

Anime Fandom in Convergence Culture: A Uses and Gratification Approach to Chinese Fan

Producers

By

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## **Abstract**

In the current media environment known as media convergence, technology has provided fans multiple tools and platforms through which to create and publish their fan works online as well as to draw on fan works and connect with other fans. Anime fans in China have taken advantage of these sophisticated technologies to generate and circulate anime and its related fan products. Due to State control over mainstream media in China, Chinese anime fans have assumed a more active and important role in the distribution of these media contents, making active Chinese anime fan producers an interesting case to examine how media convergence influences fans' activities and how fans use technologies to satisfy their needs for media consumption.

Using Uses and Gratification theory, this project explored the gratifications Chinese anime fan producers reported during their fan production process. This study focused on exploring the connections between the affordances emerging from media convergence and media gratifications reported by fan producers, reflecting both gratifications identified in the literature and newly-identified gratifications. In addition, the project addressed the shifting relationships among fans, media producers, and out-group members in the participatory fandom culture.

This study makes four contributions. It enriches U&G theory by identifying and categorizing gratifications in this contemporary international context; it contributes to the conversation on media convergence and active audience; it provides insiders' view on relationship tensions within and surrounding fan communities; and it makes suggestions for media industry participants as they approach active fans and their fan works.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

Although the Japanese film and television genre of *anime* may bring to mind young female viewers with pink hair, “the worlds of anime extend well beyond what appears on the screen. Anime is characteristic of contemporary media in its interconnected webs of commercial and cultural activities that reach across industries and national boundaries” (Condry, 2013, p. 53). Anime, which draws on the Japanese term for animation, is a style that is often characterized by complex story lines, vivid characters and colorful graphics. While some are targeted toward children, other anime have adult themes and situations. The Japanese anime industry faces fewer restrictions than American animated cartoons, which has granted them more freedom in artistic expression in the stories (Leonard, 2005). This was one reason that the Japanese anime genre developed some of its unique aesthetics and themes. Scholars and anime fans have been fascinated by anime’s unique fan culture, “featuring millions of visual images, fictional characters, and broad spectrum of signs and signification invented by and circulated among young people” (J.-S. Chen, 2007, p. 14). Some world-renowned anime include the ever-popular game and anime series *Pokémon*, the multiple-award-winning animated film *Spirited Away*, and the long-lasting franchise *Dragon Balls*. According to a report from the Association of Japanese Animations, the sales of anime industry reached a record high of \$16 billion (1.825 trillion yen) worldwide in 2016 (Masuda et al., 2016). The anime industry has produced a vast amount of related merchandise such as DVDs, books, action figures, anime-based video games, phone accessories, etc.; it also has generated events and conventions on different scales – from local anime conventions or gatherings on the weekends to week-long anime conventions that attract an international audience. The creative resources originating in the anime industry also have contributed to a successful video game industry in Japan (Aoyama & Izushi, 2003). Another

important element of anime are the materials generated by anime fans that are made available online and offline worldwide. Although the origin of anime is Japanese, the industry and its subculture has had a global influence (Condry, 2013).

Since the imported anime *Astro Boy* was first aired in China on channel CCTV in 1980, anime has steadily gained attention from Chinese audience and gradually grown into a cultural phenomenon (J.-S. Chen, 2007). The intermittent TV broadcasts of Chinese-dubbed anime shows might have been the first contact of anime for some older anime watchers. Decades later, many shows could be found in video stores for rent or sale for an affordable price. Peddlers also wandered in populated areas, selling pirated DVD disks at a very low price. Meanwhile, more anime resources became available online for free. Fan sub groups translated and released the latest anime shows with higher efficiency than any TV channels, legal or illegal DVD sellers. Assorted forums were created to share these videos, along with fan fictions and fan arts. Weekly discussions were updated via online message boards. All the resources – the shows themselves, the official news about the shows, fan-made art works, fan-written fictions, and a vast amount of discussion and analysis accumulated online, making those internet forums the favored place for fans to gather and distribute information. With the rapid development of technology and especially internet communication technology, the need to download has almost been eliminated in the current environment. With a decent connection to the internet, fans now can easily stream and watch any shows online, providing an additional means to download. Online forums are still popular, but microblogs, blogs, fan art hosting sites and fan fiction hosting sites, and sometimes independent websites are all thriving. One can find almost anything about the anime shows to his or her liking in one or more of such places.

In 2008, the Chinese government issued a notice banning the broadcast of foreign anime on TV during prime airing hours (from 5pm to 9 pm each day). The notice further restricted the ratio of imported anime to domestic animated cartoon to 1:7 each channel was allowed to broadcast (*广电总局关于加强电视动画片播出管理的通知*, 2008). In 2015, the Chinese Department of Culture issued an order to stop online broadcasting of over 200 anime works on several prominent web streaming sites because the contents of those anime featured “violence, pornography, and terrorism” (“多部日本动漫涉及不良内容 遭视频网站停播下架,” 2015). Even though the primary Chinese media have been largely under the control of the state, noticeable changes in the media environment in China have taken place across the years (Winfield & Peng, 2005; Yin & Liu, 2014). The firm state control on TV in a way facilitated the raise of an internet-based anime culture. For anime, the primary channel of distribution has shifted from a TV-dominated environment to an environment with much more diverse components, with internet playing a major role in the distribution and circulation of media contents via unauthorized channels. Anime fans no longer sit in front of TV waiting for their favorite shows to start; instead, they actively look for shows to download or stream using web browsers and various internet-based apps, opening up even more channels to watch shows and communicate with like-minded fans. These phenomena raise important questions about the fan environment and fan activities. How are the activities of anime fans influenced by this media environment? And how do they use these technologies to their benefit to satisfy their needs for media consumption? What can the current situation of anime fan activities in China add to the current fandom research in this media environment around the globe? This study seeks to shed light on these questions by examining Chinese anime fans’ fan activities via the lens of Uses and Gratification theory.

Situated in this media environment described as a convergence environment wherein media contents flow freely from platforms to platforms (Jenkins, 2004), active participants of anime fandom, or what I define as *active fans* of anime, were chosen to be the participants through whom to examine the changing relationship between audiences and media text. First, anime fandom has developed and now thrives in a media convergence environment. Fan productions come in different forms and genres, and different forms of fandom practices reflect different relationships between fans and media producers, and among fans themselves. Research topics on convergence have centered on the changing relationships among fans, media producers, fan productions, and media texts, making convergence a well-established context for studying new media and fandom (i.e. Baym, 2010c; Bruns, 2008; Croteau, Hoynes, & Milan, 2012; Jenkins, 2006a, 2006b; Milner, 2009, 2010; Shepherd, 2009). For example, Milner (2010) studied the fan-producer relationship of the digital game series *Fallout* and identified four roles fans take when communicating with the game producers - consular/managerial, antagonistic/adversarial, cynical/jaded, and deferential/respectful.

Further, I have identified myself as a long-time anime fan; thus, my familiarity with the fandom discourse permits insights beyond those of an outsider. Therefore, I have chosen anime fandom as the area in which to examine the influence of convergence culture on the changes in relationships among fandom parties.

However, as noted, media convergence, even if limited within the realm of anime fandom, is still a giant landscape to navigate. Technological advancement is giving the general population increasingly sophisticated technologies for their daily use. Multimedia thrives on numerous media platforms (Huang et al., 2006; Jenkins, 2006b), co-existing with some media such as radio and television. Technology is also used by active anime fans around the world to

spread and distribute the fandom of their choice, as well as to express and explore their identities as fans of certain anime. I define *active anime fans* as those who produce and/or publish fannish products, derivative and transformative works in various forms, including but not limited to fansub, fan fictions, fan arts, cosplay, and fan-made games.

While the rising number of new media platforms widens users' choices, it also increases the challenges for media scholars to grasp them all. One powerful theory on media and communication that is flexible enough not to be limited by type of medium is Uses and Gratifications theory (U&G) (i.e. Ancu & Cozma, 2009; I. K. Anderson, 2011; Bumgarner, 2007; G. M. Chen, 2011; Ferguson, Greer, & Reardon, 2007; Papacharissi, 2009). U&G maintains that audiences make active choices in selecting media texts to consume in order to satisfy their needs for different types of gratifications or positive outcomes, such as relaxation, entertainment, or to pass time. Through the lens of this theory, in this study I explored the kinds of gratification active anime fans reported they have gained from fannish activities such as fansubbing, fan fiction writing, fan arts and fan video production. The findings of this dissertation will contribute to building uses and gratification theory and to the mapping of convergence culture. Meanwhile, identifying gratifications can also provide some practical implications for media producers in handling relationships with these increasingly active and powerful fan producers.

The next chapter provides a literature review on uses and gratifications, the context of media convergence, and anime fandom as a phenomenon. The research questions are also included in this chapter. Chapter three describes the methods used in this study. Chapter four presents the results of this study in relation to the research questions. Chapter five is a discussion

of the results in terms of its theoretical contribution and the practical application potential; the limits of this research and possible future research are also included in this chapter.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

The following sections review literature on several major concepts and topics that are addressed as this project seeks to examine Chinese anime fans' participation in fannish activities enabled by the media environment known as convergence and the gratifications they report gaining from these fannish activities. The *context section* covers the concepts and the definitions of terms identified in the discussion about media convergence. Convergence is the overarching environment that situated the research context throughout the dissertation. It is the phenomenon that different formats of media texts flow fluidly from platform to platform, an environment where media content is no longer locked into one space but merged and synced among platforms to provide easier access for users (Jenkins, 2006a). This section also presents perspectives from media producers or corporations about the convergence media environment and the active fans in it, where marketing strategies and economic changes are altered because of the emerging fan power enabled by convergence.

The next *theory section* is dedicated to uses and gratification (U&G) theory, wherein I explore the foundations for U&G as well as the specific relevance of this theory in convergence media context. The *subject section* covers areas in anime fandom that are influenced by media convergence. This section includes literature reflecting perspectives from the fans and descriptions of specific fan productions such as fansub, fan fictions and artworks. These are areas where fandom culture thrives in a media convergence environment. Although these products differ in areas such as technological requirements, organization, and creativity, they share similarities that inform this dissertation.

## **Context: Convergence**

Currently, media convergence gives audiences an increased number of ways to experience and consume media texts, and it also gives producers more ways to distribute their products. Henry Jenkins (2006a) defined convergence as the “technological, industrial, cultural, and social changes in the ways media circulates within our culture” (p. 322), a situation in which multiple media systems coexist and media content flows fluidly across them. Convergence refers to a process rather than a result, a process in which media content flows between different media platforms (Jenkins, 2004) – both new and old media – resulting in “the migratory behavior of media audience who would go almost anywhere in search of the kind of entertainment experiences they want” (Jenkins, 2006a, p. 322). Once medium-specific contents now are able to flow freely across platforms. For example, users can now access the same content from a cellphone or a computer, because contemporary delivery channels are not as important as they once were due to pervasive network infrastructures and broader access to various media contents granted to consumers (Ito, 2008; Jenkins, 2006a). The digitization of media objects and the ease with which they can be cut up and recombined has the potential to reconfigure both media cultures and industries (Meikle & Young, 2011). Media texts can no longer be considered fixed artifacts; rather they reflect a dynamic process of invention and reinvention, as is evident in the amount of fan works being distributed and shared online, and this demands a new emphasis on the user as the creator (Meikle & Young, 2011). Media products are no longer constrained by pages of print or the edges of screens, and this fluidity allows expression across a canvas that includes a variety of traditional media platforms and physical locations (Meikle & Young, 2011).

The dynamics in media text circulation now are shifted to the struggle between cooperative convergence and grassroots convergence (Jenkins, 2006a). *Cooperative convergence*



refers to increasingly concentrated media ownership that supports owners' desires to ensure the free flow of their media content across different media platforms to maximize profits, expand markets, and reinforce viewer commitments (Croteau et al., 2012; Jenkins, 2004, 2006b; Milner, 2010). In contrast, *grassroots convergence* refers to the free flow of media content via unauthorized or illegal means among consumers for easier and broader archiving, annotation, appropriation, and recirculation (Bruns, 2008; Jenkins, 2006a; Van Dijck, 2009). The difference between the two types of convergence lies in the origins of the content, namely, audiences and producers. Both types of convergence are on-going processes affecting the flow of media contents.

The two convergences facilitate media flow in different ways, but both are important for free flow of media contents. These two seemingly contradictory forces coexist, cooperate and reinforce each other (Bruns, 2008; Jenkins, 2006a; Milner, 2010). On one hand, media producers take advantage of convergence to expand products on various platforms, reaching out for more consumers, and using different forms of new media to stay connected with them (Jenkins, 2004, 2006a, 2006b; Milner, 2010). On the other hand, consumers generate a tremendous amount of data that enriches and expands the scope of media content, promoting it voluntarily (Baym, 2010b; Jenkins, 2006a, 2006b). Via the freer flow of media content, consumers are also able to make their voices louder and to demand more participation in content production (Jenkins, 2006a; Milner, 2009). Meanwhile, producers are observing and engaging with various fan activities in order to better connect with the fans (Baym, 2010a; Jenkins, 2006a; Milner, 2010). Therefore, both the producers' efforts in promoting media flow and the actions taken by the audiences are salient to development of the media environment.

Online fandom is a powerful representation of an active audience that is facilitating grassroots convergence. Fiske (2002) suggests a type of audience that is highly active with members able to make up their own meanings of media text. Online fandom communities consist of such active audiences, known as fans. The top-down corporate-driven convergence and bottom-up consumer-driven convergence, in addition to the emergence of subcultures promoting Do-It-Yourself mentality with new technologies, form a new participatory culture (Ito, 2010; Jenkins, 2006a; Milner, 2009, 2010). “Knowledge communities” are formed according to the member’s “intellectual enterprises and emotional investments” (Jenkins, 2006b, p. 137). Online fan communities are believed to be one of the fullest embodiments of such community. While a single fan could not possibly know everything about a particular media product, collectively, fans interpret, reconstruct, and reshape media producers’ works, making sense, and creating “channels for lobbying the producers” (Jenkins, 2006b, p. 138). Their collective intelligence is characterized by multiple means of obtaining knowledge, dynamic exchange, and less control over information flow (Jenkins, 2006b; Kozinets, Hemetsberger, & Schau, 2008; Milner, 2009). “Members pool what they know, creating something much more powerful than the sum of its parts” (Jenkins, 2006b, p. 140).

Power is changing because the scope of participation is increasing due to the expansion of authorship (Rosen, 2006). Media producers are aware of these engaging fan communities, and some of them embrace this change in power and the loss of total control over their own texts (McCourt & Burkart, 2007). This reduction in control from the producers, in return, gives fans more agency to interpret and appreciate the original media text.

**Jenkins’ affective economics.** The on-going power dynamic between fans and producers for the control of the media content has led some producers to make alterations in their

marketing strategies in order to adapt to the now actively-engaging target audiences who were once passive receivers. Jenkins (2006b) argued that, instead of viewing the fans as a threat to their artistic and intellectual integrity, successful producers should be “more adept at monitoring and serving audience interests” (p. 148). Baym (2010c) suggested that even unauthorized content sharing had the potential of increasing audience size, not to mention the user-generated data that would be very helpful for the producers in their market research and decision making. As such, a new type of marketing is suggested, in which consumers are no longer the target, but rather, take up the role of producers of the texts and medium for spreading (Kozinets et al., 2008; Milner, 2009; Zwick, Bonsu, & Darmody, 2008). “Marketing in an interactive world is a collaborative process with the marketer helping the consumer to buy and the consumer helping the marketer to sell” (Jenkins, 2006b, p. 148). According to this argument, producers should bond with the consumers socially instead of pressing legal actions to obtain profit from them (Baym, 2010b). Instead of positioning the audiences as a threat, these arguments advocate acknowledgement of the audiences’ power and propose a new marketing approach.

This shift in marketing approaches is in line with what Jenkins (2006a) called “affective economics” – “a new discourse in marketing and brand research that emphasizes the emotional commitments consumers make to brands as a central motivation for their purchasing decisions” (2006a, p. 319). Recognizing the importance of audience engagement, some producers have shifted their marketing to focus more on quality of the engagement than on managing what some perceive as an over-controlling community (Jenkins, 2006b; McCourt & Burkart, 2007). This market model is proposed to enhance the consumers’ loyalty to the brand, increasing their purchase power through engaging with their “emotional, social, and intellectual investments,” according to Jenkins (2006a, p 63). Dean (2013) points out that audiences’ feelings –

“attachment, affection, excitement, fear, ease, or well-being” (p. 113) – can be considered as products. Similarly, in line with Jenkins’ (2006a) “affective economics,” Gregg (2009) described affective labor, which refers to the amount of time and effort fans put in engaging fan activities. Baym and Burnett (2009) noted that the free labor fans were contributing is the equivalent of jobs that would be paid if they were done by anyone else. In his research, Andrejevic (2008) demonstrated how fans and producers co-create contents via interactive media.

Change of marketing strategies might be crucial for the success of a media text and its related products, especially in an environment dominated by affective economics. Product placement, “the practice of placing branded products in the content of mass media programming” (Russell, 2002, p. 306), is one example of such strategies that need to be carefully crafted. In a study on the effectiveness of integrated product placement in James Bond movies, scholars found that while product placement generated more earnings for the merchandise, audiences lowered their evaluation on the movie series (Marchand, Hennig-Thurau, & Best, 2015). Producers and sponsors are trying to take full advantage of consumers’ emotional engagement (Zwick et al., 2008), via collaboration in product placement, to shape “the total entertainment package” (Jenkins, 2006a, p. 68). Because poor product placement might result in consumer backlash (Cowley & Barron, 2008), Austin et al. (2010) suggested that a good product placement should have “the ability to illuminate an aspect of an existing character’s personality through an appropriate brand or product” (p. 30). Jenkins (2006a) used *American Idol* as an example of collaboration between producers and sponsors to demonstrate the complexity of the relationships among producers, sponsors, and fans. The product placement in *American Idol* increased consumers’ brand awareness, but sometimes the sponsor’s excessive presence angered the audience. It is clear that product placement is not always a safe play; there are still risks that a

particular product, such as Apple computers or Mercedes automobiles could be negatively related to the media content if audience felt they were being exploited by the show, especially when audience felt the program was being excessively used as advertisement display for new products (Jenkins, 2006a, 2006b). This further illustrates the influence of the power of bottom-up convergence and the importance of the emotional engagement of the fans.

Alexander (2008) pointed out that media convergence is also represented in how users relate to media. As he put:

“Perhaps one of the most interesting dimensions of “media convergence” and “convergence culture” lies in our changing relationship to communications technologies. Indeed, the richest convergence point in media convergence may be between person and machine, the human and the technological, as the mixing and converging of media offers yet more sophisticated, potentially more nuanced forms of communication, representation, community building, and reflection on our own subjectivity, on what it means to be a communicating person in a techno culture” (p. 5).

A particularly powerful theory examining how people relate to various media technologies is Uses and Gratifications theory (U&G). The following section provides an overview of U&G theory and how the theory can be utilized to examine media usage in a media convergence context.

### **Theory: Uses and Gratifications (U&G)**

This section covers the basic concepts of U&G theory, the lens through which the data will be examined. The section also introduces the distinction between motive-based gratifications and affordance-based gratifications, and how these gratifications can be related to interpret fannish activities.

**The foundations of uses and gratification theory.** Uses and Gratification theory (U&G) is a general approach to understanding media usage and consequences. The beginning of Uses and Gratifications can be traced back to Lasswell (1948), who identified three functions of mass media – surveillance, correlation, and transmission. Researchers have been adapting and applying Uses and Gratifications theory to media usage and consumption for more than five decades. In short, Uses and Gratifications is an audience-centric approach (Sundar & Limperos, 2013) that examines how an audience uses media to satisfy its various needs. The emphasis of this approach is on “motives for medium, psychological, and social traits that influence this use, and behaviors or attitudes that develop as a result of the combined influence of motives and traits” (Papacharissi, 2009, p. 137). Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974) outlined the theoretical foundation of the approach as “(1) the social and psychological origins of (2) needs, which generate (3) expectations from (4) the mass media or other sources, which lead to (5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in (6) need gratifications and (7) other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones” (p. 20). This outline has been providing guidance for Uses and Gratification researchers to the present.

The Uses and Gratifications approach is not limited to traditional media types, the application of which also includes emerging ones. High applicability is one of the strengths of Uses and Gratifications theory, because the analysis frame focuses on people’s motives of media use for fulfilment of a need or want (Papacharissi, 2009). Hence the theory is not limited to one or more traditional media context, but also has the potential for new media contexts. Since the beginning of Uses and Gratifications theory, numerous studies have validated its usefulness in studying different media types, including studies conducted on newspaper reading (Berelson, 1948), TV watching (Cooper & Tang, 2009; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2007; A. M. Rubin,

1985), VCR usage (Levy, 1981; A. M. Rubin & Rubin, 1989), video games (Lucas & Sherry, 2004), telephone usage (Leung & Wei, 2000; Park, 2010; Wei & Lo, 2006), social networks (Ancu & Cozma, 2009; G. M. Chen, 2011; Urista, Qingwen, & Day, 2009), online health care (I. K. Anderson, 2011; Tustin, 2010), and general internet usage (LaRose & Eastin, 2004; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). This flexibility in media types grants U&G an edge in current media studies. As Papacharissi (2009) noted, "in a convergent media environment, all media potentially present functional alternatives to each other, based on individual needs or wants. U&G thus allows the study of this convergent media environment without limiting researchers to specific medium use" (p. 20). The scope of Uses and Gratifications is so broad that it is impossible to outline it by identifying media contexts; nevertheless, the commonality of Uses and Gratifications research lies in the shared assumptions of this approach.

The assumptions of Uses and Gratifications are mostly related to the social and psychological needs of people; however, some researchers are also arguing for a broadening of the assumptions to include those that new technology affords. Assumptions identified by Rubin (1994) are: (1) "communication behavior, including media selection and use, is goal-directed, purposive, and motivated"; (2) "people take the initiative in selecting and using communication vehicles to satisfy felt needs or desires"; (3) "a host of social and psychological factors mediate people's communication behavior"; (4) "media compete with other forms of communication (i.e., functional alternatives) for selection, attention, and use to gratify our needs or wants"; and (5) "people are typically more influential than the media in the relationship, but not always" (p. 420).

Uses and Gratifications theory assumes that media users actively seek gratifications from different sources of media (Cooper & Tang, 2009; Papacharissi, 2009; R. B. Rubin & Rubin, 1992; Ruggiero, 2000). One of the attributes of the internet for example, is interactivity, which

emphasizes the activity of its users and blurs the line between sending and receiving messages (Ruggiero, 2000). These assumptions fall in line with media convergence culture, wherein audiences and/or users go across media platforms to find the media experience they want (Jenkins, 2006a). Medium enjoyment has also been found to be positively related to media use frequency (Ledbetter, Taylor, & Mazer, 2016), providing evidence to connect the context of media convergence to U&G theory. Both convergence perspectives and U&G theory describe audiences as active entities who will take initiative to look for media contents that satisfy their needs. In addition to these findings, in their research, Sundar and Limperos (2013) reviewed 20 U&G studies across time and media platforms, finding a considerable overlap in gratifications between traditional and new media. They point out that the original tenets of uses and gratifications speak to innate human needs; therefore, some core reasons for media use could be universal across time and media platforms (Sundar & Limperos, 2013).

**Affordances and U&G.** Among the criticisms of U&G theory are that the gratifications identified are overly vague, gratifications associated across platforms are too general, the results are too individualistic to link with social structure, and the results of separate studies are difficult to integrate (Papacharissi, 2009; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Ruggiero, 2000). Some scholars countered these criticisms by taking into consideration some of the nuanced gratifications made possible by the affordances of new technologies (Lichtenstein & Rosenfeld, 1983). The concept of affordances was originally coined by Gibson (2014) to illustrate the relationship between the material properties of the environment and the actors in it. The concept was later applied on a broader range of research such as physical skill transfer (Seifert et al., 2013), workplace learning (Billett, 2001), technology and learning (Dohn, 2009; Lai, Yang, Chen, Ho, & Chan, 2007), and digital inequality (Hsieh, 2012). In the context of technological



affordances, they can be defined as “the physical properties of objects that enable people perceiving or using those objects to function in particular ways” (Baron, 2008, p. 177). For example, mobility has been considered an affordance for mobile phones, and this affordance has been extended to tablets and other portable communication devices. These new affordances might provide users with gratifications that are not from innate needs but from the process of experiencing the newly encountered features (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). In order to identify these nuanced gratifications and gain more sophisticated understanding of the newer media types, Rubin (2009) called for more specificity in identifying sources of gratifications in the research on new media.

When discussing affordances and technology, Hutchby (2001) pointed out that “the very commonsense dichotomies between the technical and the social need to be fundamentally challenged. Sociologists need to see that social processes and the 'properties' of technological artefacts are interrelated and intertwined, and need to analyze the ways in which they are” (p. 442). Affordances of certain artifacts provide users the potential and opportunities to act (Hsieh, 2012; Majchrzak & Markus, 2012).

The Internet as a technological artifact has provided a wide range of potentials for action. A users' digital skill level has been found to be positively associated with the types of online activities he or she was likely to engage in (Hsieh, 2012). And because of the complicated nature of the internet, the concept of self-actualization – one's belief of one's own ability to organize and execute certain course of action – was particularly relevant (LaRose & Eastin, 2004). While affordances refer to the physical properties of objects that provide potential for action, self-actualization is directly related to the level of knowledge of using the internet technology by the users. Rietveld and Kiverstein (2014) noted “when an individual engages adequately with an

affordance this is often an exercise of skill” (p. 334). Therefore, even though the affordances of certain media platforms are independent from their users, the different skill levels of different people can potentially make them perceive the affordances differently (Dohn, 2009).

In this sense, self-efficacious users or skilled users can perceive the potential of the affordances that media platforms provide and utilize them for various gratifications. In order to identify these gratifications and possibly nuanced ones that have yet been identified, both the affordances of the media platforms and of the users’ agency must be taken into consideration. By identifying specific affordances while acknowledging users’ skill levels, it is possible to render specific insights into nuanced gratifications users gain from engaging with new media, rather than broad and generalized gratifications that differ little from those associated with traditional media.

**Motive-based gratifications and affordance-based gratifications.** The concept of affordances has provided scholars a new orientation to identify and categorize gratifications gained from different media sources and/or platforms. Taking into account users’ skill levels also avoids a technologically determinist view of the uses and gratifications of these media platforms. To distinguish nuanced gratifications found in one type of media from the overlapping gratifications across media platforms, I propose calling the former *affordance-based gratifications* and the latter *motive-based gratifications*. Because gratifications are linked to fulfilment of people’s needs through using media, gratifications are closely connected with motives - “general dispositions that influence people’s actions taken for the fulfilment of a need or want and behavior” (Papacharissi, 2009, p. 139). Scholars have been identifying these motive-based gratifications in different areas of media use. For example, Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) found five factors for internet motives: interpersonal utility, passing time, information seeking,

convenience, and entertainment. Noticeably, these are quite similar to motives associated with TV viewing: relaxation, entertainment, social interaction, information seeking, and passing time (A. M. Rubin, 1983). LaRose and Eastin (2004) also pointed out that habit strength is a powerful predictor for media exposure and that habit is a gratification factor that should not be subsumed under “pass time” but rather examined as an independent influencer.

