The trend of Japanese pop culture and its differentiating approach through event tourism

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Abstract

Purpose – This study focuses on analysing Japanese pop culture events to determine whether they may be useful marketing tools for a location with a distinctive culture from where they are organized. It also examines how the popular culture events differ from other events and what impacts they have on these destinations.

Design/methodology/approach – A mixed-method approach is used to analyse data from a questionnaire provided to 364 participants from these events and seven semi-structured interviews with event organizers or their representatives from events on this topic in Portugal, France, Spain, Denmark and North America.

Findings – According to the research, these events are regarded as unique and unusual from the perspective of the customer due to the variety of activities they offer, the use of imagination they inspire and the engaged fan participation. These occasions have been found to strengthen and propagate Japanese popular culture outside of its place of origin and arouse interest in it.

Originality/value – Several studies have examined the appeal of Japanese pop culture, but few have investigated the impact of events to enhance the destination's image where they are held, as well as their potential outside of Japan. With already over a hundred official events of this theme held annually, with a sizable number of participants, a study of this paradigm exposes its potential for promoting a culture that is growing in popularity outside of its place of origin and understanding the effects it has on these various regions.

Keywords Events, Globalization, Impacts, Japanese pop culture, Tourism

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Events serve as effective platforms for the promotion of diverse cultures and destinations, generating economic and social benefits (Getz and Page, 2020; Hernández-Mogollóna *et al.*, 2018; Mair and Weber, 2019; Negrusa *et al.*, 2016; Popescu and Corbos, 2012). They are seen as strategic investments for destination promotion and economic growth (Hudson, 2003; Mainolfi and Marino, 2020; Yan and Halpenny, 2019; Getz and Page, 2020). In addition, the events offer unique experiences essential to respond to a more diverse and demanding public (Lockstone-Binney *et al.*, 2013).

In recent years, events and fandoms like Japanese popular culture have intersected (Iwabuchi, 2002). Japanese popular culture, which includes television, comics, music, fashion and video games, has a large international following (Shoji, 2010; Seaton and Yamamura, 2015; Simeon, 2006). Due to its wide range of activities, this cultural phenomenon has become

popular (Ah-young, 2009; Lamerichs, 2013; Sabre, 2013; Matthew and Rumi, 2014; Tajima, 2018). Events showcasing Japanese pop culture draw large audiences and participants, increasing demand for travel to both the host region and Japan, the country of origin for this cultural phenomenon (Barros, 2016; Kawamata *et al.*, 2017; Parrot Analytics, 2018; Seaton and Yamamura, 2015). These events promote community building, social interaction and creative expression while allowing supporters to experience their favourite aspects of contemporary Japanese culture (Galbraith, 2019). Events centred on Japanese pop culture attract local and international attendees and boost related industries, influencing fan experiences, fostering cultural exchange and accelerating the global dissemination of Japanese popular media (Daliot-Bul and Otmazgin, 2019; Kawamata *et al.*, 2017). Recognizing the importance of these events, the Japanese government regards them as influential instruments for promoting the country and furthering its international positioning efforts (Craig, 2020). Even though Japanese pop culture events may not always be on a grand scale, they have a profound impact on participants and contribute to the global dissemination of Japanese themes, resulting in positive effects for the host location and attracting tourists to Japan (Craig, 2020; Sabre, 2013).

