying degrees and different ways that respondents in this study were found to be involved with Japanese anime (Manion, 2005). Each respondent in this research devoted a certain amount of time and attention to this medium, and these degrees of variance, from passing or peripheral interest to near obsession, plays an important role in determining the extent to which this medium is able to impact on the viewer and potentially induce him or her to desire to travel to Japan, and to particular

destinations (Okamoto, 2015). Thus, the four identified clusters provide empirical evidence of the relation between extent of involvement and inducement to desire to visit Japan. The fanatic group of the *Enthusiastic* are regularly involved with Japanese anime and the associated pop culture and exhibit high interest in anime-related events, anime attractions and Japan as an anime destination. As Manion (2005) found in her study of American anime fans, there is a high level of interest instilled in youth who engage in Japanese anime such that the understanding and image of Japan is to a significant extent informed by the content and information given through such anime. It is this exposure to Japanese pop culture through continuous involvement with this medium that induces the interest to visit the destination by the *Enthusiastic* as they become obsessed with anime.

The *Interested* cluster shares common characteristics with the *Enthusiastic*. While members of the former group watch Japanese anime less than the latter, the level of engagement of the *Interested* cluster is sufficient to induce a pronounced interest in visiting Japan. Other than the question on gaining an understanding of Japanese culture through anime, for which all groups were more or less neutral, the mean of responses to all questions from the *Interested* group varied from just over 3.5 to just under 4.0. Hence, this group possesses a high level of desire to know more about Japan and is in particular motivated to visit anime events, implying a positive effect of consistent consumption of Japanese anime on the instilling of a positive interest in Japan as a culture and a travel destination.

The case is different among the other identified groups. The *Low-viewer* group, who watch Japanese anime, but only 30 minutes to one hour per week on average, are without exception lower than Neutral in all of their mean responses. Surprisingly, this places their responses even lower than those of the *Indifferent* group, who have the lowest rate of anime watching and tend to watch anime other than Japanese. The mean responses from the *Indifferent* group, while consistently lower than those of *Interested* respondents, are still all above the Neutral (3.0) mark, and thus higher than the *Low-viewers*. This indicates a slight but measurable tendency of the *Indifferent* group to feel that watching anime positively impacts on their impressions of Japan and tendency to want to travel there.

The findings of this research thus indicate a marked threshold at around one hour of anime viewing per week, beyond which there is a significant rise in many of what may be considered as indicators of soft-power influence on the viewer, in terms of curiosity about Japanese culture and desire to visit Japan. Those with no habit of consistent Japanese anime

viewing are around neutral in this regard while those who view Japanese anime with low consistency tend to disagree slightly that their anime viewing habits positively influence their opinion of Japan at all.

The extant literature confirms that some parents and teachers disapprove of the watching of anime among the younger generation (Manion, 2005), due to its often-sexualized portrayals and the idealized notion of romance (Newitz, 1994). Such attitudes from respected people in society could be a factor in damping the level of involvement among some members of the younger generation, particularly in Asian societies in which parents and teachers tend to be accorded much respect (Cheng & Wong, 1996). Perhaps some members of the *Low-viewers* are affected by such factors, both in their low viewing habits and in their lack of tendency to feel positive associations with Japan. In the case of those whose consumption habits are influenced by these perceived societal norms, anime may not engender a positive perception of Japan and may to a certain extent encourage negative perceptions, acting counter to the goals of the exercise of soft power through popular culture. Whether the viewing habits of those who make up the *Indifferent* and *Low-viewers* groups are indeed influenced by these societal factors, and whether this in turn leads to negative perceptions of Japan are beyond the scope of the present study, but are relevant questions for future research.

In the case studied in the present research, there are strong indications that measures that promote increased consumption of anime, as an instrument of Japanese soft power, could indeed play a role in motivating youth to desire to visit Japan. Merely casual engagement with the medium is not sufficient to influence such a desire, but with increasing exposure the desire to visit also tends to increase. This knowledge has the potential to contribute to informing government, policy makers and DMOs in understanding the potential that promotion of one aspect of Japanese soft power (anime) abroad can encourage positive associations of Japanese culture among youth, and can also have a knock-on effect in encouraging success in another milieu in which soft power is exercised: tourism. As competition among tourism destinations increases in the Asia-Pacific region, understanding these nuances can provide a valuable marketing advantage.

The findings thus imply that regular anime involvement has the potential to engender cognitive associations that can induce travel among those involved in regular viewing. This study supports findings by Kasai and Hsu (2012) and raises further implications for how anime content could be used in destination marketing to create positive destination images

among viewers globally. In terms of theory, the study proposes a framing of travel motivation in terms of the dynamics of soft power and gives detailed articulation to the way that a specific medium – Japanese anime – serves as a conduit for soft power influence on a particular population: Hong Kong’s Generation Y. In practical terms, it provides an empirically-grounded segmentation of anime consumers that links degrees of anime consumption with motivation to travel, which has implications for the targeted marketing of destinations as well as the diffusion of anime content as a component of governmental soft power initiatives.

Because the study was limited to 208 Generation Y respondents, no claim is made as to the statistical validity of the quantitative findings across the entire anime consumer population of Hong Kong. Also, the use of convenience sampling technique means that the selection did not follow a quantitative random procedure and hence the potential of researchers’ bias is acknowledged. However, the narrowly defined demographic profile of viable respondents means that the range of variance caused by any such bias is reduced. Additionally, the study provides a snapshot of anime and tourism in the Hong Kong context which may be different in other Asian markets, and even more so in countries in the West in which anime is consumed.

This research has investigated the link between anime consumption and motivation to travel. The extent to which such motivation leads to actual travel, and whether this is affected by the anime consumption habits of a given individual, is a topic for future research, as is the question of the extent to which the desire of these individuals to consume anime is influenced by any intentional soft power initiatives such as the “Cool Japan” campaign. Further studies into such questions could allow insights to DMOs and government agencies involved in pop-culture-driven soft power campaigns to positively influence foreign public perception of a nation and subsequent motivation to visit.

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