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## **Psychological Effects of Anime on Younger Audiences in India**

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**Abstract:** As an art form anime is currently one of the most accessed and produced forms of digital entertainment. And increased consumption invites for measures for the viewers' well being. This study examines the psychological and general effects of anime consumption in Indian younger audiences including children and adolescents. The effects have both risks and benefits involved. Drawing on concepts of Parasocial Interaction, Cartoon Character Syndrome and Social Learning theory, this study explores how anime factors in the development of young audiences. Assessing Indian market context, real life implications of anime and drawing from existing research this study provides possible regulatory strategies that are adaptable and applicable within India's unique social structure like parental guidance and media literacy.

**Keywords :** Anime, Adolescents, Parasocial Interaction, OTT, Social Learning Theory.

Anime, a popular Japanese digital art-form that has spread across the globe rapidly in the last two decades. Even though it started from Japan, in current times China, Korea and similar countries are producing anime that have similar aesthetic and narrative tropes. Cultural elements fused with unique aesthetics Anime popular among the younger generation and India is no exception. Anime provides entertainment but alongside holds strong influence over emotional and behavioral growth, forming perspective towards life and shaping personalities. It has both reward and repercussions. In an expanding market space like India's, anime holds strong market share and as a part of life for a section of the population it holds influence. Therefore, it becomes necessary to understand the effects of anime on youth in Indian context and for which an in-depth study is required of anime's complex applications and implications. This study will explore the various effects of the art form on its audience and help provide methods of filtration for the benefits while reducing the shortcomings.

In the age of technological advancements, the rise in the consumption of digital entertainment products are evident. The OTT platforms and Television network has made digital art accessible across borders. One such cultural product is Anime, a popular medium of narrative storytelling that is consumed world wide by all



groups of audiences. India as a sub-continent has a densely packed population which makes it a big consumer base for anime. The growing popularity of anime in the younger masses of the country is at an all time high. India is seeing fan conventions, social media communities and many OTT platforms providing access to anime and favoring its popularity. However, Indian youth's passion for the art form makes it susceptible to its ill-effects that range from changes in daily routines and unhealthy screen times to behavioral changes and long term addiction and in severe cases depression and social isolation. Anime offers motivation, teaches diligence, encourages social connections, builds character but is also capable of causing depression, addiction and lower self-efficacy. Effective mostly in children and the ages of early adolescence, in the lack of supervision anime can become as problematic as online gaming and gambling platforms that are within the access of a population that is yet to mature. For this, it calls for supervision and collective awareness from parents, teachers and any such guardian figures with proper contextual understanding to mediate between the child and harmful content in the anime corpus. Anime can contain violent, sexual and provocative elements in various aspects which in an unfiltered form can harm the psychological well-being of a child in the stages of their identity formation. Anime in its psychological effects can be explored through the lens of *Parasocial interactions*, *Cartoon character syndrome* and Albert Bandura's *Social learning theory* is also applicable.

Anime is seeing growth from subculture to mainstream in Indian audiences, and the density is highest in metropolitan spaces like Bengaluru, Mumbai, Delhi, etc. Streaming platforms are investing in anime, like *Amazon Prime Video* which introduced *Anime Times* in 2023, *Netflix India* featured popular titles like *One Piece Film: Red*. *Crunchyroll* is an international streaming platform that launched in India in 2023 and is providing dubbed anime in Hindi, Tamil and Telugu. *Crunchyroll* reports expect 60% platform growth after expanding to India. Due to the 13% annual growth rate estimated within 2023 to 2028, India now is the second largest anime market globally after China (Singh Heena, bccresearch). The anime focused expansion is working numbers drawing from the total pool of 481 million OTT users in 2023 which is a 13.5% increase from 2022 but this is still only from 34% market penetration, indicating great growth potential. Surveys indicate that an average anime viewer can watch upto 60 minutes of anime daily ([Emma Shepherd](#), the Current). Regional language dubbing and availability makes anime accessible and more appealing. There are many free streaming services for anime like *Anilab*, *HiAnime*, *Animeflix*, *9anime* and platforms where anime



can be accessed from like *Telegram*. The engagement is now at an all time high due to anime being featured in TV. TV channels now feature anime in Hindi, Bengali and other regional languages across cultural boundaries making it relevant across various linguistic groups.

Anime features resonant themes and conforms to hero stereotypes. *Shonen* genre portrays young male protagonists facing adversities and through struggle gaining strength and success. *Slice of Life* genre portrays the mundane daily lives of individuals with often wholesome stories and characters that lighten the mood and brings joy to the viewer. *Sports* genre features intense teamwork, co-ordination and will power. With well written characters, layered narratives and serialized episodic storytelling, anime becomes resonant and relevant to the viewer. One of the reasons for which anime works in Indian digital space is the lack of compelling native works. With few to no competition locally, Japanese anime works well in the streaming platforms. In recent times, Chinese and Korean anime has also become quite popular due to closely similar visuals and storytelling but Japan still holds reign. Local animation production in India exists, but is still far off from Japanese and similar animation productions in scale. Hence in both quality and quantity anime stays in the spotlight. It is noteworthy that where India stays behind in production, it covers in collaboration through regional dubbing, subtitles and Television featuring. This shows future room for further rise, making the exploration of anime's effects on its viewers all the more timely.