As most extant studies focus on events and venues associated with Japanese culture (Lamerichs, 2013; Matthew and Rumi, 2014; Shoji, 2010), additional research on the value and opportunities of hosting Japanese pop culture events is necessary, allowing the generalization to apply to other distinct and exotic cultures in non-traditional event venues. The potential benefits, challenges and impacts of hosting such events in diverse contexts in terms of destination promotion, tourism interest and the experiences of attendees and local communities have not been extensively studied. Examining Japanese pop culture events reveals the dynamics of fandoms and their contemporary significance, allowing for a novel examination of subcultural dynamics, identity formation and the relationship between fandom and society (Galbraith, 2019; Kawamata *et al.*, 2017). These events, which feature a synthesis of traditional Japanese elements and global influences, serve as sites of cultural negotiation and adaptation. This research may assist event organizers, tourism managers and academics understand the global appeal and success of Japanese pop culture events, as the study of trends, fandoms and their contribution to academic knowledge, particularly within Japanese pop culture events, offers a significant understanding of social and cultural phenomena that can be applied to other cultures that explore exotic fandoms and thematic (Daliot-Bul and Otmazgin, 2019; Galbraith, 2019; Ito, 2010; Steinberg, 2012). Therefore, the present research posits an initial question: how do Japanese pop culture events contribute to the promotion of a destination's image and culture in locations with distinct cultures where the events are held?

In this context, the study examines the impact of Japanese pop culture events on culturally distinct destinations. It seeks to investigate how these events influence the image of the destination and contribute to the spread of Japanese popular culture in various regions. By analysing the unique characteristics of these events, the study sheds light on their potential as marketing tools for destinations and the extent to which they spread Japanese popular culture abroad. To comprehend the advantages and benefits of implementing these events, the current trend and type of visitor who attends are also described.

Literature review
Japanese pop culture and its globalization
Globalization is a social phenomenon that is connected to several trends and models in terms of cultural, social, economic and political dimensions (Choudhury, 2022; Raikhan *et al.*, 2014). This phenomenon, which produces significant changes in consumption and even tourist production, is a daily developing trend as a result of global communication and the expansion of information networks, with global influences acting on a destination and having implications for the receiving society (Buhalis, 2001; Giddens and Sutton, 2021). In fact, it is a

trend that reflects a process that boosts economic activity while also raising global awareness and bringing varied groups together all over the world (Song *et al.*, 2018). People's interest in exploring the cultural singularities of the countries they visit can be boosted by globalization, stimulating subsequent travel to related destinations, as evidenced by a desire to experience cultural identities that are not their own, but with which they sympathize and want to learn more (Seaton and Yamamura, 2015; Song *et al.*, 2018).

Incorporated into this concept, Japanese pop culture serves as an appropriate example, being widely recognized due to its mixture of numerous characteristics that generate a variety of interests and curiosities in the areas where they are implemented (Rich, 2011; Seaton and Yamamura, 2015). This is defined as the "expression of the essence of modern Japan" that involves different parameters of Japanese daily life such as "manga" (Japanese books or Japanese comics), "anime" (Japanese animation films and series), videogames, fashion, "cosplay" (interpretation and incarnation of well-known characters in this theme), among others (Kawamata *et al.*, 2017; Simeon, 2006). In this view, two forms of content are distinguished: (1) the original (including the development of companies, but also its distribution through the media); and (2) the derivative (which is used from the original content), such as secondary creation, pilgrimage to sites linked to this theme and even "cosplay" (Kawamata *et al.*, 2017; Tajima, 2018).

One of the most important factors for the internationalization of this culture was the "anime" (a type of Japanese film and television animation aimed at both adults and children), which served as Japan's foundation for the country to transmit its culture to a wide diversity of people (Craig, 2000; Napier, 2005). It was not until the 1980s that Japan began to invest extensively in this aspect abroad in order to compete with American imports, as it is a component present in Japan's movie industry (Napier, 2005). As a result, series and films based on this theme began to appear on international television, exhibiting a high level of quality and efficiency with the use of resources, showing the potential they possessed through shows such as "Heidi", "Neon Genesis Evangelion" and "Astro Boy". The ongoing production of quality and unforgettable stories propels "anime" to succeed in the entertainment business, producing content aimed at both children and adults, with complex and nuanced storylines (Barros, 2016; Napier, 2005). There is arduous work associated with character creation that captures the attention of people, in a way that stimulates the development of personalities such as those who envision and, as a result, create unique links and ties (Denison, 2010; Lamerichs, 2013; Tajima, 2018).