However, in addition to motive-based gratifications, affordance-based gratifications are more specific to the media source and platform themselves because they are connected with the affordances of those media rather than connected to the innate needs of individuals. Researchers of user-generated content have identified some similar motives such as social interaction, passing time, and entertainment, but they also found some new motives, including self-expression, information, and professional advancement (Leung, 2009). Wei and Lo (2006) identified six gratification items for cell phone use, namely, information seeking, social utility, affection, fashion-status, mobility, and accessibility. They further identified mobility and accessibility as “new and unique gratification dimensions from cell phones” (Wei & Lo, 2006, p. 60). The overlapping gratifications can be summarized as “motive-based gratifications,” they argue, because these similar items speak to people’s innate needs in media consumption. However, some of the newly-identified gratifications such as mobility and accessibility are directly linked with the affordances of cell phones rather than individuals’ needs. Similarly, Leung (2009) pointed out in a study of bloggers that “the interactive nature of the internet attracts these content creators because the responses and comments that they receive on their content encourage them to do more. This fuels the cycle of production and helps a cybercommunity with common interest to grow larger” (p. 1341).

In light of these findings, Sundar and Limperos (2013) suggest U&G researchers take technology affordances into consideration when identifying gratifications brought by media platforms. They proposed four such types of gratifications – modality (different methods of presentation), agency (ability to generate information), interactivity (interact with the contents of the medium), and navigability (ability to move across media platforms) (Sundar, 2008; Sundar & Limperos, 2013). These gratifications, as I suggested above, can be called “affordance-based gratifications” in order to distinguish them from those that are based on innate human needs.

To further illustrate the distinction between motive- and affordance- based gratifications, I collected 35 U&G studies from 1983 to 2013 and organized them into a chart according to the media types and platforms (Appendix A). The chart summarizes the findings of the studies into two categories, motive-based gratifications and affordance-based gratifications. One can see from the chart that similar motive-based gratifications are found in most of the media sources and platforms across newer and older media, but affordance-based gratifications are more specifically related to the media and/or technology themselves. I propose that motive-based gratifications and affordance-based gratifications can be combined to construct an analysis frame for new media research that is not too broad to overlook the “newness” in new media, yet not too limiting to restrict applying gratifications found in one media platform to another.

**Applying the U&G approach to fandom practice.** The Uses and Gratification approach is an appropriate frame to investigate what motivates fans to produce fannish products and release them on various media platforms. As Jenkins (1992a) put it, “fans are drawing on materials from the dominant media and employing them in ways that serve their own interests and facilitate their own pleasures” (p. 214). “Now, fans can screen, can reconfigure and can rearrange media texts based upon their own desires and interests” (Soukup, 2006, p. 333). Bury

(2016) found that different internet platforms' architectures influenced the forming of fan communities and provided fans different pleasures. In other words, fans use different media platforms to suit their different gratifications. Therefore, fandom practice is likely to be associated with several motive-based and affordance-based gratifications in today's media environment. Examination of these factors can provide insights into the gratifications active fan producers gain from using new media technology.

Generating fannish products and fandom-related content online is certainly a form of content-generation; therefore Leung's (2009) research on user-generated content sheds light on motive-based gratifications for fan producers. For example, he says, recognition needs and motives reflect "how internet users engage in content generation online to establish their personal identity, gain respect, build confidence and publicize their expertise" (Leung, 2009, p. 1336). Cognitive needs (Leung, 2009) are similar to information seeking needs (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000), as users explore and expand their knowledge from the community. Moreover, social interaction and entertainment are two factors repeatedly found to be associated with media use, which are likely to be motivations for fandom practice. Fandom practice also fits the description of a habit, "a recurring behavior pattern" (LaRose & Eastin, 2004, p. 362), which means that fans' habit strength can influence their active media selection decisions and lead them to lapse "into more habitual modes of internet consumption" (LaRose & Eastin, 2004, p. 327). The current study seeks to confirm these relationships and further identify patterns of fan production of fannish products and what gratifications they gain from such media practice.

The four affordance-based gratifications identified in the literature are consistent with contemporary active fandom practice as well. *Modality* affordances are "the different methods of presentation (e.g., audio or pictures) of media content, appealing to different aspects of the

human perceptual system (e.g., hearing, seeing)” (Sundar & Limperos, 2013, p. 512). The internet makes it possible to present fan productions in different modalities, such as text, images, audio, and video, thereby providing different gratifications for the fans. *Navigability* is an affordance that connects to the concept of convergence. It is the ability for users to move across media platform conveniently (Sundar & Limperos, 2013), such as accessing contents using different devices, transforming one media format into another, and distributing derivative works across different apps or websites. *Agency* affordance speaks to users’ ability to generate information (Sundar & Limperos, 2013) and media content. Users gain gratifications from becoming the sources of the content and from finding other user-generated content. Similarly, fans may obtain gratifications from creating and/or finding fannish contents. *Interactivity* is the affordance that “allows the user to make real-time changes to the content in medium” (Sundar & Limperos, 2013, p. 515). This affordance leads users to naturally expect more responsiveness, control, and feedback from the media platforms they use. More and more fans are making their voices heard via these media platforms by sharing fan works in various forms and providing analysis and critique on the original content. It is not a coincidence that fans expect more interactions with media producers now than before, because arguably they receive gratification from the interactivity. In sum, both the motive-based gratifications and the affordance-based gratifications may account for fan producers’ active participation in generating and spreading fannish products, using every media platform available to them.

### **Subject: Active Fan Production**

This section describes various types of fannish activities that active fan producers may engage in. Active fan production refers to the fandom activities that involve production process by the fans, for example, making fan videos, writing fan fictions, or drawing fan arts. Hence I

call these fans *active fan producers* in order to distinguish them from *passive fan recipients*. Note that both active and passive fans consume the original media text; the difference lies in whether or not they produce fannish products. For a better understanding of the subject under discussion, a glossary on anime jargon is attached at the end. Note that scholars in fan studies sometimes use the term “fannish” to refer to “of or by a fan” as opposed to using “fan” (i.e. Busse, 2015; Coppa, 2008; Watson, 2010), I adopted this usage of this term in this study.

**Fans-consumers-producers.** The term “fan” is an abbreviation of the word “fanatic,” a word that evokes negative connotations of over-enthusiasm and excessive zeal (Jenkins, 1992b). The term’s association with madness and obsession helped form fans’ image in the public eye (Jenkins, 1992b), as do media representations. Stereotypes of fans include social deviants, pathetic losers, crazy stalkers, and loners (Baym, 2000; Harrington & Bielby, 2007; Jenkins, 1992b; Jenson, 1992; Larsen & Zubernis, 2013).

Jenson (1992) described two types of fans that appear in popular and academic texts: one is a pathological and obsessive loner, the other is a zealous and hysterical member in a crowd. Whether loner or hysteric, fans are often seen as individuals who go above the norm and are overly enthusiastic about their objects of obsession. Fiske (1992) argued that “fandom is a heightened form of popular culture in industrial societies and that the fan is an ‘excessive reader’ who differs from the ‘ordinary’ one in degree rather than kind” (p. 46).

Fan culture has flourished as a subculture with increasing available media for consumption. According to Storey (2003), “fan culture is not just about consumption, it is also about the production of texts – songs, poems, novels, fanzines, videos, etc. – made in response to the professional media texts of fandom” (p. 134). Jenkins (1992b) points out that the proximity between fans and the official media content is a very important characteristic of fandom, that

“they trespass upon others’ property; they grab it and hold onto it; they internalize its meanings and remake these borrowed terms” (p. 62). Fans not only read the texts, they continuously reread them (Costello & Moore, 2007; Jenkins, 1992b; Storey, 2003). Re-reading shifts the focus from original content to “questions of character relations, narrative themes, the production of social knowledges and discourses” (Storey, 2003, p. 146). Such re-reading is considered the negotiation of meanings that result in multiple interpretation (Busse & Gray, 2011).

Moreover, fans communicate with each other in fan communities about their interpretation of the texts in order to make sense of them (Baym, 2000; Bury, 2016; Jenkins, 1992b; Storey, 2003). According to Jenkins (1992b), “organized fandom is... a semistructured space where competing interpretations and evaluations of common texts are proposed, debated, and negotiated...” (p. 86). In a word, fandom involves the reading and re-reading of mainstream media and the creation of various types of messages – visual, text, audio, and video – that are the expression of “an intensity of intellectual and emotional involvement” (Storey, 2003, p. 145) from the fans.

However, Jenkins (2007) argued that the participatory culture and media convergence have made it unnecessary to call fans “poachers” anymore, as had been done early on, and that fans no longer fit into the traditional stereotypes. Although this shifted view might have more to do with the blurring of lines between consumption and production than with a shift in public opinion about fans. Hermes (2009) believed that the distinctions between fans and ordinary audiences are becoming less important as mediated networks have empowered consumers to produce content, thus turning fans into consumer-producers. According to Poster (2006), “[t]he shift to a decentralized network of communications makes senders receivers, producers consumers, rulers ruled, upsetting the logic of understanding of the first media age” (p. 540).



Fans are now both media consumers and producers. This dual identity bestows them with more power, yet they must also face negative connotations from the lingering stereotypes of fans. As consumers who also produce, fans have the power to control the life and death of a media series through organized and effective online campaigns (Costello & Moore, 2007). For example, fans organized campaigns to help finance and show their support for the hit TV show *Chuck* and eventually succeeded in helping the show renew for more seasons. “The powerless become powerful when they mimic and extend the craft traditionally reserved for producers of the original text” (Costello & Moore, 2007, p. 139).

Studies on consumer behavior have noted that this content-generating power of consumers has taken away some power from traditional marketing communications (Heinonen, 2011). Meanwhile, consumers who generated brand-related content have been motivated by empowerment and become aware of their influence over the community (Muntinga, Moorman, & Smit, 2011). Consumer behavior and fan activities both point to the power acquired by generating contents, through the publishing of which both fans and consumers gain control over the media texts within a community. The marketing potential for user-generated content to become a viral marketing strategy was recognized and encouraged by the cultural industries (Busse & Gray, 2011). A popular fan work now can potentially become a free advertisement for commercial products. This connection between fans and consumers, or fans as consumers, indicates the potential practical implication of fan studies in formulating marketing strategies.

**Fansub.** Fans produce their own material texts in various forms: fictions, art works, audios, videos, photo shoots, and mods, to name a few. Among them, fansub is among the most complicated fannish activity. Fansub, a word combining “fan” and “subtitles,” is a product of the age of fast computers and network development. The origin of fansub in the United States lay in

the *noncommercial* distribution of Japanese anime. Koulikov (2010) described fansubbing as: “Individuals throughout the United States began acquiring anime directly from Japan, largely through private noncommercial channels, using cutting-edge computer technologies to attach subtitles to the original raw content, and then distributing the resulting products, known as fan sub.” Fansub groups consist of individuals volunteering to translate and subtitle work for noncommercial distribution of media products such as anime, films, TV shows, broadcast events, and so forth. Note that neither the individuals nor the fansub group generates profit from releasing their products. Fansub is global; fansub groups can be found not only in the United States, but also in Italy, Spain, China, and elsewhere. While the following section about the historical development of fansub focuses on its development in the United States, one may generalize the development of fansub groups in other countries from the overall picture.

Fansub existed before the popularity of the internet (Hatcher, 2005; Jenkins, 2005; Koulikov, 2008; Rusch, 2009). In the early 1990s, anime fans in the United States ordered anime episodes on VHS tapes or discs directly from Japan (Hatcher, 2005; Jenkins, 2005). They translated the episodes, and used specialized equipment to add English subtitles into the anime (Hatcher, 2005; Jenkins, 2005; Koulikov, 2008; Rusch, 2009). These subbed tapes were distributed noncommercially via postal service. A fan wanting to see the anime needed to buy a blank VHS tape and a stamped envelope and mail them to the fansubbers (Hatcher, 2005). As one can imagine, the distribution of fansubbed products in the early 1990s was not wide or frequent. However, this was “the only way that fans could watch anime” (Hatcher, 2005, p. 519). The rise of the internet has made fansub much easier, faster, and more widely distributed (Koulikov, 2010; H. K. Lee, 2011). According to Koulikov (2010), an anime episode aired in Japan can be made available online within 72 hours. Although the high costs for equipment and

resources have made fansub an inevitable collective effort (Jenkins, 2005), the use of the internet has provided conveniences for fansubbers to collaborate with each other online. Without geographical limitation now, fansubs have spread into the broader community. As a result, by the early 1990s, Japanese artists and distributors of anime “were astonished to see a thriving culture surrounding content they had never succeeded in marketing in the United States” (Jenkins, 2005, p. 78).

The process of making fansub videos is expensive and time-consuming (Hatcher, 2005; H. K. Lee, 2011). Hatcher (2005) outlined detailed production steps from which one could imagine the amount of effort required in order to deliver a high quality fansubbed video in a competitive time frame: 1. raw acquisition, where un-subtitled videos are ripped from various media platforms; 2. translation, when the translator listens to the raw material and types a time-stamped translated text file; 3. timing, where the script is added onto the timeline of the episode using computer software; 4. editing, where the translation is re-read and edited by fansub editors; 5. typesetting, where the appearance of subtitle is selected; 6. quality control, a final process of correcting minor mistakes before the product is released; 7. encoding, where a smaller single subtitle file is created for those who have a lower internet speed to download; 8. final distribution, where the fansubbed edition is released through various online file sharing services. Teams that carry out this fansub production and distribution process are often referred to as fansub groups.

Aside from the expensive and time-consuming effort in making fansub videos, another pressing issue in fansub lies in its legality. Copyright laws in the United States and Japan do not allow such unauthorized translation and distribution (Hatcher, 2005; Jenkins, 2005; Koulikov, 2008; Rusch, 2009). Nevertheless, in an industry roundtable panel held at the Anime Expo, 2008,

anime industry representatives expressed varying opinions on fansubbing. Ken Iyadomi from Bandai Entertainment “strongly supported the need to educate fans in the ethical, legal, and economic aspects of fansubbing, in particular of the ways illegal distribution is beginning to affect anime's Japanese producers and creators” (Koulikov, 2008, p. 1). In contrast, Trulee Karahashee, the CEO of Society for the Promotion of Japanese Animation, noted that revolutionary steps had to be taken in order to create a bigger market for Japanese anime in the United States (Koulikov, 2008). It is clear from the industry representatives’ points of view that fansubbing is becoming not only a legal problem, but also an economic one, from which the anime industry in Japan has started to be hurt (Koulikov, 2008; H. K. Lee, 2011). However, one should bear in mind that it was fansubbing that first opened the market for Japanese anime in the United States (Jenkins, 2005; Leonard, 2005). Nevertheless, despite the legal issues and the energy-consuming nature of fansub, there are still many people willing to join or form fansub groups voluntarily to support free product distribution without earning any form of profit for themselves.

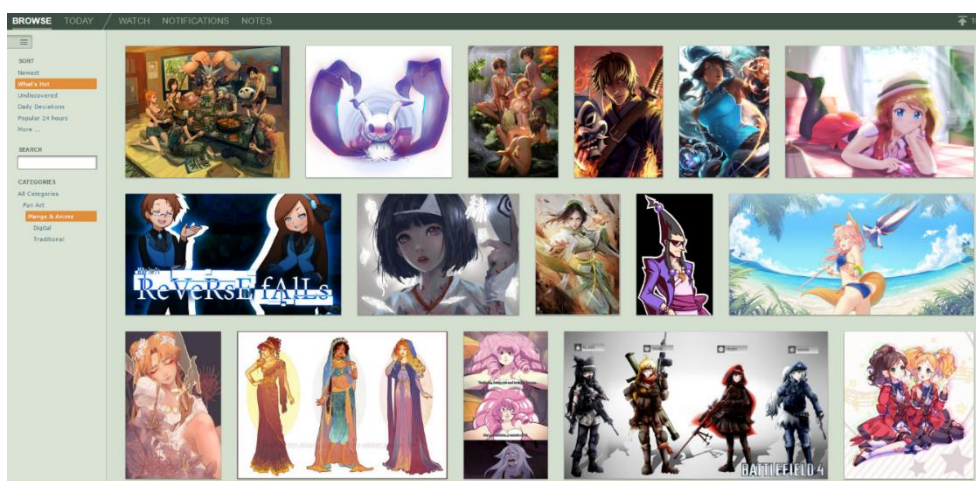
**Fansub in China.** Fansub in the United States is only a small portion of fansubs around the world; however, their current situation reflects some general problems which are applicable to that of China. Anime is only one of the major sources for fansub practices worldwide. TV series, films, and notable events...any media product that is in a foreign language can be fansubbed. For example, in China, several prominent websites are famous for their fansub products of hit American TV series. To get an understanding of the popularity of the fansub distribution, as of the end of 2011, the top three most downloaded American TV series in one fansubbing website had 8,388,607, 6,223,299, and 5,703,311 accumulated hits respectively. As is evident from these numbers, the phenomenon of fansub is substantial in China.

Jenkins (2008) provided a brief look at China's fansub activities in his blog, in which he noted that the main source of foreign media consumption was from fansubbed products because of the restricted media import quota in China. In 2006, a report on Chinese fansub groups in *New York Times* also pointed out that the flourishing of these groups in China partially had to do with the media censorship in China on sex, violence, and politics, which left the audiences no other options than consuming foreign media content that was made available by fansub groups (French, 2006). To further complicate this issue, fansubbed content is also made into DVDs and sold in local entertainment black market (Jenkins, 2005, French, 2006). However, such black market activity is the result of abusive use of fansubbed product by piracy companies, who download the products for free and make them into DVDs for their own profit. Chinese fansub groups are aware of this phenomenon, and several of them have published posts stating that they did not benefit from the selling of fansubbed DVDs and that they were not related in anyway with the piracy companies. However, the fact that the names of the fansub group and group members' IDs appeared on pirated discs might present potential legal problems related to the violation of intellectual property rights. Perhaps it is indeed because of their love of the shows that leads the fansubbers to keep creating fansub media products despite the pressing legal danger (Hatcher, 2005).

**Fan art and fan fiction.** Fan art and fan fiction are products from fan culture that represent a significant proportion of fan products. Fan fiction refers to "any prose retelling of stories and characters drawn from mass media content" (Jenkins, 2006a, p. 325). Similarly, fan arts are re-appropriated drawings of characters or stories taken from mass media content. Generally speaking, they are the texts produced by fans. I use the term "texts" broadly to refer to not only written words, but other forms of expression, including visual and audio symbols such

as drawings and videos. They are derivative, appropriative, and relational (Derecho, 2006). Three common types of fan works are written texts, graphical illustrations, and fan-made videos. By the same token, the term “work” is used to refer to derivative works of certain media shows fans produce to show their interpretations of the original work (Busse & Gray, 2011; Jenkins, 1992b), be it dedication, affection, or even hatred. Fans’ interpretations can be seen as a co-creation process that their “interpretation operates from both community literature and commercial television to influence the map both sources create together in the mind of the reader” (Bacon-Smith, 1992, p. 150).

Usually, the emphasis of such fan work is on the relationships between characters that aims to fill the gaps in the original show (Bury, 2005; Derecho, 2006; Fiske, 1992; Jenkins, 1992b; Thomas, 2011). Fans differ from consumers in their emotional, psychological, and behavioral investment in the original works (Harrington & Bielby, 2007), which is not only reflected in consumption, but also in production. As shown in Figure 1 below, a screenshot of the fan art tab of the website DeviantArt, fan artists produce a wide range of art works that vary in content, genre, and drawing techniques.



*Figure 1.* A screenshot of the amine fan art page on DeviantArt, downloaded on April 7,

2017, from <http://www.deviantart.com/browse/all/fanart/manga/>

In terms of organization, the major difference between fan works and fan sub is that the former is most likely individual work whereas the latter often requires a team because of the requirement of different skill sets in digital editing, translation, supervision, and distribution. The working process of a fansub group often resembles that of an assembly line, where each member is responsible to finish the job on time in order for the next member to start his or her work on time (Hatcher, 2005). However, fan work is a creative process and an artistic expression, be it writing or illustration (Busse & Gray, 2011). Fan writers and artists often work alone, with occasional collaboration among a few producers, re-constructing stories and/or scenes via words or drawings. They are known by online IDs or nicknames; those fan producers who have high quality and/or quantity of works can become quite famous within the fandom circle. Notably, in Japan, some fan artists are actually professional artists who are working in the anime industry. For example, Hoshino Lily is an anime artist who also posts her fan arts on the fan work hosting site Pixiv. Fansub groups, on the other hand, are not recognized by the name of individuals, but rather the name of their group (Rusch, 2009). Therefore, changing individual group members has little influence on the audiences' side. They are seen by outsiders as teams as a whole, just as consumers recognize brand names instead of the names of brand managers.

In sum, the differences between fan fiction/fan art producers and fansub groups are that one fanish work is individually created but the other is created by a group. However, both fan fiction and fansub can be seen as a transformative process of the original media text. In the case of fansubbing, the transformation happens during the collaborative process of translation as well as the technical process of ripping content and converting the content into media formats (Hatcher, 2005; Rusch, 2009). For fan fiction and fan arts, the transformative process mostly focuses on what has not been told in the original stories, such as implications for romantic

relationship between two characters, speculation for what happened “behind the scene,” and stories of same characters in an alternative universe (Bury, 2005; Derecho, 2006; Fiske, 1992; Jenkins, 1992b; Thomas, 2011).

Anime-connected products appear in more forms than fansub, fan fictions, and fan arts. Cosplay, for example, is another prominent form of fan production. Cosplay is the combination of the word “costume” and “play.” Cosplayers dress like anime, manga, and video game characters to attend events such as masquerades, photograph sessions, themed parties, conventions, etc. (Winge, 2006). The cosplayers of anime are not limited by their age or gender; anyone can cosplay any character that interests him or her (Winge, 2006). Good cosplayers often put in great effort into perfecting the details of their appearance, as well as role-playing their characters’ personality as convincingly as possible (Winge, 2006).

The fandom literature presents a dynamic and changing relationship between fans and media producers. Thanks to the contemporary convergence media culture, fan production are witnessing rapid developments and changes that they never encountered before, which in turn makes these subcultural groups more visible to the public. Convergence is not only a media phenomenon; the vast change in technology is influencing the social environment as well. Fan fictions and arts are also becoming a force that influences the perspectives of the fans’ experiences as audiences. These changes call for a closer look at fandom that is situated in a contemporary context, especially for research on non-Western audiences, in order to add to the diversity of fandom studies situated in convergence culture (Punathambekar, 2007). Although convergence is a global phenomenon, fan producers from different parts of the world might react differently to the convergence environment and choose to utilize the technology for gratifications that are unique to local environment. Uses and gratification theory can be used as a powerful tool



to analyze the media phenomenon enabled by and in the convergence environment. Further, studying active audiences using U&G can also provide new theoretical contribution for this theory and hence further enhance it for future research. In light of the context, the subject, and the theory, this dissertation seeks to answer the following questions:

**RQ1.** How are the affordances emerging from media convergence related to the motive-based and affordance-based gratifications reported by anime fan producers?

**RQ2.** What kind of tensions do fan producers report experiencing in participatory fandom culture? How do these reflect the shifting relationships between active fans and media producers, and between active fans and out-group members?

## Chapter Three: Method

### Participants

Since the subject of this research is anime fandom, any Chinese individual who identifies as an anime fan could be a potential participant, regardless of the specific anime of which he or she is a fan. However, this research focuses on active fan production; therefore qualified participants must be active producers of anime fandom. Active fan production means fandom activities that involve a production process by the anime fans, for example, making fan videos, writing fan fictions, or drawing fan arts. Hence I call these fans *active fan producers* in order to distinguish them from *passive fan recipients*. Note that both active and passive fans consume the original media text; the difference lies in whether they produce fannish products. Therefore, a qualified participant for this study was a person who has produced or is still producing fannish products related specifically to anime fandom. Further, this active fan producer must have shared or published the fan work on an online platform where other fans could access their works. A fan who produces fannish work but never shares it with the fandom community is not a qualified participant for this study.

Although the specific content of participants' fannish products are not the focus of this project, the quantity of fannish works produced can be an indicator of the time and energy a fan producer invests. Therefore, in recruiting participants, I asked individuals to report the quantity of their fannish products and time spent on fandom activities in comparison to other members of their communities. Even though these self-reported estimations might be not directly related to the research question, it is valuable information to collect and serves as an indicator of participants' commitment to fannish production. I also asked if the interviewees could share some of their work with me, and received a small collection of their artwork and photos.



*Figure 2.* A drawing of Miku, from Vocaloid franchise, by BullfHold



*Figure 3.* A cosplay photo of “the Medicine Seller”, from Mononoke by LogEnjoy

### **Fannish Cycle**

This section provides a portrait of the interview participants as fan producers, the aim of which is to capture accounts of their past and current experiences with anime fandom. This information provides important context for analysis of the motivations they reported. Because the process of becoming an active fan producer is crucial in distinguishing an active fan producer

from a passive fan receiver, it is helpful to articulate the stages of becoming a fan producer. Interview participants' reports of the process they experienced reflected the uses and gratifications they sought when and after they actively participated in fannish production. To understand the making of a fan producer, I introduce the idea of a fannish cycle to illustrate the process of becoming and perhaps retiring from active fan production. The fannish cycle is a portrait of the "origin stories" of the fan producers from the collective accounts of the interviews. It provides an overall understanding of what the participants had experienced before, during and after their prime time of being an active fan producer. A fan producer at some point in his or her life was only a fan recipient, and a recipient might become a fan producer – given the right circumstances. Based on the participants' accounts, a fannish cycle consists of five stages – consumption, discovery, production, fading, and reentry to the cycle.

The fannish cycle reported by interview participants reflects five stages any fan producer may experience in becoming an active fan producer. Not all fan producers experience a complete cycle. As they described in the interviews, some participants moved forward and exited the cycle without going to the next stage; some stayed in the same stage for a prolonged period of time; some exited a cycle of one fandom while entering another cycle with a new object of fannish obsession; and sometimes, changes in life influenced their connection with the fannish cycle and thus forced the fan producers to stop their involvement with the fandom.

The discussion of the elements of the fannish cycle includes identification of some of the gratifications participants reported. As noted in the literature review, gratifications represent motivations to use media channels to participate as an active fan or satisfactions received (or anticipated) from doing so.