Understanding the psychological impact of anime on young minds calls for exploration of some chief underlying processes that bridge media exposure to behavioral, emotional and cognitive effects. Three such processes are *Parasocial Interaction*, *Cartoon Character Syndrome* and *Social learning Theory*, all interrelated and at the same time can be individually present. The overlapping creates complex reception of anime among its audiences that are young, producing both positive and negative effects. Parasocial Interaction refers to one sided emotional connection that gives the illusion of intimacy that the audiences feel toward a fictional figure or persona which in this context would be an anime character. These characters are often masterfully developed, designed, be expressive, life-like and be featured over long episodic sequences which forge a bond between the character and the viewer (Harputlu Yamak et al).

Particularly in the adolescent, the accessibility of anime provided directly attributes to the OTT platforms and fan communities. The influence and hype revolving around any work of anime or any particular



anime character is intensified through common interest and discussion that fortifies the *parasocial interactions* regarding it. These sorts of fictional relation and relevance helps in emotional support, stress relief and even provides motivation just like a real life idol or idealized figure when the subject of admiration portrays empathy and perseverance (Lu and Zhang). However the same bond holds associated risks as explained in the same study by Lu and Zhang. Deeply forged connections with such fictional characters when in contact with social stigma can cause animosity, isolation and social withdrawal as personal choices vary person to person and in every community there are some taboos and stigmas. As a result the individual may be marginalized by peers and harbor negative psychological effects instead of the mentioned positive ones.

Cartoon Character Syndrome refer to a recurring pattern observed within a section of the viewers, particularly children who over identify with their idealized animated characters. This results in behavioral imitation which might or might not be age-appropriate or be acceptable in social or familial context. This may lead to unreal expectations or heightened transparency between fiction and reality which the under-developed mind can not tell apart resulting in emotional dependency, abnormal behaviour and temperamental issues in a child. In optimal scenarios the cartoon character syndrome helps planting good behaviour, habits and qualities in a growing child but to accomplish these results supervision is key. If unsupervised, may result in cognitive distortions.

Being subjective as it is, anime has distinctive stories and characters that are formulated around the themes of the story as the writer envisions. Due to the varying nature of their purposes, these characters often exaggerate heroism over personal safety, stylize violence and showcase absurd problem-solving beyond reason and rationale leaving lasting impressions on the young audiences. These traits motivate determination, sheer will, courage and similar positive epithets. But without proper parental guidance, the children start imitating their speech patterns, gestures, body language, problem solving strategies and even ideologies (Lu and Zhang) and sometimes these can be impractical or inappropriate causing social anxiety, avoidance or isolation as coping mechanism, reduced self-efficacy (Harputlu Yamak and Isik). In India context, the current generation of parents in all cases may not be familiar with anime yet. The art form entered the country awhile back but came into popularity not until recent years. Therefore the distinction of improper from proper works may be an early ask. And if peers do not share appreciation for the art then it risks feeding into existing stigma



that all animated content is bad for children.

Social Learning Theory was proposed by Albert Bandura in 1977. The theory advocates that learning occurs through agencies like observation, imitation and modelling that play key roles and reinforces the process. Anime is one such reinforcement, it models strategies for overcoming challenges, pursuing goals and forming social bonds. If these engagements bear fruit in the narrative then the individual is more likely to adopt them. As a positive outcome of the application of social learning theory in anime context, sports and *Shonen* or adventure anime often shows that hardwork pays off. Growth becomes the aftermath of persevering through adversity, making friends, working in teams and problem solving. These values then internalize in the viewer. But on the contrary, if aggression or antisocial activities are stylized, they could encourage rogue or aggressive behaviour, particularly in the young viewer margin with an underdeveloped media literacy (Lu and Zhang). Some anime works do promote individual heroism where the protagonist is alone and works alone or keeps to himself without much regard for others, which might promote extreme individualism in viewers. These three individual processes work together and are interconnected. Forming a bond with a character as parasocial interaction, imitating that character as cartoon character syndrome and adapting their thinking, their world view as social learning. Associated with these processes and also with some other independent variables, anime touches both extremes. And it is important to note that the effects are nor consistent nor guaranteed. Hence, only after keeping all these factors in mind can the effects be explored. Anime is a layered cultural product capable of influencing the development of its audiences. Moderate and age-appropriate consumption offers valuable psychological, behavioral, cognitive and social benefits in both children and adolescents depending on the nature of the anime, viewing context and parental control.

Anime offers escape and relief in the adolescent. The adolescent are faced with various sources of stress, academic, social, familial etc (Zuo, Wenbo). Vibrantly constructed worlds, life like characters and emotionally resonant plots offer mental refuge. *Parasocial Interaction* applies here as the audience develops a one-sided bond with the characters on screen which provides comfort and stability (Horton and Wohl). *Shonen* and *Sports anime* motivates viewers to overcome the challenges in their lives, instilling psychological resilience influenced from works like *Naruto* and *Haikyuu!!* where characters face repeated setbacks and their persistence causes growth in a competitive field (Lu and Zhang) resembling academic competition and social



environments in India. Anime characters serve as role models and influence behavioral traits like holding responsibility, creative problem solving and encouragement through its narratives as found in Social learning theory. Characters improving through practice and discipline inspire viewers to adapt their work ethics. These narratives promote constructive skills and these skills in turn are transferred into the real-world.