All this culture's richness, in conjunction with "anime", were the main key in the globalization and acceptance of societies outside of Japan, involving a mix of content that may appeal to a wide range of interests (Condry, 2013; Sato, 2007; Tung *et al.*, 2019). "Manga" (a type of Japanese comic book and graphic novel aimed at both adults and children), another recognized component of the culture under investigation, has a broader influence than American comics due to its diversity of material and public, becoming well-known due to its ability to influence cultures and reach children, adolescents and adults all over the world (Napier, 2005; Shoji, 2010).

The diversity of this culture, which also is communicated through video games, gastronomy and fashion, among many other things, is the most obvious aspect of Japanese pop culture, making it easier to discern its global appeal (Freedman and Slade, 2018; Simeon, 2006). Brands like "Pokémon" and "Hello Kitty" are examples of massive expansion, whether through merchandising, series, videogames, or movies (Assunção *et al.*, 2017; Craig, 2020; Laato and Rauti, 2021; Yano, 2013).

To summarize, the globalization of Japanese cultural products is a significant example of the cultural landscape of contemporary society, being an integral part of this culture through artistic works that were intelligently disseminated by the media, resulting in a positive tool for the promotion of Japan internationally, with several countries around the world playing this type of contents on their national media (Esposito, 2011; Rich, 2011; Shoji, 2010).

The impacts of Japanese pop culture events

Japanese pop culture events are moments that represent the modern trend of Japan in a variety of areas of interest of this culture. The events serve as a starting point to explore and interrelate in the most diverse themes, resulting in the promotion of tourism destinations, an increase in the economy, values and the local society itself (Sabre, 2013; Tajima, 2018).

With a 20-year expansion, these events surpass more than 200 official events held annually in the pre-pandemic COVID-19 era globally, with a highly diverse audience that focused on both the general public who enjoy Japanese themes and interested individuals only in a specific location, either in groups or individually (Kawamata *et al.*, 2017). Outside of Japan, the attendance at these events exceeds thousands of people, as evidenced by the "Anime Expo" in Los Angeles and the "Japan Expo" in Paris (Tung *et al.*, 2019).

These events can be a positive way of promoting and disseminating Japanese pop culture, as they represent events that develop experiences and provide opportunities for people to learn about the country of origin of these contents, as well as deepening their interest in the presented themes, resulting in essential events to promote destinations and culture (Close, 2018; Gushiken and Hirata, 2014). They can reveal curiosities about the present situation in the Asian country, the main trends and the cultural reality, increasing tourism and enhancing both the host region's and, in the long run, the promoted country's economy (Kawamata *et al.*, 2017; Tajima, 2018).

The impacts of Japanese pop culture events can be seen at the events' locations as well as in the Japanese community (via tourism induced by curiosity and interest in learning more about culture), luring private and public entities, people and even the media, as they manage to stimulate the purchase of services and products, affecting the society, economy, spatial planning and the environment (Close, 2018; Craig, 2020; Preuss, 2005; Yürük-Kayapınar and Akyol, 2017). They can make the difference in destinations, as well they can be a source of diversification and an encouraging aspect in the demand for tourism services in the impacted destination after the event (Mihajlović and Vidak, 2017). As previously stated, they are events that manage to increase tourist flows in the regions where they are used, forming meeting points for regular and occasional participants, as well as being advantageous times to boost the economy, resulting from the participants' interest in purchasing merchandising related to Japanese culture, which is normally difficult to find outside of the country of origin (Tajima, 2018; Yamato, 2016).

Japanese pop culture events, effectively, are an example of an event that incorporates a wide range of elements and realities into a Japanese theme, demonstrating added value for both the destination and the origin and serving as a lever for boosting the economy and tourism through its beneficial disclosure (Hudson, 2003; Kawamata *et al.*, 2017; Tajima, 2018).