**Consumption.** One element consistent for all interview participants was their consumption of anime media products, merchandise and fannish work during their fandom life. Before venturing into production, these fans sought gratification from consuming various media contents – be it the original anime, officially-released add-on contents, merchandise, or the fannish products of that fandom. For some fans, the extensive exposure to fannish works and anime merchandise was the first spark to fannish production (Bacon-Smith, 1992). Consumption was one of the most mentioned gratifications for fan producers. Fan translator and vidder Livestanes said: “if you really like a work, you’d want to buy all the related products once available.”

**Discovery.** Discovery happens when a fan realizes he or she is capable of producing fannish work and has the opportunity to try producing it. It is the moment a fan said: “I can do this too!” Such a realization marks the end of being a passive recipient and the start of becoming an active fan producer. Although some participants simply ventured into fannish production largely due to their confidence in their ability to write, paint, photograph or otherwise create new materials, most participants recalled memories of how they first started participating in fannish production, through one of the following ways: recruitment, personal connection, exhaustion of current products, or receiving encouragement.

Recruitment applies to group fan production, when a fan group needs new members to perform their group function. They chose a broad recruitment method just as one might post a job listing on public websites. This broad recruitment method provides all the fans in a community easy access to apply for a role in fan group.

Also connected with group fan production, personal connection, based on information about a group, reflected a less formalized way to form a fan group. Friendship also played an important role in motivating a participant to join a fan production group.

A third inspiration to become a fan producer was when all the available anime content resources were exhausted, but when participants still wanted more content. Some fans in this study reported that they took it upon themselves to generate more content. Most of the work started this way are fan fictions and fan arts created by individuals. In this way, fan producers discovered their abilities to create fannish work.

For some participants, encouragement from others pushed them to publish their already created fannish works to the community, or to make the first attempt to create fannish work. Encouragement comes in various forms: it could be a talk with a fellow fan, inspiration from others' works, or simple desire to improve one's own skill. Sometimes a fan recipient became a fan producer simply because of the encouragement he or she received.

**Production.** During the production stage, fan producers reported generating contents in an intense manner. Three preconditions must be met to support creation of fannish works – the original work must provide room for development; the person must have time, money, and the skill sets to produce and distribute fannish works, and the person must have the courage and confidence to share the work. Once these conditions were met, fan producers entered the production stage, which marked the prime of a fan producer's productivity. Consequentially, fan producers reported multiple gratifications specifically related to the production process. They reported acquiring gratifications from the production of fannish works, which will be illustrated in detail in the following sections.

**Fading.** Fan producers may drop out of active production at any time, due to life changes, fading interest, or burnout. When big changes in life happened, some fan producers found it hard to maintain commitment to fannish production. Burnout is another prominent cause for fan producers to quit working, leading to decreased interest in fannish production, and hence termination of all fannish production. These reasons lead to dropping, some fannish projects before completion, according to interview participants. For some active fans, those unfinished productions might be their last.

**Re-entering the cycle.** Fan producers might cease to be active after some years and return to the role of a fan recipient, but this doesn't necessarily mean that their role as fan producers stop forever. Participants recalled experiences of temporarily dropping out of active production, but later re-entering the fannish cycle after finding something that re-ignited their interests in production.

In sum, a fannish cycle starts with consumption, followed by discovery, production, and fading, thus complete a cycle for fan producers. However, the fading phase does not end the cycle, instead, a fan producer might re-enter this cycle of fannish production when discovering a new subject of interest. These different phases of fannish cycle also reflect how fan producers shift fluidly in and out of active production. Based on these fannish cycle stages, the participants in this study were either in the production stage or the fading stage, with all still actively producing and publishing fan works.

### **Means of Discovery**

This study sought to learn about the experiences of producers of anime fan work and the uses and gratifications reflected in their accounts, suggesting a mixed method with a qualitative focus was appropriate. Fandom experience happens across multiple domains, the experience that

can be gained by consuming anime and its related products and by producing fannish work. A quantitative survey will first establish a sense of scope of fan activities among the participants, while a qualitative approach can explore the complex ecosystem of anime fandom and identify patterns or themes that address the research questions in more details.

Furthermore, because I have been a long-time anime fan, drawing on my experience with the community provides insights into the subject. My understanding of discourses in the fandom community can be applied to explore Chinese anime fan communities. As Christians and Carey (1989) articulated, “the best scholarship results from those who act as members of the culture being studied and simultaneously as trained anthropologists from another culture...Qualitative interpretive research arises not simply from personal involvements, but from a fully developed introspective capacity that produces formulations which accurately and substantively make compelling generalizations” (p. 371). J. A. Anderson (1996) also pointed out that “the scientific study of the human condition is itself an expression of that condition” (p. 46). In this case, studying anime fandom from a perspective of a long-term anime fan is, in fact, a form of fandom expression in and of itself.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection for this project consisted of two parts, the first part a 23-item questionnaire (see Appendix B) focused on fan activity patterns and the second part in-depth interviews consisted of 23 open-ended questions (see Appendix C) with individuals who had responded to the questionnaire and other fans they referred to the project for interviews. Using a snowball sampling method, current interviewees were asked to refer others of similar roles who may be of research interest. Snowball sampling is a useful way to reach people of a subculture or a hard-to-recruit population (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011a). All the data was collected online,



because of the limitations in finding a representative sample of Chinese anime fans in offline settings, and because the internet has become the largest venue for fandom activities. Moreover, online audio interviews provided participants extra privacy and further guaranteed their anonymity.

Orgad et al. (2009) define qualitative internet research as “the study of the multiple meanings and experiences that emerge around the internet in a particular context. These meanings and experiences can relate to contexts of use...to contexts of design and production processes” (p. 34). In this research, the phenomenon under study happens mostly online, and the majority of the contents are generated online; therefore, using the internet to gather data and seek participants is an appropriate channel for data collection for the purpose of this dissertation.

**Recruitment.** I initiated participation recruitment by distributing the questionnaire section on Sina Weibo (weibo.sina.com) because of the various fannish contents shared on Weibo and the fluidity of this easy-to-use microblog service. The purpose of the questionnaire was to establish a scope of fan activities and to recognize patterns and types of common fannish productions, such as the variety of fannish production, the length of participation, and the amount of works published. These data provided an overview of who the participants were and what they did. The questionnaire also provided an overall look on demographic distribution of active fan producers in China. Moreover, the questionnaire provided an entry point for the participants if they wanted to further express their opinions on their motives and gratifications in making fan works. Using Weibo ensured that the participants were not concentrated in one specific fandom community or in one specific fannish activity. I contacted several anime fandom accounts that have a high number of followers, asking them to kindly distribute the questionnaire on their accounts. A link to the 23-question questionnaire along with an online consent form was

distributed via their reposts of my original participant collection post. I provided a brief description of the nature of my research and the link to the questionnaire. Upon the approval of IRB, I provided an internet information statement for the questionnaire to ensure the anonymity of participants. Participants were asked to fill in basic demographic information, and were given the option to include their contact information – email, QQ, or simply Microblog username handle – so that interested and qualified individuals could be contacted for the second part of this research, the interviews.

For recruitment of the second part of the research, I sent a blanket message to all those who left their contact information in the questionnaire asking for permission to conduct an online audio interview. After making the initial contact, responding participants were individually contacted and scheduled for interviews. To expand the number of interview participants, I also asked the responding participants to introduce more potential interviewees to me at the end of every interview. I provided three means of internet audio interview, either via instant messengers QQ or Skype, or an encrypted temporary online audio meeting room. For the two participants who didn't have the equipment to perform an audio interview, we decided to conduct the interview using instant message. I provided the participants options to conduct the interviews in Chinese Mandarin, Cantonese, or English; all the interviews were conducted in Chinese Mandarin. An oral consent form was read to the participants and consents were given before the start of the recorded interviews. I recorded the interview using the open source software Audacity, and transcribed the interviews using the dictation software Express Scribe under the education license.

The interview protocol consisted of 23- open-ended questions that asked participants to draw on their experiences of being a fan producer. For example, they were asked to describe how

they first became a fan producer. Participants were asked to describe any positive outcome or gratification they might gain from fannish production. An example question was “What are some satisfactions you gain from actively engaging in fannish activities? Could you give me some examples?” The interview also included questions on the relationship between fan producers and media producers, and fan producers’ relationships with out-group members. For instance, “People think being an active fan producer is higher status than being just a fan, but they also sometimes have a sense of empowerment being an active fan producer, what do you make of that? Do you feel the same? Why or why not?” I continued conducting interviews until the data displayed signs of saturation, with a total number of 21 interviews for this study. The criteria for interview participants was the same with that of the questionnaire: one must have created and published their fannish products on a platform where the community members have access, and that product must be related to anime. With a total number of 21 interviews for this study, the total length of recordings are 21 hours and 33 minutes, which rendered into 236 pages of single-spaced transcripts in Chinese.

### **Research Site**

The research was not limited to the participants of one fandom website. Since fan productions cover a wide range of artifacts including writings, paintings, translations, videos, video games, photos, and other handcrafted items, it is inappropriate to focus recruitment of participants from a single website. However, anime fans often visit some “mother ship” websites that store and display fan products of all formats. For example, the English fan art hosting site DeviantArt and the Japanese fan art hosting site Pixiv are two major sources for fan art collection of various genres. Fan fictions in English can often be found in Archive of Our Own, Fanfic.net and livejournal. It is noteworthy that although the fan fictions may be written in English, readers

could be from China. Chinese fan fictions are often assembled in a variety on online locations. For example, on Baidu Tieba, the largest Chinese communication platform service that is provided by the Chinese search engine Baidu, some individual forums and blogs are good sources of fan fictions.

Fan sub groups usually release their product links in anime bittorrent hosting websites or cloud drives. A bittorrent hosting website is a file sharing site that hosts small-size bittorrent files in place of the actual large files, and thus have become a popular means of sharing contents on the internet (Han et al., 2010). A bittorrent file is only an information sheet pointing to the actual content. A Peer-to-Peer (P2P) downloading client is required to download the actual content (Cohen, 2003). A cloud drive is a convenient, on-demand pool of resources whose content is available for download to anyone anywhere with the correct credentials associated with the files (Hale, 2013; Ruan, Carthy, Kechadi, & Baggili, 2013). In addition to bittorrent hosting sites and cloud drives, most sub groups have individual forums and microblog accounts as well.

Meanwhile, microblogs such as Twitter, Tumblr, Plurk, and their Chinese counterpart Sina Weibo are becoming the outlets for information distribution and gathering. Yin and Liu (2014) called the microblog an “ideological battleground” (p. 563), suggesting the thriving number of its audience and the various information shared on this platform, which makes a microblog, such as Sina Weibo, an excellent entry point for data collection.

### **Dealing with the Legal Gray Zone**

Active fan producers are participating in creating derivative works from copy-righted media texts, thus, they are in a legal gray zone. Therefore, it was important to address the issue of ensuring the anonymity of all the participants and protecting their identities. Among these fan producers, fansubbers and fan translators are most vulnerable to legal actions concerning

intellectual property rights. In planning the research, I exchanged emails with scholars who have done research on fansubbers (Denison, 2010, 2011; H. K. Lee, 2011), asking for details of their recruitment process. From their responses, I identified two measures to ensure anonymity and protect their identities. First, to guarantee their anonymity, interview participants were not asked to sign a consent form; only an oral consent was required. A standard oral consent form was read to the participants, and the recording only started after they gave oral consent. Second, the fan producers identities' can be considered de-anonymized by themselves because their online ID appear in public or semi-public internet spaces as well as in their released products (Elm, Buchanan, & Stern, 2008). Furthermore, their anonymity is ensured in the analysis stage by using pseudonyms that are different from their online ID or nicknames. The participants' real online ID and web address were cropped from the pictures of their products when used in this study as well.

### **Language and Translation**

Finally, because participants in this study were Chinese and data collection was conducted in Chinese, language and translation are salient. The advantages of being a bilingual researcher allow me a level of familiarity with the cross-language experience (Shklarov, 2007). Liamputtong (2010) believes that a bilingual researcher is ideal for conducting cross-language research. In line with the suggestions to bilingual research (Liamputtong, 2010; Shklarov, 2007), to prevent loss of meaning and capture the subtlety in the language, the Chinese data was transcribed in Chinese. The coding of the data, however, was in English since the codebook itself was in English. In this case, both the original meaning of the language can be preserved and the analysis can be conducted without translating back and forth. When quoting from those sources, I use my summaries of the responses for the extremely long passages, or direct translated

quotations. All the quotations are grouped by the title of each subsection and are sorted in the order of appearance. Some jargon and set phrases cannot be translated directly; therefore I drew from my own experience and to make the translation as close to the original meaning as possible. In the glossary, the jargon's original language and its English translation are both listed, followed by an English explanation.

### **Data Analysis**

To address the research questions seeking to identify uses and gratifications identified by participants, thematic analysis was used to analyze the transcribed interviews. The method used was largely deductive. Themes were determined using three criteria - recurrence, repetition and forcefulness (Owen, 1984), noting that a theme does not necessarily meet all three criteria. The analysis process follows the guidelines by Lindlof and Taylor (2011b), and Silverman and Marvasti (2008). Once the initial data collection was complete, I first read through them to get a sense of the data. An initial line-by-line coding was done using existing U&G research findings as the initial codebook (see Appendix D) in order to identify and construct themes. For example, previous research identified status as one of the gratifications of internet uses, all the sentences addressing participants' opinions on their status in fandom community are thusly coded. The further reading of the data that was coded "status" would break down the code into more details. Moreover, some of the codes that were directly related to fan production also were included in the initial codebook.

I coded the interview data in F4analyze 2.0.3, a software that makes organizing and categorizing the codes easier. Once the initial line-by-line coding was finished, I mapped out the relationships between and among significant paragraphs in order to reduce the data to a manageable size (Meisenbach, 2009). In the same section, phrases, sentences and paragraphs that

related to the same code or conveyed the same meaning were treated as single units, and were grouped into larger categories. Hence the unit could be a paragraph or a single phrase. Once a set of categories was established, I proceeded to read and re-read the data in order to organize new passages into existing categories, until the categories accounted for the majority of the data and therefore formed representative themes (Meisenbach, 2009). Meanwhile, the quantitative data from the questionnaire was used as additional information to further illustrate the analysis of the interview results.

The three criteria for thematic analysis are recurrence, repetition and forcefulness (Owen, 1984). During the coding process, I followed these criteria to organize codes and combine similar ones into an inclusive code. The number of times the code appeared in the data was tracked, as a means to assess repetition. The details of these numbers will be presented in the related subsections under the results section. The analysis software F4Analyse 2.0.3 conveniently reports the distribution of the codes among all the participants, from which I can see how many times the code recurred in each participant's transcript. The length and depth of participant's responses reflect the forcefulness of the themes.

## **Chapter Four: Results**

The results section includes the results from both the questionnaire and the interviews. Questionnaire results provide an overview of the demographic information of the participants and data about the context of their fannish production, including the fannish production types and their reported means of online communication and content distribution. Following that is the reported motive-based gratifications, the reported affordance-based gratifications, and a section of both motive- and affordance-based gratifications, which I named dual-level gratifications. The dual-level gratifications provide insights on the influence of convergence among media platforms on the reported gratifications. The final section consists of fannish producers' accounts of relationships and tensions with media producers and with people who belong to the out-group of anime fandom.

### **Questionnaire Results**

This section includes the statistical results for the questionnaire participants. These results provide an overview of the demographic composition of the participants as well as a summary of the effort they reported spending on different types of fannish works. A total of 123 questionnaires were submitted to the survey service site AskForm by participants. They were volunteers who answered my post asking for survey participants that was posted and re-posted by several popular microblog accounts. Of these, 113 of the questionnaires were viable for this study. Those excluded were respondents who had not published their fannish productions for others to see. Posting was a requirement to be defined as a fannish producer. Among valid participants, 94 (83.2%) were females and 19 (16.8%) were males. All participants were Chinese; most were located in Mainland China, while 14 resided outside China at the time of this study. The mean age of the participants was 23.67 ( $SD=3.6$ ). The oldest fan producer was 38



years old while the youngest 18. The entire questionnaire is attached in Appendix B, and all the figures and tables in this section are attached.

Participants reported they had published a variety of fannish products, including fan fictions, fan arts, cosplay, fan translation of media products, fan made videos, and other creative products such as fan crafts, fan made video games, fandom role play, fan cover of anime songs, etc. Fan fictions and fan arts made up the majority of the shared products, both at 27%, followed by fan translations at 18%.

Responses indicated that the longest time of active participation was for fan fiction and fan art. The longest time spent on being a fan producer for fan fictions and fan arts was 14 years, while the shortest participating time reported was 1 month. On average, participants reported to have been active fan producers in fan art ( $M = 50.41$  months,  $SD = 44.62$ ), fan fiction ( $M = 47.31$  months,  $SD = 45.27$ ), and cosplay ( $M = 43.07$  months,  $SD = 30.27$ ) around 4 years, while fan producers in video making ( $M = 25.57$  months,  $SD = 23.64$ ) and translation ( $M = 23.64$  months,  $SD = 20.34$ ) around 2 years. However, the typical length for being a fan producer for all types of fannish products was 3 years (36 months) or less. The mode for fan fiction was 3 years; fan art, cosplay, and translation 2 years, fan vid 1 year.

More than half of the participants identified themselves as multi-mode fan producers (59.3%). That is to say, they have produced and shared more than a single type of fannish product. Among all the participants, 30 indicated they have shared two types of fannish products, 18 have shared three types of products, 12 have shared four types of product, while seven have their toes in each of the fannish product pools. The single-model fan producers made up the rest of the 40.7% of the participants who have shared one type of fannish product. Among these 46 participants, 19 were fan fiction writers, 16 fan artists, five translators, four cosplayers, one video

maker, and one cosplay photographer. Note that these numbers represented only the fannish products that were actually shared or published on an online platform that others have the access to. Participants also reported the type of products they made but didn't share with any online community. Of the 113 participants, only five reported to have shared online all the fannish products they had created.

With the convenience of the internet, more and more communication services are becoming available to users. As a result, fan producers had multiple ways to communicate with other fellow fans within the community. The most frequently used communication service type was microblogs like Sina Weibo, making up of 27% of the total means of communication; followed by BBS services such as Baidu Tieba and individual themed forums; the third most used means of communication was instant messenger, i.e. QQ, making up 20% in total. As shown in the following pie chart, the means of communication were very scattered; fans have many choices to reach out to the community. However, when asked to rank the time spent on each of the services, forums were ranked at the top, followed by personal blogs and instant messenger services. This means that even though fan producers use microblogs more frequently, they spent longer time on forums and blogs than on microblogs.

The following sections on the interview results will present three types of gratifications reported by the fan producers in this study: motive-based gratifications, affordance-based gratifications, and dual-level gratifications.

### **Interviewee Demographics**

This section presents the interview results by theme groups, first concerning motive-based gratifications, then affordance-based gratifications, and then dual-level gratifications. Next

it presents participants' accounts on the shifting relationship between fan producers and industry producers, and between fan producers and outsiders.

The mean age of the interview participants was 21.9, with the oldest participant 32 and youngest 18. There were 18 female interviewees and three males, a ratio consistent with that of the questionnaire. Two participants were residing overseas at the time of the interview while the rest were in mainland China. Of all the interviewees, 11 described themselves as multi-model fan producers, which means they had produced and published more than one type of fannish product, and the remaining 10 were single-model fan producers who focused on production of one type of fannish work.

Participants used anime jargon that might sound unfamiliar to a non-anime fan or a non-Chinese, therefore a glossary is attached at the end of this paper for a better understanding of their accounts.

The research questions of this study are to identify the uses and gratifications that fan producers reported in the 21 interviews and to examine the significance of convergence culture in enabling the fan producers to gain such gratifications. The results are organized by the order of research questions. The first research question sought to identify the gratifications that active fan producers reported and the connection between gratifications and the affordances emerged from media convergence. The first three sections are organized by three types of gratifications, namely, the reported motive-based gratifications, the reported affordance-based gratifications, and the reported dual-level gratifications – the gratifications that are both uniquely afforded by the convergence culture and that satisfy participants' innate needs. The last section covers the reported relationship changes and tensions among fan producers, media producers, and the “outsiders” – people outside of anime fandom community.

## Reported Motive-based Gratifications

Motive-based gratifications reflect motives, how individuals use media to satisfy needs or wants. Uses and gratifications (U&G) theory proposes that people use media based on various motives to address their needs and wants. The emphasis of this type of gratification is on people's motives, with affordances playing a minor part in gratifications gained. The gratifications fan producers reported seeking or receiving from participating in Finnish production are largely consistent with the motive-based gratifications previously identified by researchers on various media uses.

Drawing on the definitions of motive-based gratifications presented in previous studies, the motive-based gratifications reported by interview participants and identified based on the codebook are labeled status (includes competition), self-actualization (includes commitment), self-expression (includes aesthetic enjoyment), and escape (includes habit). These four are the major motive-based gratifications for fan producers in terms of occurrences, while others were less present in the interviews. These gratifications are: competition, commitment, aesthetic enjoyment, and habit.

The definition of each gratification and illustrations from participants of these gratifications are provided below. Instead of listing all the gratifications by frequency, the gratifications are organized in such a way that the less frequent gratifications are grouped under the major gratifications, in order to form a more concise view of motive-based gratifications of fan producers.

**Motive-based gratification: Status.** *Status* is a gratification identified by many scholars; it is related to one's social identity and how the person is perceived in a group (Leung & Wei, 2000; Park, 2010; Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009; Wei & Lo, 2006). *Status* has been described

as a desire to enhance or maintain one's social identity through online group participation (Wei & Lo, 2006). For the fan producers in the study, this gratification is expressed as participants trying to raise their status in the fan community and increase their influence by publishing fannish works. This was the most mentioned gratification as well as the most complicated one. While acknowledging that fan producers do have higher influence in the broader fan community than regular fans, participants said that a fan producer's status should be given by others but not sought, and they held somewhat negative opinions about those who actively seek status for gratification.

During the interviews, participants were generally quite humble when talking about their own status in the community. The term "community" is used here to refer to the internet space wherein fan producers distribute their works and communicate with others. The community could be a forum, a semi-public chat room, or microblog. In Chinese fandom, the term "Guru/大大" is used to name someone who is very skilled in their line of fannish production. One can be a "Guru" in writing, painting, cosplay, translation, and any fannish field available. Being called a "Guru" is an indicator that a fan producer is well known for their quality works in the community. About half of the participants reported having been called a "Guru" at some time in their fandom career. When I told fan artist ComfyPinchAlly that she was introduced as a "Guru" by the participant who referred her to my interviews, she laughed, "No, (I'm not a Guru,) I'm a 'lowly scrub.'" Others such as 2touchiscu and Daszkridg simply dismissed being called "Guru" as a joke.

Fan translator Orconic was among the few who accepted the complement gladly, "Why not accept compliments offered to you? I will," he said. When the title "Guru" referred to them, participants were generally very humble. As cosplayer 2touchiscu put it, "I think it's unnecessary

to call people Guru. Once removed from the halo of a cover singer or a cosplayer, we're all just anime fans." The clear discomfort with openly claiming such a title is likely due to the influence of Chinese culture wherein showing humility is praised and even expected while showing pride when receiving compliments is scorned. Participants might have felt compelled to show humility when conversing with me, the researcher. Further elaborations from the participants indicated the inconsistency of status was not merely a matter of observer effect.

While participants were reluctant to grant themselves a title of status, they were very generous in calling other fan producers "Guru." The title cannot be self-proclaimed but rather given by the community. RacingThePopular and Zhitsing expressed a similar view that anyone who was more skilled than themselves was a "Guru" to them.

From the description of the participants, high skill level was related to status, but when the status was perceived by others, not by themselves. In fact, several participants addressed directly their views on people who are motivated to make fannish products to seek status in the community. Fan artist Matriespa spoke poorly of those people, "it's indeed possible that the person purposefully tries to get a higher status - to let people see him in this platform, so that his works can spread. I don't think this would be the worst outcome for him. But I'm afraid he will lose his true heart in the end and never be able to paint from the heart again. I think this would be regrettable and I personally won't try to do such a thing." The seemingly inconsistent assessment on seeking status actually reflects a difference in perspective. When status was bestowed on a fan producer by others to acknowledge a higher skill level, participants shared a generally humble yet accepting view, but when participants were talking about status as a motive for their own fannish production, the overall view of the value of status was negative.

The majority of participants indicated that people who were motivated by seeking status did not genuinely like the anime or its characters. This finding is inconsistent with previous research on uses and gratifications of cell phone usage, wherein participants reported actively seeking status as a gratification (Leung & Wei, 2000; Wei & Lo, 2006). Participants held a low opinion on those who let vanity take the better part of them. For the interview participants, status was a complicated concept, as a motive seeking status was often associated with negative attributes such as hypocrisy, pride, and vanity.

One positive outcome for higher status, participants agreed, was that it conferred higher influence over the fan community. Regardless of whether the fan producer's high status in the community was an outcome of skilled works or of purposeful pursuit, participants indicated that fan producers whom they considered of higher status had a stronger voice in the community than the non-producer fans. Some influence comes from the number of followers in the platforms where they share their work. An increasing number of followers mean that more people are willing to attend to what the fan producer has to say. Fan translator Orconic said: "They get more good replies from the community when they post. For the non-producers, a post probably can't get as many replies. Yet a fan producer with plenty of works under his belt will get more replies." Their influence goes beyond the spread of their works, in that their personal opinions on the show, the characters, and even character pairings could direct the trend for non-producing fans. The fan producers are "worshipped" (Showplexpr, fan writer) and respected by other fans, some of whom become the followers of those fan producers. Those fan followers strengthened fan producer's status in the community by almost brainlessly agreeing with their opinions and spreading their works.

The fan follower base of these fan producers in turn made the fan producers, as fan translator Funnytrixia noted, “the representation of a collective group; compared to a single fan, they are more influential, they are more efficient.” InvaderExtra and Isence62 both used the metaphor of a pyramid to describe the structure of status in a fandom community, with the producers of the original show on the top of the pyramid, and immediately followed by the high status fan producers. As a result, the fan producers indeed managed to exert more influence over the public opinion within their fan community, a point of which will be addressed in more details in the section on the relationships between and among fans, fan producers, and industry producers.

In sum, the interviews revealed that status was usually not a gratification that fan producers reported seeking for themselves when creating works. Rather, the gratification of *status* arose from responses of others in the fan community to the quality and amount of fannish works they published. Participants believed fan producers should not be motivated by status and in general reported a low opinion on those who sought status for gratification. However, they all noted that fan producers have a higher influence than the non-producer fans in the community in which their fannish works are distributed.

**Minor motive-based gratification of status: Competition.** The minor motive-based gratification nested under status is *competition*. In the U&G literature, *competition* is a gratification usually associated with video games (Hou, 2011; Lucas & Sherry, 2004). In video games, *competition* referred to a player’s motive of being the best gamer as evaluated by at least one other peer (Lucas & Sherry, 2004). In the context of fannish production, competition is similar to that of video games in the sense that a fan producer’s works can and will be evaluated against the works of other fan producers. Therefore, this gratification means that fan producers



create fannish works with the objective of being evaluated as the best fan producer or the best group by members of the community.