Along with prosocial ethics and traits, anime can also directly help form social bonds and community. Anime fandom is also growing with its accessibility in social spaces. Online forums, conventions, collaborative events, cosplay events, comic cons, all these social events of shared interests become meaningful for the social bonding of individuals. These gatherings, both digital and social greatly help people with introverted personalities who under normal circumstances find it hard to communicate with people. These spaces also promote cross-cultural exchange. The exposure to Japanese culture can encourage openness and cultural curiosity. The narrative complexity and visuals of anime help in multiple levels of skill building. Subtitled anime enhances English vocabulary and helps in learning basic Japanese terms and common mannerisms. Complex plots, branched narratives and moral dilemmas stimulate critical thinking, reasoning and ethical evaluation. Imaginative worlds, aesthetics, fictional characters inspire artistic endeavour and extends engagement. While it has positive applications, excessive screen time, age inappropriate content and unsupervised consumption of anime can result in negative effects that span the same domains as its positive ones. Problematic anime watching is corresponding to behavioral addictions that has been documented in clinical studies (Harputlu Yamak and Isik) where in cases of excessive viewing, compulsive addiction is born. This causes disruption of normalcy in daily life, neglect of responsibilities and excessive reliance on anime for emotional relief and individuals might start to seek escape in fictional world instead of facing reality which can be seen in *Cartoon Character Syndrome*.

Study shows another layer in this equation (Liu et al) where the online or offline anime communities and forums are shown to have internal stigma. Where adolescents with a strong bond with a certain character may face stigmatized exclusion or social rejection based on the widespread likability of that specific character. This can result in depression, even suicidal thoughts. *Parasocial interactions* magnify vulnerability. From Social Learning theory perspective, the modeling of antisocial behaviour is a significant issue. There are anime works that conforming to the social situation of Japan, shows violence and crime even in adolescent



which is very tempting to a young mind. The glamorization of revenge, aggression, harmful behaviour and delinquency encourages imitation and can bring a multitude of problems for a child in their growing years as they lack *media literacy*. Cartoon character syndrome can also manifest through imitation of these problematic behavioral traits. In India, where society is not comparatively not as equally developed as China or Japan and anime is not universally understood here, such behaviour can call for peer exclusion.

High engagement with anime can result in social withdrawal when an individual gets absorbed into the imaginative world to such a degree that they prefer the fictional world over the real one. This may cause weaker social skills and communication. Peer pressure, bullying and stigmatization can discourage self expression and reduce self-efficacy. Anime industry gives a good amount of focus on merchandise which can call for uncontrolled spending habits. Unsupervised exposure to age-inappropriate content like sexual content or violent content with blood and gore can cause alterations to their emotional reaction to such stimuli. Idealized or exaggerated world viewing can cause unrealistic ideas and standards, conflicting values and uncertainty. These can cause fluctuations and irreparable damage during the critical developmental period of young audiences. The influence of anime on younger audiences is dependent on the nature of the content, the readiness and the environment. Active strategies need to be applied to mitigate the risks. Parental supervision and co-viewing is one of the most effective ways to filter media influence through active mediation. Parents can steer the child towards the right content that encourage the good without the bad. This way parents can model the child's development ensuring stable growth.

Schools in India can spread awareness and literacy by incorporating anime into media literacy programs. This would give the students necessary skills to critically evaluate the plot and themes which reduces uncritical imitation addressed by Bandura. Also the inclusion of such programs will highlight anime's artistic, cultural and linguistic aspects. Age-Gating or restricting content by recommended age is something that the OTT platforms should implement strictly. But this too needs parental mediation as these restrictions can be surpassed. Parents need to control the exposure towards graphical or sexual contents. Screen time is something modern parents actively look out for in children and if done with care, will make more safely enjoyable. The *Heliyon study* (Liu et al.) showed that stigma surrounding anime fandom can encourage depression and anxiety among adolescent viewers. In India, public perception varies regionally; in some areas,

anime is still misunderstood as childish cartoons or associated with harmful stereotypes. To counter these stereotypes community spaces for fans to safely share views and fan events can make involve anime with a more socially valid creative endeavour. All these countermeasures will need mutual acceptance from parents and other guiding figures like schools and tutors. As a growing art form it is impractical to prohibit its consumption in children and especially in adolescents as these end up encouraging them to indulge even more. Hence, both sides' participation is needed for the implementation of these tactics in real life.

In the end, it can be said that anime presents itself as an opportunity in India. One that's culturally enriching, creatively inspiring and can play a major role in identity development. But if the various factors associated remain unmanaged then anime will have its ill-effects on the vulnerable adolescents. Parental mediation, platform restrictions and healthy watch times will make anime a rich source of quality engagement for Indian young audiences.

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