Methodology

Following an understanding of what literature explains about the events of Japanese culture and their effects, the methodology for conducting this investigation went through the intersection between two approaches: (1) a qualitative process, employing semi-directive interviews with event organizers; and (2) a quantitative analysis through a questionnaire applied to participants in the events. Both research instruments were applied in the same period of time, with the interviews gathering information from specialists regarding the research objectives and the quantitative study measuring the profile of the event's participants with greater precision. While a qualitative view of the interviewees can provide the necessary data to determine the impacts of Japanese pop culture events in destinations other than their origin, a mixed study employing the quantitative method from the perspective of the participants can also provide a view of the customers and how they influence the impacts directly on destinations, as they are one of the main stakeholders of the events.

The sample of events chosen for this study considered the need to include the two major regions of the world outside of Japan where Japanese pop culture events have greater expression, namely Europe and North America. As a result, the choice of countries and events resorted to a non-probabilistic selection for convenience, relevance and variety, being selected: "Iberanime" (Portugal), "Umi Fest" (Portugal), "Anisama" (Portugal), "Japan Weekend" (Spain), "Japan Expo" (France), "J-Pop Con" (Denmark) and "Anime Expo" (USA).

The next step was to carry out semi-directive interviews with the seven organizers of the chosen events. The interviews were designed to listen to the representatives of the organizations of the events in the study, being explored the characteristics, the public, the impacts and the viability of this type of event.

The interviews were based on semi-directive and open-ended questions. In their first section, the aim was to learn what each interviewee thought about Japanese popular culture in general and the key factors that contribute to the culture success in each country, including reference to what makes this culture and its events distinctive to the public. The event managed by the interviewee was the focus of the second section, which also examined the motivations behind it and its primary impacts. The last section focused on the predictions for this culture, as the Japanese pop culture events.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic's restrictions, the interviews were conducted via video call (averaging 40 min) and via e-mail, being held between March and July of 2020. The interview data was later analysed to determine the overall perspective of the data collected, using thematic content analysis with the goal of establishing identification of dialogued subjects, coding and categorizing it, resulting in a correct examination for the elements present in the analysed speeches. As a result, the data obtained were organized, and the subjects' connections and respondents' opinions were verified, demonstrating each actor's perspective.

Simultaneously, questionnaire surveys were administered to a representative sample of the study population, in this instance, fans and participants of Japanese pop culture events. This method was intended to assist with the structuring of the participant's profile and level of participation in events of this type, in order to understand how consumers perceive these events, which has a direct impact on the market interest in these events. In these circumstances, a set of open and closed questions were provided to the target markets, with the emphasis on closed questions to limit and facilitate the process of responses in the survey, such as the treatment of the data.

Due to the size of the sample population and the limitation of studies that allow characterizing this population, a non-probabilistic sample was selected. The questionnaire was primarily concerned with four dimensions: (1) characterization of the respondent and his connection to Japanese pop culture and its events; (2) the respondent's connection to Japanese pop culture and events; (3) the respondent's motive for attending these events; and (4) their perception of the differences between Japanese pop culture events and other types of events. The themes were examined in these scenarios through a total of seventeen questions, allowing for a better understanding of their purpose for taking part in these events. Given the public's sensitivity to long questionnaires, it was decided not to ask any additional questions, to obtain a response to the outlined objectives.

The COVID-19 pandemic compelled the questionnaire to be spread online in Portugal, Spain, France and North America, via social networks (such as "Facebook" and "Instagram"), community-specific forums and websites designated for distribution. Being a young adult population used to new technologies, the online questionnaire was not a limitation, as there was always a translation for each of the applied countries' languages. The requirement to have at least participated in a Japanese pop culture event, with preference for the events under study, was the criterion for answering the questionnaire. A total of 364 responses were received (200 from Portugal, France 58, Spain 55 and USA 51) over a six-month period, from March to August 2020. In this regard, it was possible to obtain relevant information for the

study, with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5.14%, allowing to ensure the statistical analysis that allows verifying if there are statistically significant differences in the studied group, reaching what is the reality in these types of events and what is their level of motivation and participation.