According to the participants, competition could happen between two fan work groups as well as between individuals. For fan work groups such as translation groups and cosplay groups, the competition often focused upon the overall quality of their works. Fan translation groups competed with other groups in the accuracy of their translation, the picture quality, and the speed of distribution. As members of different translation groups, Funnytrixia, Livestanes, and Haftwaka pointed out similar competitive aspects, although they each adapted different tactics. Fan translator Livestanes saw competition as motivational rather than external stress, “I don’t feel pressure, but I’ll work faster if there’s a competing group.” Fan translator Haftwaka is from a prominent translation group, he said the competition in the release speed and translation quality was beneficial for the fandom community. As a member in a smaller group, Funnytrixia would opt out from translating a work if other groups already announced to do it as an attempt to avoid competition.

Unlike translation groups, cosplayers didn’t need to form a group to create cosplay works, but some of them joined a group in order to compete in cosplay competition events often held in anime conferences. These events are similar to competitions for performance art shows, in which cosplayers act as a group and are judged as a group. Cosplayer InvaderExtra took great pride in the achievements of her old cosplay group, “if other cosplay groups delivered a better work on stage, we’d work harder to better them. It was quite benign competition...For example, some of our choreography designs were very unique. Unlike other groups, we chose to enter the stage from the audience seats, giving them a chance to interact with us closely. And that caused a

great sensation back then.” This type of competition reported was usually benign in nature and participants used the competition to improve their work.

Individual fan producers also felt competition from their fellow fan producers, but their focus was more on the popularity of the characters or the romantic pairing they supported. For example, fan artist ComfyPinchAlly said, “in the fandom for *LoveLive*, the character Eli is paired by some fans with Nozomi and others with Umi. Fans supporting the opposing pairing will compare with each other the amount of fan works published and the number of replies to those fan works. I for one, would participate in the creation and contribute to the pairing I like.” Fan artist Matriespa liked to compare with other fan producers the number of her followers and the number of “likes” her works received. The speed of content distribution also was important to the individual fan producers. These competitions are in fact encouraging the fan producers to work faster and create more content.

However, not all the competition is productive and beneficial. The participants also revealed some vicious competition they witnessed. Plagiarism and smear campaigns, for instance, were the outcome of vicious competition. Fan writer Jambasi recalled an incident a few years ago in a forum she used to visit. Fans of opposing pairings accused each other of plagiarism. They posted hostile comments under a fan fiction posted by the other side, and started a flaming war. The incident ended with the web administrator closing the fiction post. Fan artist RacingThePopular was troubled by the vicious competition. She felt uncomfortable being involved in a fight between two “Gurus” of a fan community about the sales amount of their fan books, and decided to drop out of that community. Cover singer 2touchiscu revealed a scandal that a top-ranking cover singer in her community bought votes and comments to boost

popularity. Such vicious competition was the topic of gossip in fan community, but it hurt some fan producers' desire to create more works.

In sum, benign competition was a gratification for members in fan work groups as well as individual fans. Consistent with previous studies on video games that revealed gamers compete with each other to be the best player (Hou, 2011; Lucas & Sherry, 2004), fan producers and fan groups have similar level of competitiveness on the release speed, quality, and popularity of their works. They were encouraged and motivated by positive competition, which resulted in more fannish works and faster delivery. However, sometimes vicious competition reduced fan producers' willingness to generate new content.

**Motive-based gratification: Self-actualization.** Previous study on user-generated Internet content revealed that users create content for *self-actualization* (Shao, 2008), that is, engaging an unconscious motive to create content, which “help people believe that they have an impact on the group and that support their own self-image as an efficacious person” (Shao, 2008, p. 15). *Self-actualization* was reported by fan producers as a motive to create and distribute their fannish works. This gratification, which is distinct to producers in their fan community, refers to producing fannish works to satisfy innate personal needs to create more fan work. These needs could be due to dissatisfaction in the current fan work collection or due to inspiration to create fan works, although both were an expression of self-actualization. The interview results suggest that *self-actualization* was motivated not by wanting to exert influence or build self-image in the community, but rather by an internal drive to generate self-efficacious feelings for and by oneself. Part of the satisfactions reported by participants was not so much related to the feeling of pride in their creation but more to the satisfaction they experienced during the process of creation and distribution. Of course, the Chinese virtue of expected humility may have

compelled the participants not to voice their pride in their fan creation to avoid expressing hubris.

The Chinese anime fan community uses the term “taking the pills” to refer to the satisfaction from the consumption of fannish content. The term vividly describes the feeling of indulgence and obsession associated with fannish consumption as reported by the participants. When there wasn’t any “pill” left for a fan to take, “Well, you make your own medicine,” said fan artist ComfyPinchAlly, jokingly. As mentioned in the “Fannish Cycle” section, many participants started to create fan works to satisfy their desire for specific kinds of satisfaction. These participants found the existing fannish work collection could not fulfill their needs or interests, so they initiated fannish production themselves.

Sometimes, participant interviews reveal, *self-actualization* started from a dissatisfaction towards the current situation of that anime’s fandom. Participants may have been discontented with the original work or annoyed with the existing fan works collection. The original anime work is unlikely to address all aspects of fans’ needs. Fan writer CyberReptile once wrote a fan fiction of 150,000 words because the original ending saddened her so much that she wanted to “give the characters a new life.” Sometimes, the on-going anime ends with a cliff-hanger, which might trigger an explosion of fannish production. Fan writer Showplexpr recalled the week when the 24<sup>th</sup> episode of anime *Tiger & Bunny* ended with that possibility that one of the main characters might die. She said: “The fan fics and fan arts production reached a peak in that week; every day there were thousands of new works published. People wrote about possible endings and about the possible romantic development. They couldn’t be satisfied if the romance stopped at a character’s death. So they wrote about the same romantic prompt over and over again,

searching for a sense of satisfaction.” In contrast, as fan writer Jambasi pointed out, “if you’re already very satisfied with the original work, then you don’t have to create fan works.”

Dissatisfaction did not stop at original works for some participants, who created fannish work because they were not satisfied with the existing fan work collection of their favored anime. Fan writer Artekkyos felt that her favored character pairing didn’t get enough love in the community, so she started writing about them herself. “I felt there wasn’t enough content for the pairing I liked, so I wondered if I should produce medicine myself, and so I did,” she said. Orconic joined a fan translation group because of internet flaming about character pairings in his favored anime. “The pressure from the other group who advocated the other pairing made me want to start fannish production. I wanted to publicize the pairing of my liking.”

Interviews reveal that not all the *self-actualization* began with dissatisfaction. Participants also created fannish works simply out of inspiration. According to fan writer Jambasi, “the process of fannish production is in and of itself self-actualization...For example, if I come up with a great prompt that was not in the original work but fit the characters very well, then I will want to satisfy myself via fannish production.” Cosplayer InvaderExtra believed that fannish production was to satisfy fans’ own fantasies about the characters’ story arcs. When inspiration hit, participants reported an almost impulsive feeling to start the production immediately. The literal translation of the term “脑洞” is “a hole in your brain,” a term that was commonly used by fan producers to describe the idea of fannish production that grew in their minds. According to fan writer Showplexpr, the process of inspiration was: “certain things in the anime touched you, and thus opened the hole in your brain. You wanted to fill up the hole so you started working on the fan work. This is what often happened to me.” Inspiration happened to participants

unexpectedly and fast: “sometimes I suddenly had an idea and then suddenly I want to draw it,” said fan artist RacingThePopular.

Some participants thought that giving back to the community was a form of self-actualization. Although fan producers said in jest that the great efforts in making fannish content was like having to “grow your own food” (EatsRock, fan artist), “make your own medicine” (ComfyPinchAlly, fan artist), or even “cut off your own flesh” (Funnytrixia, fan translator), they still wanted to make some contribution to the community. Fan artist BullfHold added, “If my paintings can attract more fan producers, then I’ll have more fan arts to look at.” These inspiration-stricken fan producers make fannish works to address their own needs for fannish creation, as well as a need to contribute to the community.

In sum, as pointed out by previous studies (Leung, 2009), *self-actualization* was a unique gratification for user-generated content such as fannish production. Fan producers tried to satisfy themselves with their own fannish creation when they were dissatisfied with the story development of the original work. They also created fannish works when the available fannish content didn’t appeal to them. Moreover, some fan producers reported the need to act on their own inspiration and to contribute to the community as satisfactory and self-efficacious. Similar to the justifications participants gave to the status gratification, the feeling of self-actualization might come from the influence they made in a fandom community, but their motive was not related to such influence towards others. Instead, the participants firstly engaged in fannish production simply to fulfill their personal goals rather than satisfying the community.

**Minor motive-based gratification of self-actualization: Commitment.** The gratification of *commitment* in the fandom context is an addition to the U&G literature. *Commitment* gratification is related to *self-actualization* in that *commitment* focuses on the sense

of responsibility regarding fan producers' influence over their community. It is an outcome of the fannish products they made for *self-actualization*. *Commitment* emerged from the interviews in accounts about continued participation in fannish production for the sake of being persistent with their task. Participants took pride in the fact that they kept on creating and publishing fannish contents for a prolonged period of time. Some participants were committed in their roles of a fan work group; some participants were persistent in creating and publishing fannish products despite a decrease in enthusiasm; and some participants looked at fannish production as a dream they must hold on to.

As volunteer groups, members in a fan work group can easily drop out without a reason. Funnytrixia commented that a lot of former members in her translation group were very passionate workers at the beginning but suddenly would disappear and never be seen again. "It's a mental strength for people to keep on translating even if they faced difficulties in real life," said Jambasi. As a work group member, being persistent was considered in and of itself an achievement.

*Commitment* was not only valued in fan work groups, but also among individual fan producers. Fan translator and fan vidder Livestanes considered it bad manners for a fan fiction writer to abandon an on-going series. Jambasi commented on writing a long fan fiction series that "without great passion or commitment, the process could wear away your enthusiasm a lot." Participants recognized that their enthusiasm would fade one day, and what motivated them to keep going was a will to be persistent.

In sum, *commitment* was a gratification gained by continuing participating in fannish production despite reduced enthusiasm. Fan producers not only took pride in their own

commitment; they also considered it a commendable characteristic that showed trustworthiness of the fan producers.

**Motive-based gratification: Self-expression.** In the uses and gratifications literature, the gratification of *self-expression* refers to articulating one's own emotion and opinions to generate feedback, develop relationships, and/or understanding from others (Bumgarner, 2007). For the fan producers, this gratification was reflected in their descriptions of how they created fannish works to express their own thoughts and feelings. Participant interviews revealed three types of self-expression: expressing one's own emotions, expressing one's feelings about the original work, and expressing one's feelings on the subsequent fannish production. Fannish production is a work of creativity; most fan art and fan fictions are creative in nature, while cosplay and translation have limited room for creativity. Yet all the participants felt they had expressed themselves to others during the production.

For example, fan writer Artekkyos admitted that sometimes she would mix in some of her thoughts in her fictions that she could not share openly with others, through the mouth of a character. Fan writer Jambasi would use the events that happened in her life as the basis of a story, and replace the people in the real events with anime characters to explore how these characters would react in similar situations. Fan artist EatsRock and cover singer 2touchiscu both used fannish production to express what they were feeling at a particular moment. Fan writer GreyTimeCooled shared a heart-aching memory about a character's death in the anime *One Piece*. She said in the interview, "when the character, Ace, died in the show, I felt pain in my chest. Back then I thought death was the end of everything, so my fics then were filled with despair." She used fan fictions to grieve the death of a character, meanwhile expressing her opinion on death in general. Even though fannish production is derivative work, anchored in the



original anime, the fan producers described still finding a way to voice their own feelings through their work.

Aside from direct expression of their own emotions, participants also said they express their opinions, or rather their feelings, about the original work. They particularly noted a desire to interpret the anime work as well as to include their own emotional response to the show and characters. Fan artist Matriespa said, “I want to express my view on the show and my hopes for a certain character. For example, if the character was not treated well in the show, then I’d want to be good to him and make such fan arts about him.” Fan artist NozyChari would make funny comics to reflect her opinions on the show and the characters. For fan translator Livestanes, self-expression was an essential part of the translation process. She said: “when you’re translating, you pour your own love and interests into the activity. You end up publishing something you truly like, therefore translating is self-expression.” Some participants expressed different views on self-expression as they emphasized the strong distinction between expressing fan producer’s own feelings and interpreting a character’s feelings.

Some of the fan producers were convinced what they reflected in their fannish works was as loyal to that of the show as possible, and as such their interpretations were not related to the emotions they personally experienced in real life. However, as fan translator Halfwaka concluded, “creative fannish production *is* self-expression.” The fannish products were “the remix of many other fan works, which in turn formed the fan producers’ personal interpretation” (BullfHold, fan artist). Whether it is the interpretation of anime works, or emotional responses towards a character, fannish production is always related to the fan producers’ personal opinions and feelings. Layering their own emotions within the fannish works granted fan producers a means to gratify their needs to express emotions in the process of fannish production.

Self-expression is also reflected in the fantasy narratives reported in participants' accounts. In their study of sex differences in video game play, Lucas and Sherry (2004), described fantasy as "to do things that you cannot do in real life such as driving race cars or flying" (2004, p. 503). Participants created fan works to create narratives that the original work could not as means of self-expression. On the subject of fantasy, fan artist EatsRock pointed out, "fannish works are the fantasy in your mind. Even if you created the fan works in real life, it is no more than for entertaining yourself." However, some participants emphasized that they believed their fan appreciation was true to the original work and hence not a complete fantasy.

The last type of self-expression focuses on expressing fondness for the fannish production activity itself. This mentality was more evident among cosplayers in the sample. As pointed out by cosplayer InvaderExtra, people who liked cosplay were very fond of showing off. "They want to express something they like; they have photos of themselves taken; they like to show off." The unique factor about cosplay lies in the fact that the fan producers of cosplay are themselves the focal point of the finished product. They were the stars in the photos, and they were the embodiment of the anime characters. When 2touchiscu made cover songs, she believed she was expressing her feelings, but when she talked about her experience in cosplay, "it's more about me liking the activity." Of course, this doesn't necessarily mean the other fan producers didn't like their fannish activity, but they seldom phrased their fondness for the activity as self-expression.

In sum, fan producers reported creating fannish works for *self-expression*. This gratification branches into three types – to express their feelings as they were situated in their own lives, to express their feelings about the anime and its characters, or to express their feelings about their fannish activity itself. These three aspects of self-expression reflect the unique nature

of fannish works. The fannish products are first and foremost derivative. Fan producers tried to express their own feelings while staying loyal to the original works. The characteristics of different fannish productions also resulted in different emphasis on the aspects of self-expression.

**Minor motive-based gratification of self-expression: Aesthetic enjoyment.** In the literature, *aesthetic enjoyment* means that people use a media platform to be aesthetically entertained and aroused (Belcher & Haridakis, 2013). Participants reported this gratification both to describe their consumption of other fan producers' works and the creation of their own works. Fan producer EatsRock said, "It is particularly enjoyable when someone's writing makes you feel you're personally in the scene." Fan artist Zhitsing started to draw an anime character just because she found him very attractive. Overall, aesthetic enjoyment focused on the positive emotions aroused during the consumption or creation of fannish works, "through exposure to something that is considered beautiful" (Belcher & Haridakis, 2013, p. 389).

**Motive-based gratification: Escape.** The gratification labeled *escape* refers to the behavior of using media to get away from stress, problems, work, boredom, people, or life; it is associated with alienation or isolation (Bumgarner, 2007; A. M. Rubin, 1983, 1985). Consistent with earlier studies on internet and other media usage (Ayyad, 2011; Ferguson et al., 2007; Lichtenstein & Rosenfeld, 1983; Smock, Ellison, Lampe, & Wohn, 2011), *escape* for the fan producers in this project describes participants' accounts of producing fannish works in order to get away from their stressors in life. In addition, participants recounted taking short breaks from work to relax by producing fannish works.

Participants expressed a multi-faceted view on using fannish production as a means to escape. While admitting they engaged in fannish production to escape, they emphasized that

escape meant a temporary stress release for them, not completely losing oneself into the anime world. Being aware of the negative social connotations on anime, participants were usually quite defensive when discussing the topic of escape. Several participants employed sarcasm to refute such claim. They argued that all habits were a form of escape, which should not be frowned upon. However, they also agreed that the stereotype of anime fans who completely lose themselves in the fictional world held some truth. Being sympathetic to these people, some participants tried to put some positive spin on these fans.

Participants described escaping into fannish production to temporarily reduce pressures from life. For example, fan writer Jambasi admitted that the peak of her fannish creation was in her senior year in high school, when Chinese students face tremendous pressure to get ready for entrance exam into colleges. “Anything you can do that’s not study is a pressure release,” she said. ComfyPinchAlly and EatsRock both thought fannish production was no more than a habit for them, and the way it reduced pressure was similar to that of jogging. Participants said gaining such gratification was justified. However, a more extreme form of escapism also was revealed in the interviews.

Participants mentioned that some fan producers they knew indeed gained gratifications from escaping into the world of anime fandom. They believed that if a person was not respected in real life, he or she might dedicate a great amount of resources to a certain fan community in order to gain respect and affirmation from the people in that community, and this was a form of escape from the real world for them. Fan translator Funnytrixia mentioned someone in her community who shared a lot of resources and gained a strong reputation in the community. Later she learned that this respected “Guru” was in fact having a hard time in real life, hence had turned to fannish production to seek gratification that could not otherwise gain. “The sense of

achievement that she can't get in real life can be easily attained in the fan community, because every post she made immediately received positive feedback from her fans", Funnytrixia recalled. This type of escape gratifies fan producers by granting them popularity and respect they cannot attain in real life. However, using fannish production to escape from work or life was harshly criticized even among the interviewees. Some mentioned a Chinese idiom “玩物丧志”, which translated to “riding a habit saps one's will to make progress” (2touchiscu, LogEnjoy). They used this idiom to criticize the fan producers who used fannish production to escape from reality. This phrase reflected a cultural premise of a dichotomy between work and play (Yee, 2006a), a point of which will be discussed in the later sections on the relationship tensions between fan producers and out group members.

Aside from gaining respect that would otherwise not be received, escaping into the anime fandom world also grants fan producers isolation. Fan artist EatsRock mentioned some fans could be NEETs – a term refers to young people who are Not in Education, Employment, or Training – who did nothing but hide in their own fantasy world. For these people, fan translator Orconic commented, “those are the ones who made anime fans look bad, they are the reason people are biased against anime fans.” This result was consistent with previous studies on media usage that revealed those who use media to escape reality also showed a desire for social isolation (A. M. Rubin, 1983).

Participants believed the escapists among fan producers were one of the reasons that the Chinese public tends to view anime fans as idle and lonely people. Some participants reacted defensively about statements like this. Fan artist NozyChari was one of them; she said sarcastically, “I'm sure whoever said anime fandom was escaping from reality is very down-to-earth.” They attributed people's negative opinions on anime fans to their ignorance. “I truly think

whoever is saying that doesn't watch anime. The lack of understanding is the main reason for such opinions," said fan writer Showplexpr. Fan writer and artist LogEnjoy commented on those who called fannish production escaping from reality, "they didn't consider it from our position, but I understand why they think like that." Clearly, fan producers tried not to be seen as escapists by out-group members and they believed the criticism mostly originated in ignorance.

In sum, fan producers tried to normalize fannish production as a temporary stress relief, and they try to communicate this idea to the critics of anime fandom in the hopes of reducing misunderstanding. However, some participants also pointed out that a few fan producers indeed used fannish production to escape from reality. This type of *escape*, although it provides gratifications to the fan producers, was frowned upon by both outsiders and fan producers alike.

**Minor motive-based gratification of escape: Habit.** Larose and Eastin (2004) defined *habit* as "a recurring behavior pattern" (p. 362). They also identified habit strength as an independent factor that should not be listed under the traditional U&G gratification "pass time" (LaRose & Eastin, 2004). This separation is particularly salient for identifying gratification of fannish production, because uses and gratification scholars (i.e. Ferguson et al., 2007; Jiménez, Lopez, & Pisionero, 2012; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000) usually refer to "pass time" as something people do when they are bored or simply want to relax and unwind. As mentioned in previous section, some participants believed fan production was not a way to escape from reality, but rather a habit. Therefore, *habit* was included as a minor gratification within the broader category of *escape*. *Habit* as an independent gratification places the focus on repetition of a behavior instead of something to fill up one's empty time slots. The level of awareness required for *pass time* is rather low, but the repetition in *habit* is intentional. Therefore, during the

interviews, I asked participants about habit and relaxation separately. This section discusses the results regarding habit and relaxation separately, although the two factors are interrelated.

As fan producers reported, passing time, unwinding or relaxation has little to do with their fannish production. According to fan translator Funnytrixia, a relaxing event should be “laying on bed while playing with your cellphone, you’re so relaxed that the phone drops on your face.” In contrast, interviewees reported that fannish production is often associated with a sense of tension. For Funnytrixia, neither airbrushing pictures nor translating scripts was remotely related to relaxation, but rather an intense and time-consuming activity. Artekkyos, NozyChari, and GreyTimeCooled had been burning midnight oil for several continuous days up to a week to finish their fan work. Fan writers like Jambasi would sometimes face pressure from readers to update their fan fiction series faster. Clearly, for fan producers, fannish production is nothing like sitting in front of a TV and zoning out, but an activity that requires attention and focus.

However, participants did point out that they still felt relaxed in a way. Described by fan writer Artekkyos, the relaxation did not come from physical sensation, “body is tired, but mentally one feels fulfilled.” Several other participants described a similar feeling of fulfillment and relaxation after participating in the fannish production, despite the physical fatigue. Fan artist RacingThePopular said that a prolonged time of drawing fan arts would sometimes worsen her neck pain problem, but she still felt happy and relaxed in the process. In order to keep her makeup and costume in place, Isence62 refused to eat anything in the day-long cosplay events, but “when taking off makeup, my nerve starts to relax, the excitement and happiness will sink in and fatigue will also set in.”

Some of the relaxing feelings they described during the process of fannish production are consistent with the concept of flow: “the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 4). Fan artist RacingThePopular described the happiness she felt, “when you’re painting, you don’t have to think about anything else, and then you just make a stroke here and a smear there. It’s very relaxing, you only have the picture in your mind at that moment.” GreyTimeCooled made a similar statement about writing fan fiction, “sometimes the inspiration hits you in the middle of the night, and you probably won’t feel the same when the moment passes, so I’ll probably start writing at that moment.” This relaxation comes from a highly concentrated creation process, but even when fan producers can’t get into the flow, they still feel relaxed from the joy of short breaks provided by fannish production. For example, fan artist ComfyPinchAlly drew fan arts in between her school assignments to relax. Consistently for the participants, fannish production was relaxing. Such relaxation resulted not from passively passing time, but from the fulfilment and enjoyment in active creation.

It is useful to keep in mind that, as noted, fannish production, especially anime fannish production, is often viewed in a negative light by the Chinese public. To some observers, it seems a waste of resources, yet the results in this study indicated that, for participants, fannish production was, rather a positive habit. When responding to negative comments on fannish production, fan artist ComfyPinchAlly said, “people have habits and interests, some like to exercise, some like to fish, but some like to watch anime, it’s all but a way to relax.” “It’s a way to unload your negative feelings,” said fan artist BullfHold. Viewing fannish production as a



habit explains the gratification of relaxation participants reported gaining from fannish production, even though it could be putting physical strains on them.

In sum, fan producers viewed fannish production as a habit, not a mere pastime that relaxed one's body, but rather a practice one actively engaged in. During the production process, fan producers reported feeling satisfactions such as relaxation, enjoyment, and fulfilment. Some described a state of flow during production, while others simply enjoyed the process. Fannish production was also seen as providing short breaks from their regular life.

In sum, the major motive-based gratifications reported by participants are *status*, *self-actualization*, *self-expression*, and *escape*. Each major gratification includes minor gratifications that are related to them but not the same as the major gratifications. The minor gratifications highlight components that may be more prevalent in the context of anime fandom than in other media contexts. *Status* includes *competition*, *self-actualization* includes *commitment*, *self-expression* includes *aesthetic enjoyment*, and *escape* includes *habit*. All these gratifications have been identified in previous research. Although the definitions vary slightly, the gratifications evident in the interviews in this study can be seen as consistent with previously identified ones. These motive-based gratifications emphasize the role people's innate needs play during gratification seeking. While affordances still provide the features enabling them to satisfy such needs, these affordances assume a less important role than people's motives in these gratifications.

### **Reported Affordance-based Gratifications**

This section presents the affordance-based gratifications reported by participants. In contrast to the motive-based gratifications, affordance-based gratifications focus on how the affordances of media platforms enable these gratifications. The results are organized by the four

affordance categories proposed by Sundar and Limperos (2013): agency, modality, navigability, and interactivity. Gratifications based on agency affordance are related to users' abilities to generate information. Modality affordances are linked to different methods of presentation of the media text and navigability affordances are related to users' ability to move across media platforms. Interactivity affordances refer to how users interact with the contents of the medium. Some gratifications reported by the fan producers fell into these four categories of affordances, and some are unique to fannish production. Note that the affordances are categories within which specific gratifications fit; the affordance is itself not considered a gratification. A definition of each gratification is presented in each sub-section.

**Agency affordance-based gratification: Skill evaluation.** *Skill evaluation*, a newly-identified gratification from the interviews, is a gratification that is specifically related to praising, criticizing, or evaluating a fan producer's skill level. This gratification is based on agency affordance, which is related to users' abilities to generate information. Fan producers found satisfaction in evaluating and critiquing their own works in terms of skill proficiency as well as appreciating other fan works from a skill-specific lens.

Participants considered one of the most satisfactory things in fannish production was to witness improvement in their production skills over time. "Compared to some older works, my current works are more improved, I think I'll feel the same looking back at these works in the future," said fan artist ComfyPinchAlly, implying her skill had improved over time and would continue to do so. Fan translator Orconic gave a summary on the specific areas in Japanese-Chinese translation that he felt he was better at and the areas he believed needed improvement. Like fan artist Zhitsing, many participants expressed the willingness to keep improving their skills in fannish production to satisfy themselves and others. Most of them made it a goal to

improve their skill levels for fannish production. The gratification came from realizing how their skills improved over time and what aspects need more improvement.