Following the collection of quantitative data, the findings are explored through a descriptive analysis of the quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires, employing the study of absolute and relative frequencies. Additionally, parametric descriptions related to location measures were used, as well as the graphical description.

Findings and discussion

Type of visitor – survey results

According to the quantitative findings, about half of the respondents (prior to the COVID-19 era) frequented this type of event at least twice or three times annually (49%), and the majority desire to attend these events more frequently (57%). In agreement, 91.2% of respondents indicated that they were motivated or very motivated to participate in these events, with the remaining 8.8% indicating that they are neither motivated nor unmotivated. A closer examination of the Likert scale administered to respondents on the motivation to participate in Japanese pop culture events, where 1 is not motivated and 5 is very motivated, reveals that the average of the responses was 4.38, with a median out of 5 and a deviation error of 0.823, demonstrating the high motivation of participants in this trend's events. This data refers to how much the participants enjoy the events of this theme, with diversity within the culture being the most indicated by the sample, followed by doing and enjoying cosplay (that is, being an active element in Japanese pop culture), socialization, available merchandising and competitions. It should be noted that the North American attendees, with an average of 4.51, are thought to be the most motivated. Following that are the responses from Spain (4.49), France (4.47) and Portugal (4.29).

When asked how participants differentiate the tourist experience in this category of event, 88% of the respondents highlighted "the diversity of Japanese pop culture elements in one place". Correspondingly, 69% of respondents believed that these events are a good recreation of Japan, increasing the potential for Japan's promotion through these events and demonstrating a viable way to make the country's reality known. Following that, participants viewed these events as places for product consumerism (54%) as well as a place for socializing (45%). As stated in the literature (Seaton *et al.*, 2017), this can be an intriguing perspective for investment in destinations outside of Japan, as events can often be presented as opportunities to experience a place that is sometimes inaccessible to the consumer, such as Japan and its pop culture. Actually, 98.3% of respondents express a desire to visit Japan, whether for the first time or not, whereas only 11.5% of respondents have been there. With events being idealized as representative of Japan's diversity in a single event, it can be advantageous to attract diverse audiences, comprehending that this type of event, as well as others that investigate exotic pop cultures, can serve as effective promotional tools.

Even though only a small proportion of participants (14%) said they travel abroad to attend Japanese pop culture events (mainly from the French and Spanish respondents), a significant number (52%) travel domestically to other regions to attend these events. This means that these are the kinds of events that, as was already mentioned, could improve domestic travel and thus strengthen the local economy.

Most of the participants (79.70%) regarded these events as innovative when compared to other types of events, with exoticism or a differentiating culture representing the key elements, along with the various constituent elements. On the Likert scale administered to respondents on their opinion in differentiating these events in innovative terms compared to others, where 1 is nothing innovative and 5 is very innovative, it appears that the average of

the responses was 3.95, with a median of 4 and deviation error of 0.835. This demonstrated the perception in terms of differentiation of this type of events, which, in turn, stimulates the tourist's curiosity for the visit, whether the tourist is already a fan of the culture or just has an interest in some of its elements. Among the groups studied, the Spanish respondents feels most satisfied with the events in which it participates, scoring an average of 4.51 on the provided scale. Following that are the French with an average contentment of 4.22, the Portuguese with an average of 4.28 and the North American respondents with an average of 4.49.

Otaku (unconditional fans of Japanese popular culture, especially "anime" and/or "manga") are the main group of "enthusiastic" participants in these events, and they even contribute to the empowerment of the event by producing derivative content that enhances the event. The questionnaires showed these people as devoted followers who actively engage in the event, identify with the pop culture icons and show great enthusiasm for it. There are also the "casual" fans, who are interested in Japanese pop culture but do not actually engage or identify with it and the "core" fans, which are like lovers of this culture, but do not fully identify with it.