Being a fan producer influenced the way participants evaluated other people's fan works. In addition to appreciating their own works, they also critiqued others' works. Several participants pointed out that since they took part in fannish production, they started to notice things in other people's fan works that they didn't pay attention before. For example, Funnytrixia and Livestanes noticed small imperfections like a wrongly placed comma in a translated work, or a character image that wasn't properly airbrushed. These new discoveries were related to their roles in fan translation group. After working on these areas for a while, they naturally critiqued other fan works in skill-specific areas. "I think it is because you'll understand it better when you're doing it...when looking at a picture, I will pay attention to things that I can learn from," concluded fan artist Matriespa. Fan writer GreyTimeCooled even sought out her friends to critique her works in a similar fashion in order to have an honest review. Participants not only critique their own works but also other fan works in order to learn from the skilled fan producers and improve their own skill levels in return. Some noted that this skill-specific lens sometimes would interfere with their experience in fannish consumption, making it less immersive to read or watch other fan works. However, some participants believed such lens provided them a more sophisticated view on other fan works and thus made it even more enjoyable.

In sum, fan producers sought gratification from evaluating their own fan works as well as other fan works through a skill-specific lens. Their satisfaction come from witnessing their skill improvement in related areas and from drawing inferences from the critiques of others fan works. Even for those who did not feel satisfied about their current works, the desire for constant improvement and perfection drove them to create more and better works.

**Agency affordance-based gratification: Skill acquisition.** The gratification of *skill acquisition* is based on agency affordance, which is related to users' abilities to generate information (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). Translating the use of a skill from one area to another, for example, is a way to generate new information. Participants reported learning new skills from fannish production that eventually helped with other aspects of their lives. Therefore, skill acquisition is an agency-enabled gratification gained by learning and mastering a skill. While skill evaluation focuses on the skill-specific critiques of fan works, skill acquisition focuses on learning a skill that can be transferred and applied in other areas of life.

Participants learned skills in digital editing, language, handcrafting – the skills that would enhance the quality their fannish production. Fan artists such as Matriespa, BullfHold, and RacingThePopular learned to use digital drawing tablets so that their works could be created and uploaded digitally. Fan translators Funnytrixia, Livestanes, and Artekkyos learned to use software to fine tune the picture quality of the final products so that the translated works would look as localized as possible, such as replacing the original street signs and store logos of a picture with Chinese signs. Of course, translators also reported an increase in Japanese language proficiency. Cosplayers like InvaderExtra, Daszkridg, and Isence62 became quite skilled in handcrafting in order to make the costumes and accessories by hand that were otherwise unavailable. As fans of an inquisitive nature, CyberReptile, Jambasi, and Funnytrixia increased their digital skills in using VPN to bypass the Chinese censorship mechanism, “the great firewall”, in order to get more information on the fandom of their liking.

These new skills they learned were directly beneficial for the fannish production of their choice, but the skills were in fact transferrable into other fields of their lives. For example, fan artist Matriespa studied Japanese in order to get first-hand information on the latest anime news,

and she passed the Japanese language proficiency exam – a requirement for her future plan to study abroad in Japan. Participants who mastered Photoshop said that this skill helped them in processing pictures at work or for school projects. Some participants also reported that their experience searching online for fandom-related information made it easier for them to conduct research for projects at work. Although the primary goal of fannish production for them was not to learn a new skill, the participants felt accomplished when they learned skills that applied in other aspects of life.

**Agency affordance-based gratification: Responsibility.** One last gratification related to the agency affordance (one’s ability to generate information) is *responsibility*. As previously identified in the discussion above of the fannish cycle, fan producers sometimes experienced a stage, during which they reported reduced passion for fannish production. However, some participants found another gratification to continue participating in fannish production – *responsibility*. This gratification refers to the sense of duty and achievement they felt while making and sharing fan works, even though they considered the production process less enjoyable than before. This gratification was more often reported by fan producers who worked in a group than by single producers.

Participants expressed a change in the reasons to create fannish work after the initial passion faded. For example, as members of translation groups, Funnytrixia, Jambasi, and Livestanes all indicated that they felt a sense of duty to continue working on the translation projects even when their feelings for the anime diminished. Fan artist ComfyPinchAlly said it was her duty to keep publishing fan pictures, and to “do one’s best to perfect the picture.” Participants reported a sense of achievement in committing to fannish production. Such senses of duty and responsibility partially replaced some of the previously-identified gratifications such as

*self-expression* and *self-actualization*. Participants no longer focused on their own needs to produce and share fannish content; instead, they put more emphasis on serving the fandom community as a responsible member of a fan group.

Both GreyTimeCooled and CyberReptile used the analogy of raising a child to describe their experience in fannish production. GreyTimeCooled believed that as the creator of a fiction, she must be responsible for finishing up the fiction. “It’s like having a child, you gave birth to him, so you’ll have to raise him well... Similarly, you must finish what you started writing just as you must raise your child.” The child-raising analogy reflected both the amount of effort the fan producers put into their works, and the sense of responsibility they felt towards the fan works. This analogy also sheds light into the complexity of gratifications, that participants not only felt gratified from the pure passion in creating the fan works of their liking, but also from fulfilling their role as a responsible fan producer, even after the initial enthusiasm waned.

**Modality affordance-based gratification: Promotion.** *Modality* affordances are “the different methods of presentation (e.g., audio or pictures) of media content, appealing to different aspects of the human perceptual system (e.g., hearing, seeing)” (Sundar & Limperos, 2013, p. 512). Three gratifications were identified as related to modality affordance – *promotion*, *information sharing*, and *immersion*. These gratifications all involved participants utilizing different types of platforms and forms of presentation to participate in fannish production.

*Promotion* reflects a gratification that fan producers derive from creating and sharing their fannish works in order to publicize and promote the original anime and draw more people into the fandom community. This voluntary action can be seen as free advertisement for the anime. Most participants agreed that their effort of promotion activities was to get more fannish content to consume for themselves. When promotion brought in more fans interested in the

show, more fans would participate in fannish production, and thus the fan producers could gain access to more fan-made contents. This is especially salient when their favorite anime was not very popular. Several participants emphasized that they publicized a show because the anime they liked received too little attention. Even if the show was a popular one, there was still a felt need to publicize the less popular characters or character relationship pairings in an anime. Fan writer Livestanes said that the number of people in her fan community was quite large, but not many of them liked the same character she liked; hence she still tried to promote her character. Orconic and RacingThePopular were in a similar situation, except that the character pairings they wanted to promote had other competing pairings. In order to make the pairings they root for become more popular in the community, they tried to share more works of that particular pairing. These participants publicized for the anime to boost its popularity because they wanted more conversation and feedback of the show. However, other participants publicized for the show simply because they wanted more people to know about it. As fan writer and artist LogEnjoy put, “I shared my works because I hope more people will know about the anime, about the characters, and I can know more fellow fans. It is much more joyful to share the joy than enjoy alone.”

This modality-afforded gratification of *promotion* is also related to the promotional effectiveness of different forms of fannish products the fan producers create. Participants believed the forms of fannish product they shared for free had a different effect on publicity. Fan writer GreyTimeCooled believed that fan pictures were the most effective to draw attention from those who knew nothing about the show. Similar to fan pictures, fan-made videos also provided an easy entry point for the potential fan-to-be, because both were visually stimulating. Fan fictions, she pointed out, were the least effective in terms of publicity, because sometimes the fictions may have references only the existing anime audience would understand. For translated

works, Haftwaka said their work focused on “convey and explain” the meaning of the original texts so that audience and readers could understand the meaning and the implication of the original texts. Cosplay and anime song covers, according to 2touchiscu, were widely spread over commonly-used media platforms like blogs and microblogs. Such spread of contents might draw attention from those who knew nothing about anime and thus became a starting point for them to develop a liking for anime. However, as fan writer and artist LogEnjoy pointed out, it was always better to have some fannish works ready to show people than just trying to talk them into watching. In this sense, all forms of fannish product are more effective for publicity than nothing at all.

Participants were aware that these promotions they did for the show were, in a way, free advertisement for the anime producers. Scholars have pointed out both the potential marketing power of fan works (Busse & Gray, 2011; Heinonen, 2011; Muntinga et al., 2011), and the possibility of fan labor exploitation (Milner, 2009; Terranova, 2000). Although participants recognized that their action were free advertisement for the producers, they did not seem to be bothered by this. “Of course I don’t get paid for doing all these promotions,” fan artist Matriespa laughed, "but as long as I’m happy, no harm can come from letting more people know about the show." Her statement was representative of the participants’ attitude towards their free advertisement. Although their publicity ultimately benefitted the anime producers, they did not publicize *for* the anime producers. The first and foremost reason for fan producers to promote the anime was to gratify themselves.

In sum, promotion refers to fan producers’ effort to get people’s interests in an anime by sharing fannish works. By creating and sharing different forms of fannish products, fan producers tried to persuade more people to watch the show and facilitate conversations in the



fandom community. Different forms of fannish products had different effects on those who know little about the show or anime in general, but having any fan work to show people was seen by default as more effective publicity than having nothing at all.

**Modality affordance-based gratification: Information sharing.** *Information sharing* is classified as another modality affordance-based gratification. Similar gratification was previously identified in studies on internet use (Leung, 2009; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Urista et al., 2009) and online social support (I. K. Anderson, 2011; Tustin, 2010). The participants reported that they utilize different types of media platforms to share the information about their subject fandom. *Information sharing* is different from *promotion* in that the *shared information* does not consist of the fannish products the fan producers themselves made. The information could be about the next press conference about a show, news on the development of an anime, or news of an upcoming translated work by a fansub group. If the contents in fan producers' promotion pieces are advertising attempts to draw more people's attention to a certain show or certain characters, the contents in their shared information are fact-based and timely briefs.

Participants differentiated this gratification from sharing fan works for promotional purpose in that *information sharing* was more of a "transportation of the information" (Funnytrixia, fan translator), the process of which did not involve fannish creation. "Transportation is to post the information from a show's official page to Weibo, so that more fans can see and re-post," fan writer and artist LogEnjoy said, "there is some difference between this and fan production, but I won't say they're completely different. After all, it's based on the same interest." Although the information sharing process didn't involve much creative process other than simple translation, some participants pointed out being a fan producer helped with

faster information sharing as well. “It is faster to find and share information now because I changed from an audience waiting for the news to the active publisher of said news,” commented fan translator Orconic. Fan artist BullfHold believed this sharing of resources facilitated communication among fellow fans and exchange of resources. Cosplayer 2touchiscu admitted that it came naturally for her to share information among fellow fans the moment she learned new information related to the fandom.

In sum, *information sharing* is a gratification reported by those participants who took extra time on top of fannish production to share news, articles, and event information related to certain fandom. This modality-afforded gratification serves to translate and transport information from the source to various platforms in different message forms. Participants acted on information sharing proactively and considered it a way to communicate with fans of similar interests as well as a way to exchange informational resources with one another.

**Modality affordance-based gratification: Immersion.** *Immersion* as a gratification has usually been found in studies on computer games (Weibel & Wissmath, 2011; Wu, Wang, & Tsai, 2010; Yee, 2006b). *Immersion* is a state of continuous enjoyment wherein users feel immersed in the virtual game world (Wu et al., 2010). In this study, *immersion* refers to feeling part of a fictional world or becoming a certain fictional character via fannish production. The different types of fan works provided modality for fan producers to experience a degree of immersion they could not find by simply watching the anime. “I prefer to make fan productions because watching the show alone lacks interaction for me. I feel that I can go inside that fictional world when I make fan works,” commented fan artist EatsRock.

Participants identified two types of immersion. One was to pull the fictional world and the character closer to one’s real life, and the other was to imitate the fictional world or character

as closely as possible. Participants tried to relate to the anime characters more closely by incorporating their real-life experience into their fannish production. Fan producers Jambasi and NozyChari said they had used their real-life experience in writing or drawing the scenes of a fan work, so that “you’ll know this scene in your work is a reflection of who you are in real life.” Participants also tried to recreate a character’s appearance and fathom a character’s inner thoughts in order to feel more immersed in the story world. Cosplayer LogEnjoy pointed out that a good cosplayer not only needed to dress like the character and look like the character, he or she also must emit the right type of aura that belonged to the character. Similarly, Isence62 and EatsRock mentioned the desire to walk into the fictional environment and peek inside a character’s mind. These participants believed participating in fannish production would provide an entryway into the fictional world as well as the fictional character’s head. By doing so, they felt more immersed in the story world.

In sum, modality affordance-based gratifications include *promotion*, *information sharing*, and *immersion*. All these gratifications emerge from the diverse available presentation forms and formats in multi-media platforms that provide satisfaction to participants. The different forms of fan works published and available across platforms – fictions, pictures, videos, audios, and photos – serve as promotional materials to attract potential audiences. The information from one source is translated and transported to different platforms in various message forms by fan producers to facilitate communication and resource exchange. Meanwhile, different presentations of fan works provide immersive experiences for fan producers, who reported feeling incorporated into the story world and the character via fan production. The participants took advantage of the various forms of presentation provided by different media platforms and sought gratifications through this diversity.

**Navigability affordance-based gratification: Information seeking.** *Navigability* describes affordances that closely connect to the concept of media convergence. It represents user ability to move across media platforms conveniently (Sundar & Limperos, 2013), accessing contents using different devices, transforming one media format into another, and distributing derivative works across different apps or websites. *Information seeking* has been identified as one of the gratifications available through various media platforms, including newspaper (Ayyad, 2011; Lichtenstein & Rosenfeld, 1983), telephone (Dimmick, Sikand, & Patterson, 1994; O'Keefe & Sulanowski, 1995), TV (Cooper & Tang, 2009; A. M. Rubin, 1983), Internet (Ayyad, 2011; Jim énez et al., 2012; LaRose & Eastin, 2004), social media (Ancu & Cozma, 2009; Park et al., 2009; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Urista et al., 2009), and platforms for user-generated content (Haridakis & Hanson, 2009; Leung, 2009). As creators of user-generated content, *information seeking* was reported as a gratification sought by the fan producers, which was consistent with previous studies. Just as contents flow freely among media platforms, fan producers seek information by navigating through different online spaces. Part of the information they seek overlaps with what the non-active fans seek, but fan producers also tend to seek information specifically related to their fannish production.

Just like any other fan, the fan producers in this study reported that they liked to be well-informed about the anime they followed. This included news stories about the show, newly-published fan works from the fan producers they follow, and information shared by fellow fans. These actions required fan producers to be able to access and use multiple online web services and mobile services. Participants mentioned the official show websites, forums, micro blogs, personal websites or blogs, and fan work hosting sites as their usual resources for information, in addition to using various web search engines. Some more technologically inclined fan producers

admitted that they also use VPN services to access contents censored by the local government. The frequency of information reported by fan producers in this study varied. BullfHold and Orconic were avid information seekers and said that information such as those mentioned were very important satisfactions. However, several other fan producers admitted that they only sought information occasionally to learn news about the shows they followed.

The accounts of the participants seemed to suggest a higher skill level in information seeking for the fan producers than regular fans. Artekkyos and Matriespa said that after participating in fannish production, they learned to use the various web resources that hosted fandom-related information to receive firsthand information of their fandom. Fan writer Showplexpr said that she was more skilled in using search engines than before, because searching for fandom-related information provided a lot of practice. Moreover, fan producers require detailed information to perfect their fannish works; hence their search for information was more intense than casual fans. For example, fan artist ComfyPinchAlly said that she would search vigorously for a high-resolution picture of a character so that her fan works of the same character would have appropriate details. In addition to developing more advanced search skills, being a fan producer also opened door to information that was otherwise unavailable. For example, as a member of a translation group, Funnytrixia had access to resources such as newly-released fan books and untranslated works. Moreover, fan producers often shared relevant information with others during their information-seeking process. Several fan producers mentioned that they gained a lot of information from the posts of other fan producers they followed on microblog, and that was a convenient way for them to search for information.

In sum, *information seeking* is not a gratification that is uniquely related to fan producers, but fan producers may seek more information than regular fans. Fan producers reported they

navigate across web spaces of different languages and functions to look for the information they need to improve their fan works. This is a navigability gratification that both regular fans and fan producers sought, but in addition to learning about the latest news of an anime, fan producers also utilized the information to enhance their fan works.

**Navigability affordance-based gratification: Accessibility.** *Accessibility* is a gratification grouped under the navigability affordance. *Accessibility* refers to the convenience provided by different media platforms that enable their users to navigate freely across different web spaces. For fan producers, this platform-afforded convenience meant that they could more easily participate in discussion and share fannish works. This affordance made it virtually impossible for a fan producer to not be able to find a platform to publish fan works and communicate with others. The interview participants mentioned at least two platforms they often used, while some multi-modal producers used more than two to publish their different works separately.

*Accessibility* granted fan producers new means to publish their fan works, making fan works more available to others. For example, Artekkyos used to write her fan fiction in paper notebooks. Shifting from hand writing to typing digitally made it possible for her to upload and share her stories on the internet. Participants liked to choose platforms that best suited their preferences for publication. Some participants preferred their fan works to be stored in semi-private spaces like personal blogs or personal websites; some liked to publish in themed forums for fans of the same interests; while others like to publish their fan works on microblogs that most people can consume. Although all these platforms are accessible to other users, the level of accessibility varies. For example, personal blogs are more private than microblogs, while microblogs can spread fan works faster and more widely. Being able to choose the level of

accessibility for their own works seemed to provide a sense of security that encouraged fan producers to publish their fan works. Participants also reported they shifted publishing platforms as their needs changed over time.

Moreover, *accessibility* meant that fan producers had wider access to platforms that could connect them with fellow fans. Fan producers noted that the more they used online platforms to communicate with other fans, the bigger their circle of fan peers grew. Fan writer Jambasi said: “Thanks to Weibo, it’s easier to search for fellow fans now.” Fan works were exchanged easily between fan producers as tokens of friendship, which in turn produced more fan works available to the community. Fan artist RacingThePopular also mentioned an on-screen live-commenting function provided by a streaming website that allowed her to communicate with other fans while watching the anime. In addition, accessibility to convenient shopping platforms granted fan producers ways to sell their fan works and purchase items needed for fan productions like cosplay and illustration.

In sum, *accessibility* is the convenience afforded by different media platforms for fan producers to share their works, acquire resources for fannish production, and connect with peers. This affordance made various platforms easily accessible to fan producers, enabling them to choose the platforms that best suited their needs for publication and communication at will.

**Interactivity affordance-based gratification: Feedback.** Interactivity describes the affordance that “allows the user to make real-time changes to the content in medium” (Sundar & Limperos, 2013, p. 515). This affordance refers to how the users can interact with the contents hosted on a media platform. For fan producers, interactivity means that not only can they upload and share their fan works, but they also can receive feedback from other users and potentially communicate with them. The online spaces of fannish works often provide users more than one

way to interact with the hosted content. One can attach comments to a fan work, send private messages to the fan producers, click a button to repost the contents to other online platforms, save the fan works to the user's private favorite folder, or to simply give the fan work a "like" by clicking on the corresponding icon. The *feedback* gratification refers to the positive and encouraging feedback fan producers receive from their viewers that motivated them to keep producing.

Fan producers reported they feel gratification in all forms of feedback, whether it was a simple "like" or a thoughtful comment. However, the later was appreciated more. Fan producers found it very encouraging when they received feedback, especially at the beginning of their fan production enterprise. RacingThePopular recalled that she didn't know much about the fan community when she first published her fan arts on a website, "but then I found people would comment on my works whenever I posted a new one, and they seemed to be liking my works, which made me very happy," she said. Fan writer Artekkyos said: "the biggest satisfaction is when I see people repost my works to microblogs and comment on them." Fan producers like BullfHold and EatsRock admitted that even if their works only received "likes" and reposts without a comment, they would still feel good about it.

However, the ability to receive user feedback has its downsides. Current well-developed web spaces provide users multiple ways to interact with a fan work. Therefore, not receiving any feedback had more effect on the fan producers' creative confidence than before when the technology wasn't perfected. Some fan producers confessed that they felt quite discouraged if their works didn't receive enough feedback or received negative feedback. Fan writer CyberReptile said: "It gets boring when you're running a one-man show without others' support. I will be much happier when I have people to communicate with about my works." Several other



fan producers also admitted that they would abandon their current work if they didn't receive any feedback.

In sum, the interactivity gratification *feedback* refers to the positive reviews or stats fan producers receive when they publish a fan work. Online platforms now provide multiple ways for users to interact with the content. Hence it is almost expected for fan producers to receive some kind of feedback. Positive feedback encourages fan producers to keep publishing their works, while negative feedback or the absence of feedback sometimes deters them from producing more fan works.

**Interactivity affordance-based gratification: Control of content.** Being able to interact with the media content make it possible for users to change the contents, for example, fans can re-edit existing movies to make a “fan cut” version as opposed to the director’s cut. Various scholars have pointed out the potential for users to gain more control over the media contents in this way (Busse & Gray, 2011; Costello & Moore, 2007; Jenkins, 2006a), thereby developing more influence on media producers. In contrast to these scholars’ arguments, a few participants in this study said that they were able to influence the direction of an on-going show simply by producing fan works. However, they reported a desire to control the content of their own fan works and the opinions of their fan communities. For example, fan writer Jambasi was displeased by the trend of the fan forum she often visited wherein her favorite character was constantly abused. Therefore, she attempted to take control of that character’s fate by producing fan works featuring the opposite. Fan writer Orconic had a similar experience when he and his fellow fan producers tried to out-publish another fan producer’s group in a forum, in order to help his favorite character pairings become the main trend in that forum. These accounts suggest that the fan producers indeed exerted a level of control over the fannish contents, but the control

was often limited to within their fandom community. The control of content wasn't a major factor for fan producers to publish their works either. Instead, it seemed to be a reaction to an unsatisfactory trend of a fandom community.

In sum, affordance-based gratifications include gratifications that are linked with one of four types of affordances – agency (ability to generate information), modality (different methods of presentation), navigability (ability to move across media platforms), and interactivity (interact with the contents of the medium) (Sundar, 2008; Sundar & Limperos, 2013). In this study, agency-related gratifications identified included *skill acquisition*, *skill evaluation*, and *responsibility*. Modality-related gratifications were *promotion*, *information sharing*, and *immersion*. Navigability-related gratifications were *information seeking* and *accessibility*. Interactivity-related gratifications were *feedback* and *control of the content*.

The affordance-based gratifications emphasize the unique features of the affordances that support new or enhance existing gratifications. The technology advancements that support media convergence have granted fan producers the ability to create and publish fanish contents online, utilize various media platforms to present their fan works in different formats, move and share the fan works across media platforms freely, while interacting with other users and other fan works via a convenient feedback system provided by various internet services. In interviews, participants reported gratifications specifically related to these areas, some of which reflect gratifications specifically related to the creators of user-generated content such as *skill acquisition*, *skill evaluation*, and *control of content*. Similar affordances were also found in studies on other media like newspapers (Lichtenstein & Rosenfeld, 1983), online news (Yoo, 2011), TV (Cooper & Tang, 2009; A. M. Rubin, 1983), and telephones (O'Keefe & Sulanowski, 1995), such as *information sharing* and *information seeking*.

## Reported Dual-level Gratifications

Research question one asked for the connections between gratifications fan producers may seek and the affordances that emerged from media convergence. The interviews revealed some gratifications that belong to both categories, which I name dual-level gratifications. Dual-level gratifications are both motive-based and affordance-based. These gratifications are uniquely afforded by the convergence culture and also satisfy participants' innate needs. Affordances grant users the means to act upon their motives; without them, the gratification cannot be sought or satisfied. Motives drive users to seek out appropriate media platforms that provide the affordance to do so. While motive-based gratifications emphasize the aspects of innate human needs, and affordance-based gratifications emphasize the unique feature of affordances, dual-level gratifications demonstrate the strongest connection between affordances and the gratifications. The dual-level gratifications can be seen as unique gratifications emerging in the era of media convergence, wherein innate needs and unique affordances interact as people seek and gain these gratifications. Three main dual-level gratifications were reported by participants: *affection*, *seeking connection*, and *seeking recognition*. The following sections define and illustrate them.

**Dual-level gratification: Affection.** In previous studies on cellphone usage and internet, *affection* generally referred to caring for others, feeling closer to family, and showing care for others (Dhir, Chen, & Chen, 2017; Wei & Lo, 2006). In the context of fannish production, the affection participants described was towards the anime or the anime characters. Although the targets of this type of affection were fictional, the effort and passion the participants showed were like those directed toward human targets. In terms of affordance, this gratification was related to agency (ability to generate information) and modality (different methods of

presentation) (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). The ability and skill to create fan works made it possible for participants to demonstrate their affection for the show in different forms of presentation. Without affordances of agency and modality provided by various internet-based technologies, participants cannot publicize their affection effectively.

Throughout the interviews, “love/爱” was the most-used word for the participants to summarize the reason for their fannish production. According to the accounts of the participants, “love” in anime fandom seemed to be a spontaneous expression of affection towards shows or characters through the forms of fannish works. Affection was the spark that inspired their fannish production, and the fuel that kept their passion burning. Participants said that they wanted to do something for the anime in order to show their love for it. As a result, they chose to create fannish works to demonstrate that love.

According to the participants, the degree of their affection dictated the level of dedication they put into fannish production. Fan writer GreyTimeCooled noted that the amount of available anime to watch was so high that no one could make fan works for every show he or she liked. The fan producers must decide which ones were their favorite for fannish production and which ones for which they would simply remain a fan audience. As noted in the section on fannish cycle, a fan producer could remain a fan audience for one show while creating fannish production on another. The level of affection determined the shift between a fan audience and fan producer. In their accounts, participants had the tendency to emphasize that a show was their “true love” in order to distinguish it from other shows they liked. Only the show that was recognized as “true love” evoked fan works. The distinction drawn by participants themselves between “like” and “love” was essential in their decisions whether or not to participate fannish production of the related anime.

Of course, too much affection could negatively influence the fan producers. As mentioned in previous sections, some fan producers described their fondness for creating and consuming fannish works as excessive indulgence. Some participants mentioned a level of “madness” when it came to fannish production for something they were infatuated with. According to them, uncontrollable affection could influence their life balance, leading them to spend too much time and energy in fannish production and inhibiting their ability to finish tasks in other areas of their lives.

Although participants were quick to admit that for themselves, the high level of affection - “love” or “true love” – was what made them want to participate in fannish production, they emphasized skills and talents rather than affection when comparing producers to fans who didn’t produce fannish works. CyberReptile, BullfHold, and Jambasi preferred to think that the non-active fans simply did not have the skills or talent to engage in fannish production. Fan producers who had high levels of affection for an anime might be extremely passionate about their own fannish production, yet they remained quite non-judgmental when considering other fans’ level of affection.

In sum, *affection* in the context of fan production reflected a gratification that fan producers sought through creation of fan works as a way to show their high level of affection towards anime shows or characters. Affordances of agency and modality made it possible for this demonstration of affection public in online spaces. They used the term “love” or “true love” to distinguish such level of affection from that of a non-active fan audience. And the fannish products were both a product of and a show of affection.