Regarding the type of participation, it is discovered that most participants in these events are male (56%), between the ages of nineteen and thirty (66%), with a bachelor's degree level (58%) or up to secondary education (25%) and currently working (51%) or studying (43%).

There is a predominance of "core" (54%) participants who usually go with friends (61%). Following this majority, "casual" and "enthusiastic" participants appear with similar percentages (25% and 21%, respectively), as well as the possibility of these participants coming alone or in pairs (14%). The French respondents was found to have the most enthusiastic participants (22.4%), while the North American respondents had the majority of "core" fans (63.8%). The study's results show that casual fans (30.9%) are more prevalent in Spain.

Using a non-parametric Chi-Square test, it is revealed that there are significant asymptotic differences between who the respondents usually attend Japanese pop culture events and their displacement to the event, with a result of less than 0.05. As a result, when a participant in this type of event travels abroad to these events, his preference is to go as a couple, or in pairs, travelling to neighbouring countries (40.6%), or alone to other regions farther away (58.8%), although at national events, he mostly travels with friends (65.6% in his home region and 64.2% in other parts of the country). In conclusion, participants in these events tend to travel domestically with friends rather than abroad, where it is more common to travel alone or in pairs.

In an analysis of the user type variable (casual, "core", or enthusiast) using the Chi-Square test, it was discovered that there are differences in its asymptotic significance, with the group of enthusiasts revealing more older fans, between 25 and 30 years old (33.3%) and the "core" and casual group aged between 19 and 30 years old (42.3% and 34.4%, respectively), as is possible to analyse in Table 1. The young adult audience is primarily the casual and "core" group, that is, those who appreciate and enjoy this exotic culture; however, as they grow older, their interest in this subject grows significantly, reaching predominance in the enthusiast group at 25 years old.

When the frequency of users at these events and their intention to visit these events in the future was subjected to a Chi-Square test, differences in their asymptotic significance were also discovered. The enthusiastic user is the one who attends this type of event more than four times per year (55.3%), while the casual user attends events less frequently, once or less per year (81.7%). The "core" user is shown to be the intermediate one, who attends the event two to three times per year (62.2%). Conversely, the casual and "core" groups are those who aim to participate in these events more frequently (53.8% and 61.7%, respectively), while the enthusiastic group mostly plans to maintain their existing regularity (48%). This situation is

				Age					
			12–18 years old	19–24 years old	25–30 years old	31–40 years old	41–50 years old	More than 50 years old	Total
User Type	Casual	Count	20	32	20	12	3	6	93
		% within User Type	21.5%	34.4%	21.5%	12.9%	3.2%	6.5%	100.0%
		% within Age	35.7%	23.7%	18.9%	22.6%	37.5%	100.0%	25.5%
	Core	Count	25	83	61	24	3	0	196
		% within User Type	12.8%	42.3%	31.1%	12.2%	1.5%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within Age	44.6%	61.5%	57.5%	45.3%	37.5%	0.0%	53.8%
	Enthusiast	Count	11	20	25	17	2	0	75
		% within User Type	14.7%	26.7%	33.3%	22.7%	2.7%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within Age	19.6%	14.8%	23.6%	32.1%	25.0%	0.0%	20.6%
Total		Count	56	135	106	53	8	6	364
		% within User Type	15.4%	37.1%	29.1%	14.6%	2.2%	1.6%	100.0%
		% within Age	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source(s): Created by authors

based on the supposition that the enthusiastic fan already tries to attend as many events as possible, as an actual promoter of the culture itself. For casual users, the first event is a kind of catalyst for participate in more events.