**Minor dual-level gratification of affection: Happiness.** The minor dual-level gratification of affection is *happiness*. Similar to *entertainment* in previous U&G literature, in

which audiences use media to be entertained, amused and feel enjoyment (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; A. M. Rubin, 1983), participants described enacting fannish production to feel happy and to entertain themselves. This gratification was labeled *happiness* instead of *entertainment* for two reasons. First, “happiness” was the term most participants used throughout interviews, which made it more representative than entertainment. Second, in the literature, *entertainment* gratification indicated a degree of passively consuming media products such as watching TV and browsing internet. *Happiness* was used instead to emphasize the activity inherent in fannish production, in that the participants make fan works in order to actively pursue happiness. The ability to interact with media contents and convenient, connected modes of online communication afforded this gratification.

Participants reported feeling happy during fannish productions in two ways. One was in the process of creation, and the other was in interaction with other fans. Several fan producers described a simple and pure happiness during fannish production. They simply wanted to have fun while making fan works. Fan writers GreyTimeCooled and CyberReptile, for example, both considered “making oneself happy” very important for their fannish production. Fan translator Funnytrixia told the new group members of her fan work group that the best goal to work in her group was for them to be happy. In addition to the happiness one felt during fannish production, being able to play with other fans was also a cause of happiness for them. One phrase the fan producers liked to say was to “play happily with my little friends.” They seemed to use such a childish tone on purpose, to emphasize pure happiness in interacting with fellow fans. The media platforms now offer convenient ways for users to communicate with each other, which made this co-play aspect of fannish production easier and more available than before the development of online networks.

In sum, *happiness* for fan producers means that they create fannish works to make themselves happy and entertained. Participants felt happy during the fannish production process as well as when interacting with other fans. Various media platforms and applications offered them ways to easily create and share fan works and communicate with like-minded people. The affordances available through media convergence made seeking happiness a convenient gratification for them.

**Dual-level gratification: Seek connection.** In a gratifications study on Facebook and Myspace uses, *connection* is defined as “connection with others for their (mediated) interpersonal communication satisfaction and as an ongoing way to seek the approval and support of other people” (Urista et al., 2009, p. 226). Finding like-minded friends and establishing mediated communication with peers online is made possible through the technologies of the internet and social media platforms (Bumgarner, 2007; Urista et al., 2009). Therefore, *seek connection* is a dual-level gratification that speaks to an innate human desire for personal connection as enhanced by affordances emerging from network technology. The affordances of social media platforms enable users to display personal information and gather personal information from other users (Bumgarner, 2007). These platforms also allow people to initiate and maintain communication with others (W. Chen & Choi, 2011; Jiménez et al., 2012). In the context of fannish production, these affordances allow fan producers to establish a personal profile to display their fandom interests and to check other fan producers’ fandom interests. The convenient display and gathering of such information enables location and connection with others of similar interests and supports friendships with fan producers who are otherwise impossible to meet or recognize in real life. Consistent with previous studies on

internet and social media usage, interview participants reported a desire to seek connection with others.

As noted in previous sections, Chinese fan producers reported that the public generally had a negative view of anime and anime fans, which made them more cautious when talking about anime fandom to others in person. Online spaces provided them a way to share fan works and opened channels for fandom discussions without apprehension. Fan artist BullfHold found it impossible to share the excitement of fandom with people present around her, so she used the microblog Weibo to post fan works and wait for replies from online fans. Seeking connection with other fans was reported to be a common desire among fan producers. They liked to publish their fannish products to attract people of similar fannish interests. Several participants admitted that they wanted to have more friends to talk about their fannish obsession, and publishing fan works was a way to connect with them. Although not all the feedback led to a new friendship, several participants said that they were able to meet new fans who later became their friends. In the words of fan translator Funnytrixia, “Thanks to Weibo, now it’s easy for me to find fellow friends. They share the things we all like. Even though you’re still making fan products alone, you know you’re not lonely.”

In addition to seeking new personal connections with other fans, fan producers also described publishing fannish works to develop deeper connections with the friends they already knew. Conversations with friends in the fan community could expand a fan producer’s understanding of the original work. Fan writer Artekkyos noted that within a fan community, even if all the people were interested in the same show or character, the locus of affection was different for everyone. As such, talking to other fans helped fan producers to discover new aspects of the show that they didn’t realize before, which could become the inspiration for their



next fan works. Several participants admitted that they had made fannish works to their friends' likings and published the works as gifts for those friends. In addition, participants commented that the topics of conversations with friends in the fan community would gradually increase and eventually went above and beyond the fandom of their current obsession. They discussed other fannish topics to expand their mutual interests and tried to recommend shows or fan works that might suit the other person's taste. Several participants had extended this online personal connection into the offline world and met the fan community friends in person.

In sum, fan producers actively publish fannish works in order to seek personal connections with peers of similar interests. Sometimes, they continue to publish fan works as a way to strengthen the connection they established with friends from the fan community. Their desire to make personal connections with people of the same interests is fulfilled thanks to the existence of online spaces such as the microblog Weibo and other fan work hosting sites. The affordances of these social media platforms provided a suitable space for them to spread their works and allow themselves to be found and contacted by other fans. The convenience of online communication also allowed them to discuss fannish topics in depth and thus enhanced their creativity as fan producers.

**Minor dual-level gratification of connection: Connection with community.**

*Connection with community*, as a minor dual-level gratification of connection, means that fan producers publish fan works to feel more connected with the broader fandom community.

Previous U&G studies often focused on gratification sought from personal connection using the internet (Bumgarner, 2007; W. Chen & Choi, 2011; Jim énez et al., 2012; Urista et al., 2009).

Connection with community differs from the reported connection gratification in that that connection was more of a personal nature than connecting with the community as a whole. This

minor gratification, on the other hand, focuses on how fan producers felt about being a part of the fan community.

For the purpose of this study, the term “community” is defined as the internet space wherein fan producers distribute their works and communicate with others. The boundary of such communities is flexible and highly dependent on the communication preferences of the fan producers themselves. For example, if a fan producer publishes his or her works exclusively on a forum, then his or her fandom community is limited to that forum. However, if the fan producer publishes his or her works on microblogs that have the affordance of cross-sharing the contents to other platforms, the content fluidity of the fan work makes pin-pointing a specific community difficult. Therefore, for the fan producers, their community is not a specific chat room or forum, but rather a perceived online space wherein they publish works and communicate with others. Such space could be a combination of multiple platforms that are customized according to fan producers’ preferences. Due to the fact that the perceived community varied from fan producer to fan producer, their accounts on the connection with community differed from one another.

A few fan producers said they did not feel more connected with the community after they became active in publishing fan works. Despite the affordance provided by various media platforms, some participants admitted that they were reluctant to become active community members. They preferred publishing their works quietly and communicating with a handful of close friends. Big fandom communities, in their opinions, were “too complicated” (RacingThePopular, fan artist) and “too chaotic” (Funnytrixia, fan translator). Some fan producers believed they actually became detached from the bigger fandom community because their specific fandom interests limit them to interact with a niche circle of friends. These fan producers seemed to value communicating with friends over participating in community

discussion and connecting with community did not play a significant part in their fannish production career.

More fan producers reported positive experience when they actively interacted with people from their fandom community. Their connection with the community was strengthened in two ways: one was to receive more feedback, and the other was to stimulate more discussion. As noted in the previous section, positive feedback was more likely to encourage fan producers to publish more works while negative or lack of feedback would cause some to abandon their projects. Some fan producers said they liked to be active in a community because their works were more likely to receive feedback. Meanwhile, other members of community liked to spread the fan producers' works as a way to expand the community reach. Active communities also meant more stimulating discussion. Fan writer GreyTimeCooled commented that if the original anime works had a more complex world-building, such as an elaborated world economic and social system, fans were more likely to develop a diverse community. Because a complex story world would provide more topics for fan producers to discuss with each other, even if the foci of their own fan works were different. Being more connected with the community also provided fan producers opportunities for collaboration. The successful collaborations would in turn strengthen their connection with the community.

In sum, *connection with community* is a minor dual-level gratification that maintains fan producers publish fan works to feel more connected with the fandom community. Various online spaces provided fan producers different ways to join and participate in a community of their choice. Although a few fan producers noted that they would rather keep to themselves than to interact with community members, more fan producers believed participating in community

discussion and being a contributing member of their perceived fan community helped them become a better fan producer.

**Minor dual-level gratification of connection: Connection with original works.** This newly-identified gratification is uniquely related to derivative works such as fannish production. *Connection with original works* meant that fan producers took advantage of the affordances provided by media technology to develop a deeper and better understanding of the original works during their process of fannish production.

Fan producers reported they re-watched the original anime over and over again to ensure their interpretation of the show was in line with canon. In her study of early fannish vidding of Star Trek fandom, Coppa (2008) described a diligent synchronization process of fan video making using two VCRs. In comparison, today's technology is far more superior. Convenient video players enable users to watch a show frame-by-frame, which allows fan producers to pause and meticulously take in the details of the show. Most fan producer participants in this study said that re-watching the show and analyzing the frames in detail improved their understanding of the show and thus improved the quality of their own fan works. Some fan producers also utilized web search to identify visual references in the show and then discussed these hidden metaphors with other fans in the community to further their understanding.

In sum, *connection with original works* is a new gratification that applies to derivative works. Advancements in video technology, online communication and web search enabled fan producers to examine an anime show in detail. By analyzing and discussing the visual details and hidden references of the anime, fan producers felt more connected with the original works, and reported that their fan works improved due to such improved connection.

**Dual-level gratification: Seek recognition.** In a study of user-generated media, Shao (2008) pointed out that seeking recognition was a behavioral goal that was triggered by a person's need for self-actualization. In the previous section on *self-actualization*, it was maintained that *self-actualization* was driven by an internal need to feel satisfied and self-efficacious by producing fan works. *Seek recognition* is connected with *self-actualization* in the satisfactory and self-efficacious feelings people gain from creation. However, *seek recognition* requires external feedback from others, and the affordances of online spaces provide the possibility to do so. In the context of fannish production, *seek recognition* means that fan producers publish their fannish works in order to be recognized by the community. Such recognition can be in the form of the number of followers, the number of “likes” and reposts a work receives, or awards for fan work competition.

During the interviews for this study, fan producers expressed the desire for wanting their works to be recognized as quality works and themselves to be recognized as capable fan producers. They said that they would hone their skills in fannish production, so that their followers would think of them as “a diligent perfectionist” (Haftwaka, fan translator). The affirmations fan producer received from feedback kept them in producing more works. Participants mentioned that sometimes other fan producers would recognize their skills and reach out to them for mutual skill improvement. They believed this was a recognition of their skills and ability as fan producers. Meanwhile, fan producers did not just take any form of compliment as a sign of recognition. For some fan producers, receiving the right type of positive feedback was more important than receiving a large number of compliments. For example, the multiple-award-winning cosplayer Daszkridg said that he wanted people to recognize him as someone who can

bring out the personality of an anime character during cosplay performance, rather than just being a good-looking cosplayer.

In sum, *seek recognition* is a dual-level gratification. Seek recognition means that fan producers publish their works on online spaces in order to be recognized by their community as capable fan producers. Fan producers considered receiving both affirmation on the quality of their work and on their fanish production skill, a type of recognition. Online spaces such as forums or microblogs provided an affordance allowing them to publish fan works and to receive direct feedback from other fans, thereby seeking recognition. Of course, recognition also comes in forms other than feedback. The following two gratifications were identified as minor gratifications of recognition, because while they were indeed forms of recognition, each focused on a different gratification – *monetary outcome* and *professionalization*.

**Minor dual-level gratification of seek recognition: Monetary outcome.** In their study on the Uses and Gratifications of internet usage, LaRose and Eastin (2004) identified *monetary outcome* as a gratification wherein people use the internet to find information on products and services to save money. However, with the help of online person-to-person selling platforms such as EBay or its Chinese equivalent Taobao, users can easily post information on the products and services they want to sell in order to make money. *Monetary outcome*, therefore, has the new meaning of generating financial gains via the use of online platforms. In fanish production, *monetary outcome* was considered a minor gratification wherein fan producers sold their products or services as a means to make money.

Fan producers generally considered making money not the main goal of fanish production, but they did describe it as a type of recognition for their skills as fan producers. Not all the fan producers had sold or wanted to sell their fanish products, but for the fan producers

who had published and sold products, the actual amount of money they made was less important than the symbolic meaning behind being paid for the work. Note that all the participants were not professional anime industry workers; some were students and some had a stable day job. They were not dependent on the money they made by selling the fan products they created. Such financial income for the participants was simply extra income. However, participants took pride in the fact that they were able to make money via fannish production and considered it a great encouragement for them to keep producing. Fan artist RacingThePopular said that the small amount of income helped her gain recognition from her parents, who had not been supportive of her fannish production activities before she was able to make some extra money. On the other hand, some fan producers admitted that they didn't attempt to sell any of their own fan works because they didn't think their works were good enough yet. Regardless, *monetary outcome* was a form of recognition for the fan producers.

However, some fan producers also tried to make money for utilitarian reasons. In the previous section on fannish cycle, I mentioned that fan producers tend to spend money in purchasing fannish products and merchandise. Selling their own fan works was a way to recoup these costs. Cosplayer 2touchiscu offered her service in Photoshop to cover the cost of buying costumes and props for her cosplay. Fan writer Artekkyos said that if fannish production kept one constantly in debt, then the production couldn't last long. Hence making some money was a means to ensure continuing production. This was the case for some fan work groups as well; fan translator Haftwaka commented that even the non-profit translating groups needed to cover the cost of running a server for their forum. Fan translator and vidder Livestanes said that members of her fan groups periodically collaborate to print fan books for sale, in order to cover the cost to

run their fan group. For these fan producers, monetary outcome was not only a form of recognition, but also a guarantee for their continuing future fannish production.

In sum, *monetary outcome* is a minor dual-level gratification of recognition. Fan producers sell their products and services for financial income, supported by the affordances provided by online platforms. They considered the ability to make extra money via fannish production a recognition of their ability. Some fan producers and fan work groups also sold fan works to ensure they had the funds to keep operating as fan producers.

**Minor dual-level gratification of seek recognition: Professionalization.**

*Professionalization* is identified as a minor dual-level gratification of recognition, which is also an addition to reported gratifications related to user-generated content. *Professionalization* is a gratification wherein fan producers realize they have the potential to transition from a fan producer to a professional media producer by publishing their fan works. The gratification comes not so much from actually transitioning from a fan producer to a professional, but from the fact that such a transition is now possible thanks to the affordances of online publication platforms.

Fan producers in this study said being able to transfer from a fan to a professional producer was the ultimate recognition from the industry. However, such transition did not happen often. Among all the interview participants, only four had been hired for their fannish production skills, although none of these four believed it was viable for them to turn these part-time jobs into full-time ones. Several participants gave examples of fan producers successfully transitioning into professional producers. This occurred when fan producers accumulated a large number of followers and produced high-quality works of a show. Then, sometimes people from the production team of those shows would hire them as officially-recognized fan producers for the shows, and their fan works would be recognized as part of the anime's canon.



Most participants had considered the possibility that they might turn their passion in fan production into a real career, but meanwhile, they had realistic concerns about such a change. For example, fan artist Matriespa worried that if she turned into a professional painter, she would lose the happiness she felt during fan production. Fan writers Isence62 and CyberReptile said they wouldn't be comfortable with the high intensity in daily writing that contracted writers were required to do. ComfyPinchAlly (fan artist) and Funnytrixia (fan translator) believed that becoming a professional producer this way was highly dependent on the recognition of industry media producers. Despite all the realistic concerns, participants still expressed admiration for those who made it into the professional tier.

In sum, *professionalization* was a gratification that fan producers experienced when they perceived themselves to have the potential to turn their passion in fan production into a career as professional producers. The affordances of online publication platforms have made fannish works more accessible to people, including industry producers. The fact that their fan works could be recognized by anime professionals, which could lead to a career in the media industry, was more important to the fan producers than actually being discovered.

Dual-level gratifications are both motive-based and affordance-based. These gratifications are uniquely afforded by the convergence culture and also satisfy participants' innate needs. Affordances grant users the means to act upon their motives; without them, the gratification cannot be sought or satisfied. Motives drive users to seek out appropriate media platforms that provide the affordance to do so. The dual-level gratifications can be seen as unique gratifications emerged from the era of media convergence, wherein both innate needs and unique affordances are needed for people to seek and gain these gratifications. Three main dual-level gratifications were reported by participants: *affection* (includes *happiness*), *seeking*

*connection* (includes *connection with community* and *connection with original works*), and *seeking recognition* (includes *monetary outcome* and *professionalization*).

### **Reported Relationship Changes and Tensions**

The second research question seeks to explore the relationship changes brought about by convergence culture and tensions that have emerged from these changes. Interview participants revealed three types of relationships that reflected different tensions: the relationship between fan producers and anime industry, the relationship between fan producers and the fandom community, and the relationship between fan producers and out-group members. The following sections cover these three relationships separately. The first section will focus on the participants' accounts and observations of the relationship between fan producers and producers from media industry. Second section will be their accounts of fan producers' influence on fandom community. The last section will be their reactions towards out-group members – those who know little about fandom or anime culture.

**Fan producers' observation on anime industry.** Scholars on convergence culture have pointed out the increasing power fans developed over the media industry, and that fans became no longer mere consumers of media but active producers (Jenkins, 2006a; Kozinets et al., 2008; Milner, 2009; Zwick et al., 2008). Fan producers generated a large amount of fannish content that expanded the reach of the original media and promoted them voluntarily (Baym, 2010b). They even have been able to bring a beloved show back to life via a series of organized campaigns (Costello & Moore, 2007). Similar to these observations, Chinese fan producers in this study also reported an increase in fans' influence over the anime fandom community, which in turn influences the production of the anime fan works themselves. While recognizing the

media producers' effort to cater to fans' needs and wants, some fan producers also expressed a concern that media producers sometimes catered to fans excessively.

Though aware of the differences between fan merchandise and official merchandise, interview participants didn't seem to discriminate between the two. In terms of purchase and consumption, fan and official merchandise were treated nearly equal since they satisfied different needs. The differences were that official merchandise provided canonical information of the show, while fan products satisfied fan producers' needs in characters' relationship pairings. The canonical information was important for fan producers as references for their upcoming production. However, as fan writer Jambasi said, the official producers had a message to send to the audience, just like fan producers did, there wasn't much difference in that aspect. Most of the participants didn't think official merchandise was automatically superior to fan merchandise. For most participants, the contents and quality of these merchandise were more important than the origin of them. Opposite to some industrial producers' concerns that fan merchandise would hurt the sales of official merchandise, the participants' accounts seemed to be suggesting that fan merchandise wasn't in direct competition with official merchandise. Most of the interview participants expressed a willingness to purchase more merchandise – be it official or fan made.

Fan producers believed they had the influence over the official anime production in several ways. The interview participants believed now the fans had an increased influence on the direction of anime shows. Although official producers didn't address certain changes in an on-going anime, the fan producers were convinced that these changes were due to popular trends in fandom community. For example, fan artist ComfyPinchAlly said in the second season of one of the anime she followed, two fan-favorite characters suddenly had significantly more romantic interactions than the first season, which she believed to be influenced by fan communities.

Several participants thought it was an open secret that the industrial producers lurked the web spaces that amassed fan works to see what the fans were into these days. Fan producers BullfHold and EatsRock noted that during some official promotions, the industrial producers used memes that were already popular in the fan community. Participants also noted some of the fan influence were from within the industry. When the show producers were also fans, they might choose to “sneak in” contents that satisfy their fannish needs. Meanwhile, popular anime would usually release new seasons faster than the less popular shows. Fan producers believed producing more fan works increased the popularity of the anime shows, which in turn would result in a faster new season release. In general, participants believed that fannish production had a positive influence on the anime industry, the fan works represented the likes and dislikes of the fans, and the feedback were picked up by official producers as reflected in the changes to the on-going shows.

Fan producers responded favorably to the industrial producers’ attempt to cater to fans’ desires when such catering wasn’t seen as overboard. Participants understood that anime producers needed to generate profit in order to stay in business, even though this was the major motive for industrial producers to cater to fan’s needs. In addition to the use of popular memes in official promotion, fan producers also noticed that popular characters had more official merchandise released. As for romantic pairings, merchandise of two characters who were in a popular fannish pairing would be released together, and some would even have suggestive details such as matching patterns on their clothes. Participants gave examples like these as evidence that they believe the industrial producers were listening to fans’ needs and catering to them. In the words of fan artist ComfyPinchAlly, “it is shameless for the official producers to promote a pairing so blatantly, now give us more sugar.” Meanwhile, the catering to fans was also reflected

in the actual anime show. Fan translator Orconic said that sometimes the romantic and suggestive interactions were not limited to two characters, but among several characters, which he believed to be the official producers' attempt to cater to all the fans who supported different romantic pairings.

However, media producers' manipulation was not always well received, some fan producers believed the media producers should maintain a level of artistic integrity instead of catering to the fans excessively. Fan writer GreyTimeCooled used the anime *Free!* as an example of excessive catering. She said the story was so twisted to satiate different fans' relationship pairing preferences that the actual story of a swimming team was lost in all the fan service. Several other participants also expressed similar opinions that official producers should not cater too much to fans as they risk losing the integrity of the original story. The definition of canon was also challenged due to the influence from fandom. Now some participants would question whether some characters' personality change or relationship tendencies should be considered canon just because it was aired on TV, since the influence from enthusiastic fan community could not be underestimated.

In sum, in line with the changes brought about by convergence culture, Chinese fan producers reported an increase in fannish influence over the official media contents. They noticed that the media producers were now lurking the web spaces hosting fannish works and used the popular trends in fan community as promotional materials. The participants could pinpoint the contents in an anime that was inspired by the existing fan works. They also noticed attempts from industrial producers to cater to fans' needs and desires in character development and relationship pairings. Although the excessive catering to the fans was not well-received for

some fan producers, they generally held a positive opinion on how the fan works and fandom community influenced the industry.

**Fan producers' influence on fan community.** During the interviews, participants generally agreed that fan producers held a stronger influence over the fandom community than non-producing fans. However, their accounts revealed that such influence was not always positive. Participants expressed both positive and negative influence from the fan producers over the fan community. On one hand, fan producers made fan works that expanded the reach of the fandom community; the fan works expressing fan producers' feelings resonated with the non-producing fans. On the other hand, fan producers was free to express their personal bias towards certain anime characters, which in some cases, turned into character smearing; fan producers also had higher influence in directing people's opinions within a fandom community than regular fans, and sometimes their personal opinions caused flaming wars among different groups of a fandom community.

In the previous section on *promotion*, fan producers revealed that they used their fannish products to promote an anime or anime characters. As these promotions reached a wider audience, fan producers exerted their influence on fandom community by bringing in more fans of the same show into the community conversation. The wide spread of fan works now allowed other audiences to notice the anime featured in the fan works. Several fan producers said that a number of fans decided to watch a show because they were influenced by the fan works they accessed beforehand. The fan translator participants believed that they held an even stronger influence over the community, because they provided the translated source of the anime – the most important media content for anime fans, especially when the official channel of anime access was unavailable. As fan translator Haftwaka pointed out, the fandom community he was

involved in was built by fan translating groups, without whom the regular fans might not even have a community to join.

In addition to the expansion of anime fan base, the fan producers were also influencing the development and the direction of their fan communities. The fannish products carried messages fan producers tried to express. In previous sections on *self-expression* and *affection*, fan producers revealed that they use fannish production to expression personal emotions, their feelings about the anime or characters, and their opinions on the show that were embedded within their fannish works. Needless to say, these creative works would affect their audience as well. For example, fan artist GreyTimeCooled recalled a long fan fiction series of the anime *One Piece* she once read. She thought the fiction was so well-written that she felt the fiction was a part of the canonical story world for her. Other participants also gave examples on how an influential fan work became the canon for a fandom community (also known as “fanon”). Fans adopted the fan producers’ views on the show as their own, such as character traits that were not in the official story, the explanation of events that were omitted in the show, or the fan translations that were not entirely correct but were considered better than the official translation. Fan producers kept expanding the fandom community by contributing to the community with more fannish works that became a part of the anime story world for the fans. The works that expressed their personal views were consumed in the community, and consequently the fan producers’ views were accepted and adopted by their audience, which inevitably shaped the fandom communities.

However, the power of shaping a community also came with negative effects. While participants agreed that the contributions of fan producers to their communities were tremendous and generally positive, there were times when an influential fan producer used his or her power

of persuasion in a negative way. According to cosplayer 2touchiscu, influential fan producers were considered celebrities in their communities. As such, the words and actions of them could have their fan followers follow their leads “brainlessly” (InvaderExtra, cosplayer). The most referenced negative influence by the participants was that some fan producers expressed their strong bias towards certain characters that could be considered distorting or even smearing the characters. “Out of character” or OOC is a term used in fandom to indicate that the featured characters in a story or a graphic painting was not following their canonical personalities or behaviors. For some participants, a certain degree of OOC was acceptable due to the derivative nature of fan works. However, several fan producers said it was unacceptable for a character to behave in a way that was impossible to happen in the story world, for example, a tough-guy male character behaved “like a sissy” (NozyChari, fan artist), or an innocent character acted evil. Participants emphasized the importance for a fan producer to portray anime characters as canonical as possible – even though sometimes the OOC materials were enjoyable for them.

Smearing a character on purpose was considered even worse than making OOC fan works. Participants considered it wrong that some famous fan producers imposed their personal preferences onto a character during fannish production, such as purposefully making a character look despicable or over sexualized. Participants pointed out while some of these fan works were very well accepted in the fandom community, the negative influence could be very damaging. The image of a smeared character in those fan works could direct the opinions of a fandom community towards an unfavorable end. Moreover, some participants expressed concerns for the lack of age regulation and censorship in fandom community. Taboo topics like rape or underage sex were glorified in some fan works, while the younger audience could be misled by consuming



them. Participants believed that all the fan producers, especially the celebrity fan producers, should recognize their responsibility in guiding the fandom community.

When speaking about the responsibilities of fan producers, participants revealed that one of the most notorious events that could happen in a fandom community would be a flaming war instigated by a handful of influential fan producers. As mentioned in previous section on *status*, high-status fan producers often had fan bases of their own. And those loyal fan followers were easily swayed by the words of the fan producers. As a result, public disagreement between fan producers could become a flaming war among their followers. The fan followers would defend the “Guru” of their recognition and turn an argument between two fan producers into a group verbal fight. Although it is difficult to tell how often these flaming wars happened, the recollection of the participants definitely indicated that such flaming wars were quite memorable and had long-lasting influence over the fandom communities wherein the fights took place – some communities fell apart after these intense fights.

In sum, the fan producers agreed that they had significant influence over their fandom community. They contributed contents in the forms of various fan works and translated works that were the brick and stone of a fandom community. Their fan works were consumed by other fans and created poetic resonance among the fans, which in their views, became an integrated part of the anime story world. However, participants also pointed out that fan producers should be aware of their responsibilities as opinion leaders. They should also be more in imposing personal preferences onto characters that could affect the entire community. Most importantly, as celebrities of their community, the fan producers could easily start a verbal fight among the fans that could have irreversible effects on the community.

**Fan producers' reaction towards out-group members.** Previous sections mentioned the Chinese public generally held a negative opinion on adults who were fans of anime. Participants' accounts suggest that the lack of understanding of the true nature of anime and fannish production often led to a misunderstood and negative view on anime and anime fandom. As a result, most participants chose to conceal their fan producer identity in their non-anime life and avoid anime-related topics in their daily conversations.

Participants recalled when they mentioned their passion for anime to people who were unfamiliar with the genre, they often received unfavorable responses. Participants' accounts indicated that the general opinion on anime by the non-anime watchers in China was that anime was for children only, and that adults who were still watching anime were childish and naive. However, even as children, an interest in anime was frowned upon or even forbidden. Cosplayer Isence62 recalled that her mother threw away her entire anime VCD collection when she was a child, claiming that these things would harm her grades at school. The participants were criticized for watching anime as children, and such criticism continued as they turned into adults. Participants explained that the criticism against anime most likely originated in a lack of understanding. Some anime outsiders assumed anime was no different from cartoons for children, hence they held the firm belief that anime lovers were too childish. Other anime outsiders might have heard about news reports that "demonized" anime lovers (Jambasi, fan writer), and equated anime fans with people who liked animated pornography. For performance artists like cosplayers, they had to face one more problem – anime outsiders criticized them for wearing bizarre clothing and cosmetics.

Participants believed that proper explanation and communication with anime outsiders would remedy the situation for them, but few chose to do so. Instead, they opted for an easier

option, to hide their passion in anime and fannish production from the anime outsiders. Several participants admitted that they concealed their fan producer identities around their co-workers, friends and family members. They would avoid using anime-related merchandise around them, avoid showing their passion for anime when the topic come up in conversation, and avoid using fannish jargon with anime outsiders. Some participants thought this was simply a strategy to be appropriate around different people, but not hiding their identities as anime fan producers. A few participants shared their experience of convincing their family members to accept fannish production as a habit, but none of the participants had tried to persuade people other than their immediately family members. For them, the effort of convincing anime outsiders to be more accepting seemed to be much harder than just avoiding the subject altogether.

In sum, fan producers faced the constant criticism against anime and anime fandom from childhood to adulthood. Anime outsiders usually thought anime was only for children, or in some extreme cases, for outcasts of society. Although some of the participants had positive experience in convincing their family to accept their anime interests, most participants chose the strategy of avoid anime topics and conceal fan producer identities when interacting with anime outsiders.

## **Chapter Summary**

The results of this study were presented in five major parts: the questionnaire results that provided an overview of the demographic information of the research participants; the motive-based gratifications reported by fan producers; the affordance-based gratifications reported by fan producers; gratifications that were both motive- and affordance-based; and finally the fandom relationship changes and tensions reported by the participants.

The participants of this study were predominantly female for both questionnaires (83.2%) and interviews (18), with an average active fannish production time of 3 years. More than half of

the participants were multi-model producers, meaning that they create more than one type of fannish products. The interview participants reported to have produced fan fictions, fan arts, fan translation works, cosplay, fan crafts, and so on.

Major motive-based gratifications reported by participants were *status*, *self-actualization*, *self-expression*, and *escape*, while minor motive-based gratifications were *competition*, *commitment*, *aesthetic enjoyment*, and *habit*. Most of these gratifications have been identified in previous research and the results of this study remain consistent with the previous literature. *Commitment* is identified as a new gratification that is connected with *self-actualization* but has a different emphasis. While *self-actualization* reflects fan producer's self-efficacious feelings generated during fannish production, *commitment* focuses on the prolonged period of time that fan producers engaged in fannish production. All the motive-based gratifications emphasize the role people's innate needs play during gratification seeking.

Major affordance-based gratifications reported by participants were reported based on four different affordances – agency, modality, navigability, and interactivity. Agency affordance-based gratifications are *skill evaluation*, *skill acquisition*, and *responsibility*. Modality affordance-based gratifications are *promotion*, *information sharing*, and *immersion*. Navigability affordance-based gratifications are *information seeking* and *accessibility*. Interactivity affordance-based gratifications are *feedback* and *control of content*. The newly identified gratifications in this study are *skill evaluation*, *responsibility*, *promotion*, and *accessibility*, which are also gratifications unique to user-generated content such as fannish production. The other reported affordance-based gratifications were identified in previous research on the media platforms that had the same affordances, for example *information seeking* was found in reading newspaper, *information sharing* in using social networks, and *immersion* in playing video games.

In contrast to the motive-based gratifications, affordance-based gratifications focus on how the affordances of media platforms enable these gratifications. These affordance-based gratifications emphasize the unique features of the affordances that support new or enhance existing gratifications.

Dual-level gratifications are both motive-based and affordance-based. These gratifications are uniquely afforded by the convergence culture and also satisfy participants' innate needs. Three main dual-level gratifications were reported by participants: *affection*, *seeking connection*, and *seeking recognition*. Minor dual-level gratifications include *happiness*, *connection with community*, *connection with original works*, *monetary outcome*, and *professionalization*. The newly-identified gratifications are *connection with community*, *connection with original works*, and *professionalization*. Meanwhile, the meaning of existing gratifications changed as affordances evolved, for example, *happiness*, *seek recognition*, and *monetary outcome* reported in this study have definitions differed from previous research. While motive-based gratifications emphasize the aspects of innate human needs, and affordance-based gratifications emphasize the unique feature of affordances, dual-level gratifications demonstrate the strongest connection between affordances and the gratifications. The dual-level gratifications can be seen as unique gratifications emerged from the era of media convergence, wherein both innate needs and unique affordances are needed for people to seek and gain these gratifications.

Fan producers reported three types of relationship changes or tensions surrounding their fan production activities. They observed an increase in fans' influence over the direction of the on-going shows. Their accounts suggest that fan producers are the opinion leaders and trend setters in their communities, exerting higher influence than other members. Meanwhile, fan

producers chose to conceal their fan producer identities from the public to avoid stigmatization and criticism.

In the next chapter, the significance of these findings will be discussed from different angles, including their contribution to U&G theory and the contribution of examining Chinese fan production to the study of active audience and media convergence. It also presents suggestions on fan-producer relationship management and on presenting anime and anime fandom to anime-outsiders. The limitations of the study and possible future research directions are discussed in the final chapter.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion**

Via conducting online questionnaires and interviews on Chinese fan producers, this study identified gratifications Chinese anime fan producers reported during fannish production. The gratifications were categorized into three types: motive-based gratifications, affordance-based gratifications, and dual-level gratifications. In addition to identifying the gratifications, this study also examined the connection between the reported gratifications and affordances resulting from media convergence. Finally, this study examined several changes in relationships within and surrounding fandom community brought about by media convergence.

In this chapter, I will first discuss the connection of the gratifications identified in this study to the existing literature, pointing out consistencies, differences, and new additions to the existing theory frame. Next, I will discuss how media convergence influences a non-western fandom culture. The affordances and their influences are not necessarily the same with that of the western fandom culture. Following the discussion on media convergence and Chinese anime fandom, I will move on to the practical implications of this study, making suggestions to better manage the relationships between fan producers and industry producers, as well as the relationship between fan producers and anime outsiders. Finally, I will discuss the limitations and possible future research directions of this study.

### **Contribution to the Uses and Gratification Theory**

This study contributes to the U&G theory in three ways: it proposes a way to identify and categorize the gratifications identifying both the overlapping gratifications across time and media platforms and the gratifications uniquely related to the characteristics of particular types of media. Participants in this study revealed eight new gratifications for fannish production. These could be extended to similar media usage such as user-generated content and media usage for

active audience. A study by Shao (2008) on the user-generated content of YouTube, Wikipedia, and Myspace serves as an example of such media usage. This study combined qualitative method with U&G theory for a holistic approach, as suggested by Ruggiero (2000).

The gratifications identified in this study were organized into three categories: motive-based gratifications, affordance-based gratifications, and dual-level affordances. The overlapping gratifications and the newly identified ones fell into one of the three above categories. In each category, findings were largely consistent with previous studies, but there were several exceptions. As shown in Table 4, of the 29 different gratifications identified by participants, 14 were consistent with previously identified gratifications, five gratifications were identified by previous studies but the elaboration in this study were different from previous research, while eight gratifications were new additions to the U&G theory. Among all the identified gratifications, eight were uniquely related to fan production, derivative works, or user-generated content.

The motive-based gratifications reported by this study's participants are largely consistent with those found in previous studies. Motive-based gratifications fulfill people's innate needs, which are not specific to different media platforms. Rather, the motive-based gratifications are consistently found across different media platforms, from the earlier media technologies such as VCR (A. M. Rubin & Bantz, 1987), TV (A. M. Rubin, 1983), newspapers (Lichtenstein & Rosenfeld, 1983), and telephone (Dimmick et al., 1994; O'Keefe & Sulanowski, 1995), to the more modern technologies such as cellphone (Wei & Lo, 2006), email (Dimmick, Kline, & Stafford, 2000), social networks (Ancu & Cozma, 2009; Bumgarner, 2007), and internet (Jiménez et al., 2012; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). In their comparison of 20 U&G studies across time and media platforms, Sundar and Limperos (2013) found considerable



overlap in gratifications between traditional and new media. The findings of this study are consistent with their result, in that most of the reported motive-based gratifications were previously found in the U&G studies of other types of media. This finding further confirms the argument that some gratifications are universal across time and media platforms, because they fulfill social and psychological human needs. Therefore, identifying a gratification as motive-based implies that the gratification can and should be found across platforms, not limited by the physical characters of a media platform, but reflecting users' needs and motives to fulfil those needs.

In addition to the universal motive-based gratifications, some affordance-based gratifications reported in this study were also identified in previous research: *information seeking*, *information sharing*, and *immersion*. The findings suggest that media platforms that share the same affordances could provide similar kinds of gratifications. For example, *information seeking* has been found in the majority of media platforms, from newspaper to social networks, because they all have the affordance to provide the information people need. This is the same case with the dual-level gratifications, wherein the same affordances provided people the ability to gain the same gratifications.

Several gratifications reported in this study were similar to that of the previous research, yet they differed in nuanced ways that are worth noting. The motive-based gratification, *status*, was perceived differently by participants from this study in comparison to the previous research. Although participants did report this as a gratification *gained* from fannish production, *status* was not a gratification they actively *sought*. This difference could be a cultural difference between the Chinese participants in this study and the other studies. Chinese culture emphasizes humility; admitting one is actively seeking higher status to the researcher might sound like

bragging for the participants. Instead, participants more often reported *seeking recognition* as the gratification they sought. The distinction they made in the interviews between *status* and *seek recognition* made it clear that for them, the two gratifications were different. Therefore, instead of identifying *seek recognition* as a part of *status* (Shao, 2008), this study treated them as two separate gratifications.

The remaining gratifications that are different from prior studies might be due to the changing nature in the technological affordances. Affordances evolve thanks to the advancement of technology, so the gratifications gained may also alter accordingly. For example, online shopping platforms provide convenient and integrated access for individuals to sell their merchandise, which makes it possible for fan producers to seek *monetary outcome* for income. This contrasts with previous research wherein *monetary outcome* only referred to purchases (LaRose & Eastin, 2004). Similarly, non-linear editing software makes it possible for fan producers to edit and re-mix existing media contents, and drawing software gives fan producers tools to draw anime characters. The fannish works are derived from and based on the original anime works, the production of which expands the definition of *control of content*, which now both means the control of a producer's own fannish contents and the control of media content by producing fannish works based on the original contents. The evolving affordances give the same gratifications new meanings, enriching the definition of the existing gratification.

Affordances also played an important role in identifying the new gratifications. As shown in table 5, the majority of newly-identified gratifications are related to affordances. The enhanced communicative features of most web spaces grant users multiple ways to connect and interact with each other as well as with the contents. Functions like leaving comments, sending private messages, giving "likes," leaving "stars" for rating, and easy repost gives users multiple

choices in how they prefer to communicate with others. These rich affordances have led to an increased number of new gratifications, such as *accessibility*, *skill evaluation*, *connection with community*, and *promotion*. Meanwhile, online spaces that host user-generated content have made it easier for their users to browse contents of others and display theirs, the affordances on which *skill acquisition* and *professionalization* are dependent.

Identifying the affordances of a media platform has proved to be an essential step in identifying new and unique gratifications. In their study on photo tagging on Facebook, Dhir et al. (2017) emphasized the importance of linking specific gratifications with specific features. Ruggiero (2000) also pointed out that one criticism of U&G theory was being overly vague. This study's identification of connections between specific gratifications and specific affordances reduces the vagueness and improves the specificity of the gratifications. Meanwhile, knowing the affordances of a new media platform can also provide help in determining the predictors of gratifications for future research. The integration of traditional motive-based and affordance-based affordances provides a response to the criticism of U&G being too individualistic, since an anchor in affordances can help integrate individual research results. For example, *commitment* is an addition to the motive-based gratifications, but it might not be one that's unique to fan production. A number of mobile apps try to encourage users to keep a continuous streak by "checking in" with the app on a daily basis. This function could be an affordance that reflects *commitment* through intensified app usage.

Research on the U&G theory has embraced the concept of active audience (Ruggiero, 2000). The activity level of audience varies from passive to active, and these are related to different gratifications (A. M. Rubin, 2009). Fan producers are examples of active audiences with a high activity level. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss some unique gratifications related

to fannish production, which is characterized by producing user-generated content and derivative works. Gratifications such as *self-actualization*, *skill evaluation*, *responsibility*, *feedback*, and *professionalization* cannot be sought without actively producing user-generated content, while *control of content*, *promotion*, and *connection with original works* are gratifications closely related to creating derivative works. The affordances brought forth from new technologies make active audience even more active than before. They now have the tools to produce works of their own, which become an integrated part of media consumption for the active audiences like fan producers. As such, more and different gratifications were reported by the active audiences. This suggests that perhaps for the active audiences, media usage triggers more gratifications than for non-active ones. Based on the accounts of the participants of this study, this active audience also demonstrated a higher level of affection for the shows that inspired their fannish production than for the shows they simply watch. Not all audiences should be examined equally, since their level of audience activity is likely to influence the types and amount of gratifications they seek and gain.

Finally, this study is an example of applying a qualitative research approach to the study of U&G theory. Ruggiero (2000) suggested that U&G theory offers more than a methodological perspective and asked for multiple approaches and levels of analysis in media research. In her qualitative research on audience activity during an earthquake disaster, Massey (1995) concluded that “the complex questions about how people use the media can no longer be answered with pre-operationalized concepts and simplified lists of uses reflecting generalized audience trends” (p. 345). This study utilized both questionnaires to provide demographic parameters of the participants and interviews to collect rich data that provides more depth into this audience’s media use and their interpretation of gratifications sought and gained. The rich data provided

more context in which people actively seek gratifications, providing a better link between individual media usage with social context. Participants' detailed accounts of the gratifications gained from fannish production also helped identify new gratifications related to fannish production and illustrate nuanced differences between previously identified gratifications and the reported gratifications in this study.

Based on the findings in this study, some motive-based gratifications are likely to be universal. They can be found across time and media platforms, because these gratifications reflect human psychological needs. Affordances of media platforms play an important role in determining which gratifications their users are likely seeking. Thus, identifying the affordances of a media platform serves as an important step to identify specific affordance-based or dual-level gratifications of specific media platforms. In addition, activity level of the audiences is also associated with specific gratifications. Content-generating active audiences can gain unique gratifications and have higher affection related to their media usage than those who do not generate contents.

### **Contribution to the Study of Fandom and Convergence Culture**

Just as new affordances have brought about new gratifications for media users, new affordances are also the technological advancements that supports media convergence. This study examined active fan producers of Chinese anime in the era of media convergence. It contributes to the ongoing conversation on the technological, industrial, cultural, and social changes of media convergence and its influence on active audience in three ways. First, this study on Chinese anime fan producers is an example of how active fannish production contributes to the development of fandom communities in media convergence; second, this study

provides a non-Western point of view of the global changes in the media environment; and finally, this study provides insights on conducting research on active audiences.

Technological affordances have expanded accessibility for media users, creating media convergence – a situation in which multiple media systems coexist and media contents flow fluidly across them, while audiences move across platforms in search of the media contents they want (Jenkins, 2006a). Chinese anime fandom is a transcultural and transmedia product of this media convergence. By transcultural, I adapted the definition provided by Denison (2010), that active audience move media contents across cultural boundaries, in the case of this study, the cultural boundary between the Japanese and Chinese. The active fan producers interviewed for this study dedicated time and energy to the creation and distribution of media contents, facilitating the free flow of contents across platforms as well as cultural boundaries. Denison (2010) pointed out in his study on the Western fandom of Japanese anime that “media may not just be produced for one domestic market, but, rather, for diasporic audiences, for subcultures in other nations, for regional cultures” (p. 222). Even if the media contents were not intended for non-domestic (i.e., non-Japanese) audiences, *grassroots convergence* ensures that these contents move freely across cultural boundaries via unauthorized or illegal means, at a speed faster than the legal distribution facilitated by *corporate convergence*. Similar to previous studies on anime fandom in the United States where most anime works are translated and distributed by fan groups (Denison, 2010; Leonard, 2005; Wood, 2013), Chinese anime viewers also depend on fan translating groups for the fast release of the latest anime episodes. These fansubbed anime episodes gradually collected fans of anime and developed into a blooming subculture in China.

In addition to translating and transferring media contents across cultural boundaries, fan producers contribute to the growth of their anime fan community by publishing fan works of

their own. The various forms of fannish products – fictions, pictures, videos, photos, and crafts – indeed transcend anime fandom into a form of transmedia storytelling. Although scholars often use the term “transmedia storytelling” to refer to industry media producers’ approach to use multiple media delivery channels to distribute a series of coherent stories in order to construct a diegetic story world – a self-contained narrative universe that is bigger than the show itself, wherein spaces and narrative elements are available for further storytelling (Hills, 2012; Jenkins, 2006a; Johnson, 2007), I argue that fannish products are fan producers’ similar approach to transmedia storytelling. In this study, fan producers disclosed that they had absorbed and utilized other fan producers’ stories, ideas, and opinions into their own fan works. Fan producers communicated with other fans, and consumed other fan works while they created new ones. This feedback loop formed a unified story world for the fan producers within the same community circle. By so doing, like-minded fan producers reinforced each other’s story world, and constructed for their audiences a diegetic world where the fan works connect with the original work in a way that made sense to the fans. Just as fan artist NozyChari pointed out, a single fan work might not have any influence on its own, but a large number of similar fan works could be quite influential to the community and even to industry producers.

Some scholars such as Bird (2011), Couldry (2011), and Van Dijck (2009) voiced their concerns on the research focus of active audiences in current media studies. They pointed out the content-producing audiences were lower in number compared to the rest of the audiences, and questioned how much the studies on active audiences can inform scholars on general audience (Bird, 2011; Couldry, 2011; Van Dijck, 2009). However, the findings of this study suggest a different role for active audiences. Even though fan producers are lower in number than non-producing fans, they exercise greater influence over their fandom communities. The fan

producers are not only the major content producers of a community, but also the opinion leaders of that community. The popularity of a fan producer and his or her works reflects regular fans' preferences on the media contents they want to consume. The findings of this study might not be able to inform general audience activities or their gratifications from media usage, but the results show that fan producers were the trend-setters and opinion leaders of their communities, and what they published within the communities contributed to general fans' perceptions and interpretations of the original story world narrative. Although fan producers cannot represent all the audience members who watch the same show, results here indicate that they do exert a significant amount of influence over the fandom community as a whole. Studying active fan producers can inform the media preferences, opinions, and interpretations of the fans being influenced by them.

This study provides a non-Western point of view on audience studies in the context of media convergence, identifying similar technological but different cultural, industrial, and social characteristics in China. Busse and Gray (2011) said, "a renewed and reinvigorated fan studies will need to pay greater attention to race, ethnicity, and global practices of fandom" (p. 439). Similarly, other scholars have suggested that audience and convergence needed more emphasis on non-Western contexts (Bird, 2011; Chin & Morimoto, 2013; Harrington & Bielby, 2007; Punathambekar, 2007). As indicated in this study's findings, there is considerable overlap between Chinese and Western fandom practice. The fannish activities in Chinese anime community are similar to those found in some previous studies on Western fandom. For example, fansub groups are responsible for most of the content distribution (e.g. Denison, 2010; Leonard, 2005); fans discuss the content and communicate with each other within their communities (e.g. Baym, 2000); and fan works explore subtexts in the original show that cannot



be addressed otherwise (e.g. Bury, 2005). Similar to Jenkins (2006a) description of the *Star Wars* fan community in the West, Chinese anime fandom communities are also influenced by convergence culture, wherein fan producers use cutting-edge technologies to create fan works, publish their works on the online spaces of their choice, and fans will access any of a variety of platforms to access the contents they want. Similar technological changes resulted in similar fannish activities between Chinese and Western fans. Interestingly, Chinese censorship on web contents and attempts to block certain foreign web spaces (Dong, 2012; MacKinnon, 2007) have not stopped tech-savvy fan producers or fans from accessing the media contents they want. In addition to the local Chinese web spaces, participants in this study reported also publishing their works on DeviantArt, an online English hosting site, and Pixiv, a Japanese hosting site, making the origin of some of their fan works virtually indistinguishable from those of other countries.

Meanwhile, locale and its cultural, social and industrial context also affects anime fans' fannish activities. Language is one of the most obvious cultural factors. Although fan producers have access to Western and Japanese fan works, they do not simply translate and adopt the genres and lingo of those fandom cultures. The jargon developed in the Chinese fandom community, such as "taking the pills," "Guru," or "Amway" are unique cultural products with meaning only to people familiar with both anime and Chinese culture. These language differences formed a narrative unique to Chinese anime fan communities. The use of jargon helps anime fans recognize each other in an online context, while leaving their messages encrypted to outside eyes. For example, "taking the pills" is a light-hearted self-mockery of being a fanatic or, a fan, without revealing that the "pills" mean fannish works and that fan producers make and consume those "pills." It is also worth mentioning that the participants sometimes combine the elements from traditional Chinese culture into their fan works, adding

more local flavor to the foreign media texts. Meanwhile, interview participants also mentioned their participation in the fan production featuring local Chinese shows, games, or books. They did not distinguish domestic media contents from the foreign contents as subjects of fannish production. This further illustrates how the free flow of media content across national boundaries alters the way audiences choose which contents to consume.

Media convergence has granted anime fans online spaces to explore their fannish interests safely, avoiding criticism from the public. This is another phenomenon specific to Chinese fandom, as reflected by this study's participants. Fan producers reported how they coped with criticism from the outsiders to the anime community. In a society where hierarchy is highly respected, the fan producers seemed exceptionally uncomfortable in revealing their interests in anime fandom to outsiders, especially when the outsider holds a superior social position such as their parents, teachers or supervisors at work. Although the social context does not seem to change in a broader sense, thanks to the online spaces, fans now enjoy a higher degree of anonymity and more freedom in expressing their affection towards anime than before. As a subculture that gradually gained the public's attention over the years, the well-developed fan communities provide fans the support they need when facing criticism.

As mentioned in the first chapter, China has heavily regulated State control over TV broadcasting and some authorized online streaming channels. When facing global media changes, China adapted a strategy to “‘attack poison with poison’ – competing on transnational media giants’ terms by organizing state media conglomerates to stimulate ‘managed competition’” (C.-C. Lee, 2003, p. 10). The ban on the airing of anime on TV or streaming anime on several large web services is not in line with corporate convergence. On the contrary, the forming of conglomerates and the banning of media contents has not facilitated the free flow

of media contents. However, this move gives anime fans more incentive to facilitate grassroots convergence in order to get the media contents they want. Although the restriction placed on anime broadcast started as early as 2008, the Chinese anime fan community is still expanding, and the available anime contents remain up-to-date thanks to the diligent work done by the fans. The lack of corporate convergence makes grassroots convergence the driving force to make more contents available online. This also raises questions on what is an effective approach to ensure the coexistence between the industrial for-profit corporations and the free sharing of media contents by active audience. The case of Chinese anime fan community suggests that a subculture can still grow on grassroots convergence with little or no help from corporate convergence.

Even though Chinese anime fandom has some local non-Western characteristics, it is nonetheless heavily influenced by media convergence. Such influence is manifested in different ways culturally and socially, but media convergence indeed brought changes to the Chinese anime fan communities.

As media convergence has made media contents more fluid, boundaries have blurred with the free flow of media content: the boundaries between cultures, between grassroots and corporate production, between local and global orientations, and between media platforms. The blurring boundaries also mean that communities are becoming more fluid and diverse than before. Meanwhile, as Jenkins (2007) pointed out, media consumers' activities are more diverse than before thanks to the increasing number of available media platforms. These changes and diversity in audience characteristics and activity suggest researchers should consider carefully what the appropriate claims about audience activity and gratifications sought and gained are. Finally, the study of such mixed and vibrant audiences in contemporary media environment calls

for a mixed method approach that can both inform a larger picture while incorporating nuanced differences.

### **Practical Implications for Audience and Fan Management**

The findings of this study can be applied to various context where active audience participation is expected. Active fans gain more and more attention from the media industry when they use cutting-edge technologies to produce quality fan works that express their own interpretation of the original works. The act of producing, enabled by technological affordances, blurs the boundaries between the audience and the producer, while the contents of fan works blur the boundaries between the fans and the corporate producers. These changes mean that fans now have the tools media producers use to create contents, disrupting the existing power balance between the media-viewing audience and the media-making producers (Jenkins, 2006a). Media producers are struggling between taking the scorch-the-earth approach to crush all fannish productions, and welcoming and incorporating more fannish content into the original works (Jenkins, 2006a). Milner (2010) suggest that a more benevolent fan-producer relationship could yield methods of interaction that differed from the four he identified in his research. In order to better mediate the relationship between fans and industry producers, this study proposes two approaches for the industry producers to improve fan engagement and form a benevolent relationship. Meanwhile, this study argues for implementing some self-regulation from fan producers to keep fannish production safe for all kinds of audiences and maintain an environment full of creativity and imagination.

Affective economics, a new marketing strategy that centered on consumers' emotional engagement to encourage purchases (Jenkins, 2006a), should be the key to improve fans' engagement level and their motives to purchase. The reported gratifications such as *affection*,

*self-expression, connection with original works, and happiness* are all related to fans expressing their affection towards their favorite shows. For the show makers, understanding and acknowledging these feelings are the first steps to connecting with the fans. Fan producers have been appropriating media contents for decades, some of which are in contradiction to the industry producers' intention (Coppa, 2008; Harrison & Barthel, 2009; Jenkins, 1992b). Instead of trying to diminish these activities (Denison, 2011; Jenkins, 2006a), industry producers should consider the fannish products as affective texts from the fans. As Shefrin (2004) suggested, "participatory fandom is marked by a sustained emotional and physical engagement with a particular narrative universe – an engagement that visualizes a non-commercial, shared ownership with the media company that holds the commercial, legal property rights" (p. 273). Fans' emotional investment in the show is essential to the concept of affective economics, wherein their affection can translate into profit for the industry producers. In the findings, participants said they preferred to purchase merchandise featuring their favored characters or relationship pairings. In officially released merchandise, small details such as both characters have matching colors or patterns on their appearances, character merchandise being released on the same day, or mildly suggestive contents, were considered as a nod of acknowledgement from the industry producers, and fans would happily pay for them.