Japanese pop culture events, their impacts and marketing feasibility – interviews results
According with the interviews, it appears that Japanese popular culture has gained attention globally over the past twenty years, with strong influences from "anime" and "manga" and a generally positive reception, especially in Europe and America. The interviewees mention it is a culture that adherents regard as unique because of the purity, impact and inspiring message it conveys through intricate and complicated storylines, captivating Westerners. Similarly, it is a trend with a variety of integral and modern areas of Japan that, due to their diversity, reaches a large number of enthusiasts and interested people. As a result, it is important that the events of this theme manage to highlight the matrix of Japanese pop culture, with an identity and message related to this multiplicity of experiences and with the participant's deep connection with the event itself, because these are active elements in the event, which like and insist on being present as representatives of their content. They are opportune times to share the content they truly value, to collaborate and communicate with one another and to forge connections for future events. Thus, and strongly expressed by the interviewees, "cosplay" is a very distinguishing feature of these events, and it is frequently a point of attraction (both to see and to participate), expressed by both casual visitors and fans, as well as those who do it for competition (usually, at these events there is a contest associated with the costumes and the interpretation of the characters they incarnate).

Emphasized by the interviewees, the target audience for these events is quite diverse, similar to the survey results, ranging from the curious visitor to the passionate one, who attend the event in groups or alone, even though the average group size is three visitors. For this reason, the interviewees showed there are a growing and diverse number of participants in these events, who often come with a purpose and stay in other areas to learn about Japanese culture. For example, the largest event in this field outside of Japan in 2019 was the "Anime Expo", in North America, Los Angeles, with over 350 thousand visitors. In Europe, the largest event was the "Japan Expo" that was held in Paris, France, with over 250 thousand visitors in 2019. Following this, in 2019, "Japan Weekend" in Madrid, Spain, attracted more than a hundred and sixty thousand visitors, and "Iberanime" in Lisbon, Portugal, attracted more than thirty-five thousand visitors.

It is a culture that presents a vast amount of material to be explored, and thus, through its events, it can express this trend coming from Japan, with an increasing number of fans participating in these unique circumstances in order to experience and live moments that are so highly valued and idealized in their minds. In fact, the participants, together with the Japanese pop thematic, are the focus of the event, verified not only by the answers of the interviewees, but also through a content analysis of the conceptual meanings of the ideas and notions of them. As can be seen in Figure 1, the expressions which stand out the most, after event and culture, are the concepts of people, of Japan, of the anime and of the participants. This is due to its emphasis on its events (the target audience) and the main components to explore (such as "anime"), which are favourable occasions to always exalt Japan itself.

Interconnected with the exposure of the impacts of theme events in destinations outside of Japan, interviewees essentially expressed that the promotion, dissemination and enhancement of the destination image where the event takes place stands out, giving the region significant renown, which subsequently attracts participants back to the location. Events of this type successfully promote the region in which they are held, and most of their participants are not locals, but rather day visitors or even national tourists, similar to quantitative data shows. Even if the primary focus is domestic tourism (though the percentage of international tourists is increasing significantly), the interviews showed that its supporters feel obligated to actively participate in events to feel useful in promoting these events. In this way, events of this type of help to develop the local economy, the reputation of the host location and the image of the destinations, primarily by bringing a large number of people to the region over a two to four-day period. Thus, these events undoubtedly have a relevant and beneficial impact on the promotion of destinations, serving as conducive places to personally experience the culture, thereby creating memories and desires. Japanese pop culture events emerge then as possible mediators or catalysts of interest, as they make it possible to create a "spark" for interest in this culture and even encourage tourist practice, increasing motivation and thus arousing curiosity about its associated elements.

Moreover, the interviews also showed that there is an increase in the local economy related or unrelated to the event, as a result of the mass movement of population attracted to the event, with a focus on the event's stakeholders, because one of the participants' interests is to acquire

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merchandising that is difficult to acquire in retail stores. Additionally, catering and lodging services may be able to expand local business, as followers of this culture tend to migrate outside their areas of residence, resulting in the consumption of these services. Only in Los Angeles, the interviewees said the 2019 "Anime Expo" generated an economic impact of more than eighty million euros for the American metropolis. Despite a lesser scale, all the European countries studied had a favourable economic impact in their host cities because of their events.

The increase in tourism and visitors to the area, the potential for free publicity and the steadfastness of customers who stay in the area are additional effects of these incidents. These are the kinds of events that could draw both public and private organizations, giving the region a competitive edge. The region that hosts the event has a variety of effects, whether these effects are related to the event or not, because it may draw tourists, which stimulates commerce and, in turn, raises prices, which is good for the local economy.

Finally, in terms of understanding the positive effects of Japanese pop culture on events for destinations outside of Japan, interviewees agree that events are an asset for destinations and that, as previously stated, they increase not only the economy in the region where they are held, but also tourism and the growth of local businesses. They are events valued by lovers of the Japanese pop culture trend because they represent vital opportunities to demonstrate their taste, but they are also widely recognized by other people and the community as something interesting and unique, aimed at a diverse range of genres and ages. There are more admirers as a result of this, as well as the rise of this culture in theatres, televisions and bookstores. The number of parties involved in these events is also growing across several industries, as their participation only enhances their reputation and visibility. For instance, the 2019 "Anime Expo" event featured over 850 artists and exhibitors, yielding a 4.5-time average return on investment.

Thereby, according to the interviewees, the future of Japanese pop culture events is quite positive, owing to the strong connection of its consumers and the growing increase in news on this topic.

Conclusion

Over the past twenty years, Japanese pop culture and events have been popular in Portugal, France, Spain, Denmark and the US. These events are important vehicles for spreading understanding of this reality throughout Japan, benefiting participants and all their associates, especially in the regions where they are held.

By investigating the perspectives of interviewees associated with the organization of events on this theme, as well as event participants, it is possible to perceive the various points of view of each element regarding Japanese pop culture events, obtaining detailed information on various aspects of these events. These elements make these events touristy, and there is universal agreement on the theme's tourism marketing potential.

These events have a strong potential to become more relevant in tourist dynamics outside of Japan, offering both their culture and the destination where they are held. Due to Western cultures' continual curiosity with the Japanese paradigm, its popular culture attracts many followers due to its distinctiveness, artistic ability, exoticism and plurality. Even if a pandemic limited the events' broadness, Japanese pop culture and its events are a rising trend with a future, extremely present in society internationally and with visible effects.

Clearly, these fandom and trend events demonstrate to be a viable and useful marketing tactic for a destination that is distinctive from Japan itself, with positive effects and impacts in regions like Europe and America. Being different from the other type of events that are already organized, Japanese pop culture events can open a variety of opportunities by assimilating different concepts and putting efforts into involving their fans with the theme, resulting in a combination that attracts regular participants as well as new elements and, at the same time, induces tourism, thereby enabling benefits for all, whether associated or not.

However, these opportunities can clearly be enhanced even further, by making good use of the innovation of new contents of this thematic, exploring the use of the imaginary that these contents convey and investing in the existence of multiple hypotheses of consumer participation. These elements are easily adaptable to other events that explore exotic cultures where they are applied, so long as they tend to replicate the elements of uniqueness that Japanese popular culture demonstrates.

In summary, this is a distinguishing study because it manages to add not only an analysis of a specific type of event or product but also the fact that the specificity of some types of events, such as the case of Japanese pop culture, in addition to the impact on the destination as well as on an economic and social level, manage to be events that serve as promotional vehicles for an external destination to promote itself internationally and nationally. Thus, a study of this nature materializes because it can be an opportunity for destinations with a distinctive cultural heritage that can be disseminated internationally, with potential in other cultures, via future research.

Nevertheless, generalizations of the implementation of these trend events are not possible in this study due to the convenience sample used for data analysis. Despite this, it was possible to collect vital information regarding the applicability of this trend as a marketing strategy for a specific and remote area, as well as to determine what distinguishes these events and which positive outcomes occurred in the affected regions.

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