Listening to the fans is becoming a common practice for some industry producers – be it lurking at fannish content hosting sites, or directly asking fans what they want (Liang & Shen, 2016). As indicated in the findings, fan producers observed that sometimes the industry producers catered to the fans' needs and wants by adding contents that are similar to that of fan works. For example, increasing the screen time of two characters' interactions, or adding romantic conversations between characters were all considered fan service by the participants of

this study. However, there is a delicate balance between fan service and excessive pandering. Sometimes industry producers might be inclined to listen to their fans and fulfill as many of their requests as possible. As indicated in the findings, excessive pandering was not very well received. Instead, the findings suggest that fans preferred some ambiguity in the original media content. Suggestive plots worked better on stirring up discussion in the fan community than the explicit display of affection between characters. Moreover, some participants mentioned that certain excessive catering affected the artistic integrity of the original show, which only made them disappointed rather than ecstatic. For the industry producers, the best path to take is to keep the fans satisfied but not too satisfied, leaving them some room for potential fanish production. This also requires the industry producers to incorporate some degrees of ambiguity in the story while diligently maintaining the consistency of a diegetic story world.

In the findings, some participants voiced their concerns for the lack of content regulations for fanish products. Given the verity of fanish products and sharing platforms, it is impossible to expect all the contents are monitored and regulated. Being in a legal grey zone, fanish products are not subject to the level of censorship as official media products either, which results in highly mixed contents of fanish products – from comedy romance to explicit violence and sexual conduct. These fanish products are easily accessible by any audience regardless of their age, which is potentially problematic for young viewers. This is not to say that we should eliminate all the “mature” or “inappropriate” contents from fanish products, but to apply some self-regulation when publishing fanish products. Some websites that host fanish contents have options for users to indicate mature content, such as DeviantArt and Archive of Our Own. However, these functions are only helpful if the users choose to apply the warnings. Therefore, it is fan producers’ responsibility to ensure warnings are properly applied to their own fanish

products. It is my belief that fans should be the ones to monitor and regulate their own works instead of some industry producers or other authorities due to the conflict of interests. As the most influential members in a fan community, fan producers should be the ones that actively build their communities to be safe for all kinds of audiences.

### **Limitations of the Project and Potential Future Direction**

Despite its contributions to theory and real-world practice, this study has several limitations. First, the ratio of male participants to female is lower than ideal. Previous studies suggest that fandom communities can be gendered (Bacon-Smith, 1992; Fiske, 1992; Gosling, 2007). This could be the case for the anime fandom communities in this study. However, more male participants may be able to provide more complex accounts reflecting possible gender differences.

Second, the data collection method only reached fan producers who have good internet access and means to communicate in audio. Bird (2011) suggest active online audience activity depended on media saturation and technological accessibility. Thus, areas that did not meet these criteria might have a completely different audience activity model. The fandom practices in rural China, if any, could be significantly different from those of the participants of this study who were located in urban areas with access to advanced technologies. Future studies on audience or fan activities should be conducted in less developed areas, which might provide more insights into the influence of media convergence with low technological accessibility.

Third, for the purpose of this study, fan producers of all types of fannish production were enrolled. Though this approach provided an overview for the Chinese anime fandom, the nuanced difference between each fannish activity was de-emphasized. Moreover, as shown in the results, the majority of the fan producers were multi-model producers who published different

types of fannish works. In the future, a comparison between the multi-model producers and single-model producers could also inform more specifically on the nuance of each separate fannish production activity.

Finally, as an insider of anime fandom community, my perspective was both beneficial and limiting. On one hand, I could draw on my experience in the fandom community to understand and relate to participants' accounts. I understood their jargon, anime references, and some high-contextual discourses. On the other hand, my insider's perspective inevitably brought with it my own assumptions. Having first-hand experience of a phenomenon brings both advantages and disadvantages to a study.

## **Conclusion**

Anime and anime fandom in China have witnessed increased popularity with the era of media convergence. Using a Uses and Gratifications theoretical frame, this study sought to analyze the accounts of active anime fan producers in order to determine the reported gratifications gained from practicing anime fannish production and explore the relationship tensions and changes surrounding the Chinese anime fandom communities.

Drawing on interviews with Chinese fan producers, this study identified new gratifications for fannish production, some consistent with prior research and others unique in their dependence on affordances made available in specific media platforms. Moreover, this study contributed to the study of media convergence in a global context by providing a non-Western point of view on the influence of active fannish production on the development of local fandom communities, especially when the fan producers are still perceived in a negative light by outsiders to the anime community. The analysis on the relationship changes between fans and industry producers provided practical suggestions for industry producers to mediate fan-producer



tensions and benefit from this changing relationship. In conclusion, this study provided fans, industry producers, and researchers on audience studies and the on Uses and Gratification theory scholars a better understanding of the nature of active fanish production in the age of media convergence.

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## Tables

Table 1. *Frequencies for sex*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
F	94	83.2	83.2	83.2
M	19	16.8	16.8	100.0
Total	113	100.0	100.0	

Table 2. *Frequencies for location*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
China	99	87.6	87.6	87.6
Oversea	14	12.4	12.4	100.0
Total	113	100.0	100.0	



Table 3. *Frequencies for types of fannish product published online*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Shared 1 type	46	40.7	40.7	40.7
Shared 2 types	30	26.5	26.5	67.3
Shared 3 types	18	15.9	15.9	83.2
Shared 4 types	12	10.6	10.6	93.8
Shared 5 types	7	6.2	6.2	100.0
Total	113	100.0	100.0	

Table 4. *Gratifications arranged by findings and categories*

	Motive-based gratifications	Affordance-based gratifications	Dual-level gratifications
Consistent with previous research	Competition Self-actualization Self-expression Aesthetic enjoyment Escape Habit	Skill acquisition Information sharing Immersion Information seeking Feedback	Affection Seek connection
Different from existing literature	Status	Control of content	Happiness Seek recognition Monetary outcome
New addition	Commitment	Skill evaluation Responsibility Promotion Accessibility	Connection with community Connection with original works Professionalization
Unique to fanish production (user-generated content, derivative works)	Self-actualization	Control of content Skill evaluation Responsibility Promotion Feedback	Connection with original works Professionalization

## Figures

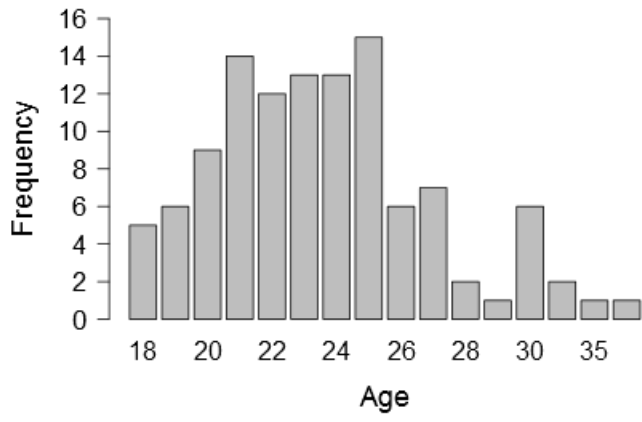


Figure 4. Age distribution of participants.

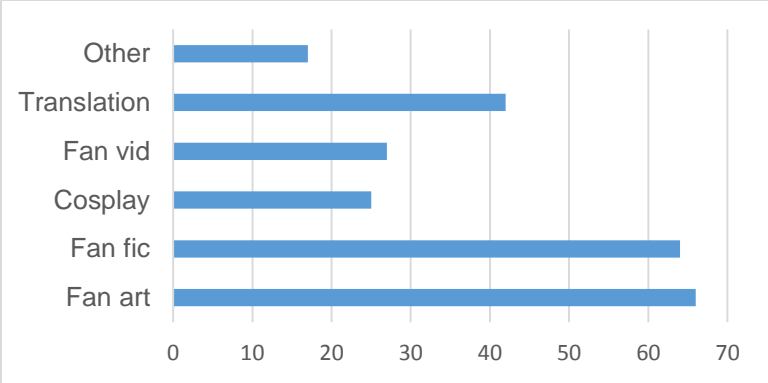


Figure 5.Types of shared fannish products.

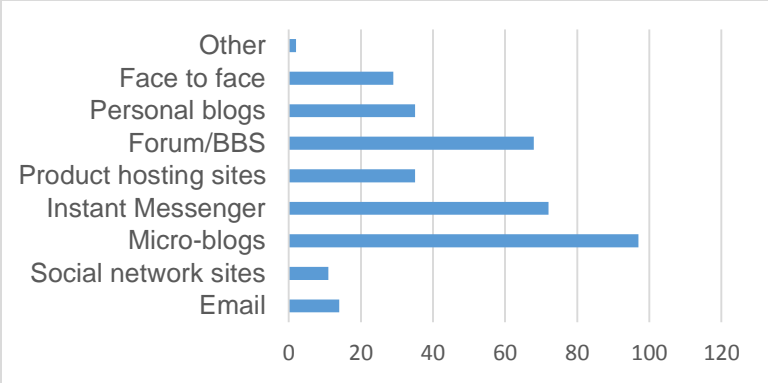


Figure 6. Means of communication.

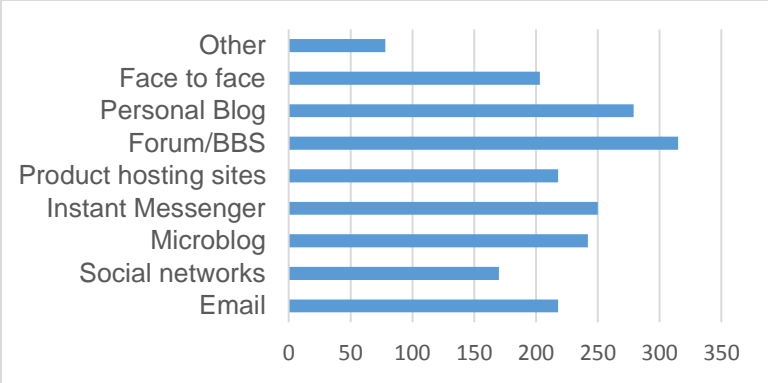


Figure 7. Time reported spent by communication services.

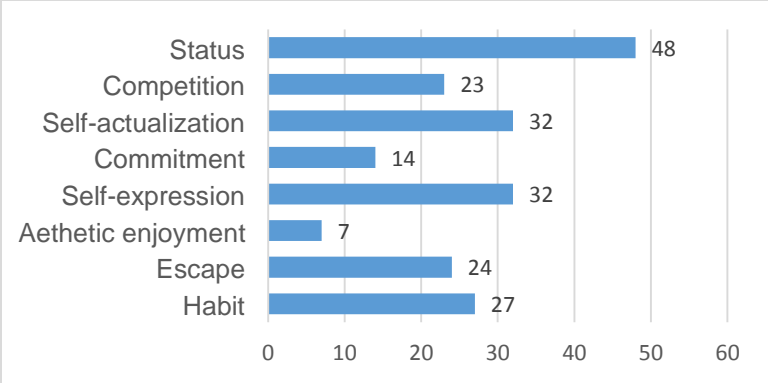


Figure 8. Motive-based gratifications chart in order of discussion.

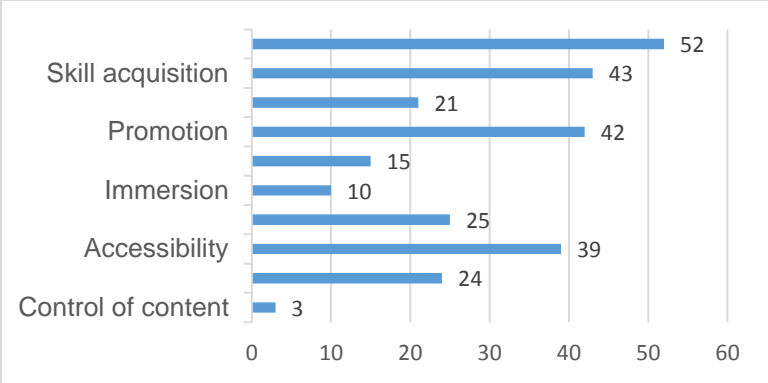


Figure 9. Affordance-based gratifications chart in order of discussion.



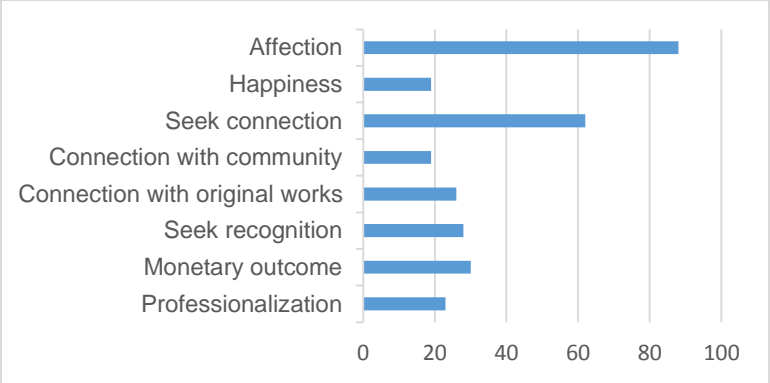


Figure 10. Dual-level gratifications chart in order of discussion.

## Glossary

**Amway:** A term used in Chinese fandom community to refer to a fan's persistent and aggressive attempt to persuade others to like a certain show or a certain character pairing, alluding to the well-known direct sales style of Amway company in China.

**Fannish:** Of or relating to a fan.

**Fansub/fansubber:** Short for fan subtitle groups, a group of fans who translates, subtitles, and releases anime to the fandom community. Fansubbers refer to the members in fansub groups.

**Fanfic:** Fan fictions are derivative stories written by fans but featuring characters from an existing show.

**Fanvid:** Short for fan videos, short video montage tribute made by fans, usually in the form of music videos or funny videos.

**Cosplay/cosplayer:** Short for costume play, a performance in which a fan dresses up as a character from anime or other shows. Cosplay can be a choreographic performance on a stage, or a series of photo shots. Cosplayer is the one who dresses up as the character. Aside from cosplayers, a cosplay performance sometimes also needs stage directors, makeup artists, and photographers.

**Manga:** Japanese comic books or graphic novels, the term uses its Japanese pronunciation instead of direct translation.

**Pairings/CP/西皮:** Fans refer to two characters who they believe to have a romantic relationship, a pairing. A pairing can be male/female, male/male, or female/female. Pairings are purely subjective and can be differ from fan to fan. Pairings are more of a matter of opinion than fact-based.

**Taking the pills/吃药:** Chinese community use the term jokingly to refer to consume fandom-related contents.

**Fan podcast:** A fan group who makes fannish radio drama featuring characters or pairing from a show.

**Translation group:** A fan group dedicated to translate fan books, manga, and other text-based materials from a foreign language into Chinese, and then release the translated products for free.

**Guru/大大:** A title for the fan producers whose works are considered of high quality, fans call certain fan producers “Guru” to show their respect.

## Appendix A

*Table 5. Motive-based gratifications and affordance-based gratifications category chart*

	Articles	Motive-Based Gratifications	Affordance-based Gratifications
<i>* For more details, please refer to the notes at the end of this chart</i>			
Cellphone	Wei & Lo (2006)	Affection Social utility	Accessibility Fashion-status Mobility Information seeking
Email	Dimmick, Kline & Stafford (2000)	Social utility	Communicating Asynchronously
Facebook/ Myspace	Ancu & Cozma (2009)	Social utility Entertainment	Information seeking
	Bumgarner (2007)	Social utility Companionship Self-expression	Directory Voyeurism Collection and connection
	Park, Kee, & Valenzuela (2009);	Social utility Entertainment Status	Information seeking
	Raacke & Bongs-Raacke (2008);	Social utility Companionship	Information seeking Information sharing
	Smock, Ellison, Lampe, & Wohn (2011);	Entertainment Self-expression Escape Status Companionship Social utility Pass time	
	Urista, Qingwen, & Day (2009);	Social utility Connection Companionship Status	Information seeking Information sharing Convenience
	Dhir et al. (2017)	Social utility Status Entertainment Affection Feel good	Receive feedback Information sharing Convenience
Internet	Papacharissi & Rubin (2000);	Social utility Companionship Pass time Entertainment	Convenience

	Jiménez et al. (2012);	Entertainment Social utility Pass time Connection	Information seeking Convenience
	LaRose & Eastin (2004);	Pass time Habit Entertainment Social utility Companionship Status	Monetary outcome Information seeking
	Ayyad (2011)	Entertainment Pass time Social utility Escape	Information seeking Communicating asynchronously Skill acquisition
Internet phone	Park (2010)	Entertainment Instrumentality Social utility Status	Information seeking
Mp3	Ferguson et al. (2007);	Escape Relaxation Arousal Entertainment Companionship	
	Zeng (2011)	Entertainment Pass time Relaxation Social utility Companionship Escape Status	Control of content Concentration Portability/Mobility Concentration Information sharing
Music listening	Belche & Haridakis (2013)	Mood management/arousal Pass time/habit Social utility	Aesthetic enjoyment Information seeking
Newspaper	Lichtenstein & Rosenfeld (1983);	Pass time Companionship Entertainment Relaxation Escape Orientation	Information seeking
	Ayyad (2011)	Entertainment Pass time	Information seeking

Online caring	Anderson (2011);	Social support Social utility Affection	Information seeking Information sharing Convenience
	Tustin (2010)		Information seeking
Online news	Yoo (2011)	Entertainment Social utility	Interactivity Information seeking
Political Blog	Kaye & Johnson (2002)	Entertainment Social utility	Guidance Information seeking
Reality TV	Papacharissi (2007)	Companionship Pass Time/habit Social utility	Reality entertainment Voyeurism
Telephone	O'Keefe & Sulanowski (1995);	Social utility Social support Entertainment	Information sharing Information seeking Time management
	Dimmick et al. (1994);	Social utility Reassurance Companionship Pass time	Long distance communication (Convenience) Information seeking
	Dimmick et al. (2000)	Social utility Affection Companionship	
TV	Rubin (1983);	Relaxation Companionship Habit Pass time Entertainment Social utility Arousal Escape	Information seeking
	Rubin 1985	Escape Entertainment Social utility	Information seeking
	Copper & Tang (2009);	Entertainment	Information seeking
	Ayyad (2011)	Entertainment Pass time	
Twitter	Chen (2011)	Need for connection	Need for connection

User-generated content	Leung (2009);	Status Social utility Self-expression Entertainment	Information seeking Information sharing Skill acquisition
	Shao (2008)	Entertainment Mood management Social utility Self-expression Self-actualization	Information seeking Interactivity
VCR	Rubin (1987)	Social utility	Choosing suitable tapes to watch Library Storage Time shifting
Video game	Lucas & Sherry (2004)	Arousal Pass Time/habit Social utility Competition Challenge	Fantasy
YouTube	Haridakis & Hanson (2009)	Entertainment	Co-viewing Social interaction Information seeking

\* Chart is arranged alphabetically by medium

\* Social utility is used to unify all the social interaction-related gratifications, which includes social, socialization, social interaction, and sociability. Social support is a separate gratification

\* Information seeking and information sharing are different gratifications because the former focuses on finding out information about current affairs but the later focuses more on sharing information about oneself

\* Pass time/habit is used to refer to similar gratifications such as relaxation, diversion/pass time

\* Affection refers to the need to connect and show care to family members and friends, which is similar to social support

\* Companionship means that the participant uses the media to feel less lonely

\* Orientation and guidance means that individual uses media to seek ascertain how others act

\* Some research did not find any motive-based gratification or affordance-based gratification; this does not necessarily mean that the media platform doesn't have one, but reflects more a matter of measurement/methodology

## Appendix B: Questionnaire

### Personal information:

Age: \_\_\_\_

Sex: \_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_

Favorite anime: \_\_\_\_

1. What kind of fan products have you shared with the community (posted online or printed for distribution)?
  - a. Fan art
  - b. Fan fiction
  - c. Cosplay photo shots
  - d. Fan video
  - e. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. If you create fan products but do not share them, what kind of products are they?
  - a. Fan art
  - b. Fan fiction
  - c. Cosplay
  - d. Fan video
  - e. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. Please rank the amount of time you spend on each type of fan product, where 1 represents the one on which you spend the most time, 2 the one on which you spend the next largest amount of time and so on.
  - a. Fan art
  - b. Fan fiction
  - c. Cosplay
  - d. Fan video
  - e. Other \_\_\_\_\_



4. I believe the total number of fan products I have produced until now is:
- slightly fewer than other fan producers in my fandom communities
  - about the same with other fan producers in my fandom communities
  - slightly more than other fan producers in my fandom communities
  - a lot more than other fan producers in my fandom communities
5. How long have you actively participated in producing fan products?
- a. Fan art
  - b. Fan fiction
  - c. Cosplay
  - d. Fan video
  - e. Other \_\_\_\_\_
6. I feel more connected to the fandom or fan community when I am an active fan producer.
- strongly agree ----- agree ----- neither agree nor disagree ----- disagree ----- strongly disagree
7. I think I have higher status than other fans because I am an active fan producer.
- strongly agree ----- agree ----- neither agree nor disagree ----- disagree ----- strongly disagree
8. I prefer to be an active fan producer rather than just being a regular fan.
- strongly agree ----- agree ----- neither agree nor disagree ----- disagree ----- strongly disagree
9. I communicate with other people who produce the same kind of fan product as I do using (mark all that apply):
- a. Email
  - b. Renren/Facebook (or equivalent social network sites)
  - c. Weibo/Twitter/Tumblr (or equivalent microblogging service)
  - d. QQ/Skype/WeChat (or equivalent Instant messenger)
  - e. DeviantArt/Pixiv (or equivalent built-in message service of hosting sites)
  - f. Tieba/Forum (or equivalent BBS service)
  - g. Blogs

h. Face-to-face

i. Other \_\_\_\_\_

10. Please rank the space in which you communicate with others who produce the same kind of fan product you do, with 1 as most often, 2 as next most often, etc.

a. Email

b. Renren/Facebook (or equivalent social network sites)

c. Weibo/Twitter/Tumblr (or equivalent microblogging service)

d. QQ/Skype/WeChat (or equivalent Instant messenger)

e. DeviantArt/Pixiv (or equivalent built-in message service of hosting sites)

f. Tieba/Forum (or equivalent BBS service)

g. Blogs

h. Face-to-face

i. Other \_\_\_\_\_

11. I am satisfied with the communication I have with other active fans.

----- strongly agree ----- agree ----- neither agree nor disagree ----- disagree ----- strongly disagree

12. Fan-produced products contribute to the success of the anime.

----- strongly agree ----- agree ----- neither agree nor disagree ----- disagree ----- strongly disagree

13. I actively create fan products as a means to feel relax and pass time.

----- strongly agree ----- agree ----- neither agree nor disagree ----- disagree ----- strongly disagree

14. I actively create fan products as a means to express myself.

----- strongly agree ----- agree ----- neither agree nor disagree ----- disagree ----- strongly disagree

15. I get to communicate with other active fans as often as I would like.

----- strongly agree ----- agree ----- neither agree nor disagree ----- disagree ----- strongly disagree

16. Being an active fan producer allows me to enjoy fandom more than being just a fan.

----- strongly agree ----- agree ----- neither agree nor disagree ----- disagree ----- strongly disagree

17. Fannish products have done more damage to the anime industry than good.

----- strongly agree ----- agree ----- neither agree nor disagree ----- disagree ----- strongly disagree

18. I became an active fan producer because I want to interact and communicate better with other fans.

----- strongly agree ----- agree ----- neither agree nor disagree ----- disagree ----- strongly disagree

19. Active fandom production is entertaining to me.

----- strongly agree ----- agree ----- neither agree nor disagree ----- disagree ----- strongly disagree

20. In my fandom community, active fans have bigger influence on the anime producers than regular fans.

----- strongly agree ----- agree ----- neither agree nor disagree ----- disagree ----- strongly disagree

21. In my fandom community, media producers (not fans) do well in listening to what their fans have to say.

----- strongly agree ----- agree ----- neither agree nor disagree ----- disagree ----- strongly disagree

22. In my fandom community, media producers (not fans) do well in communicating to their fans.

----- strongly agree ----- agree ----- neither agree nor disagree ----- disagree ----- strongly disagree

23. In my fandom community, I would say that media producers (not fans) fail to appreciate \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C: Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about your latest fan productions, what did you do? (If you're not actively producing fannish works right now, tell me about some of your older works.)
2. How do you like it? What do you like about it? Is there anything you don't like?
3. Can you describe your participation in fandom before you became an active fan producer?
4. How did you start actively engaging in anime fandom?
5. What drew you into the active fandom at the first place?
6. What are some satisfactions you gain from actively engaging in fannish activities? Could you give me some examples?
7. Do you think people sometimes experience negative consequences from actively engaging in fannish activities? What are those? Why do you think these negative consequences didn't stop them from continue being an active fan?
8. What do you think are the major differences between being an active fan and a fan lurker/consumer?
9. Do you prefer being an active fan producer rather than just being a regular fan? Why?
10. Sometime people feel more connected to the fandom or fan community when they are active fan producers, why do you think they feel that way? Do you feel the same?
11. Some people become active fan producers because they want to interact and communicate better with other fans (need for social interaction), do you feel the same? Why or why not?
12. People think being an active fan producer is a higher status than being just a fan, they also sometimes have a sense of empowerment being an active fan producer, what do you make of that? Do you feel the same? Why or why not?
13. Is being an active fan producer a habit for you? To what extent do you use it to pass time and relax?
14. Some people think it's a means to escape from reality, what do you think of that?

15. Some people view active fandom participation more like a job, and they sometimes feel pressure from these fandom activities [“at first it’s just interests, but then it turned into a job”], what do you think made them feel that way? Do you feel the same? Why or why not?
16. Do you think you can express yourself by being an active fan producer? In what way can you express yourself better, and why is that important to you? Do you think you can voice your opinion better when being an active fan producer? What are some opinions you heard from other fan producers that stand out to you?
17. Do you think an active fan producer allows you to enjoy the fandom more than being just a fan? What implications does fandom have for art, social interactions, and entertainment in your opinion?
18. Do you think being an active fan producer helps you acquire new skills? If so, what kind of skills and why do these skills matter?
19. Do you think being an active fan producer can help you to gather and distribute fandom information faster? What are some instances for this information gathering/distribution you remember the most?
20. Do you think active fan producers can exert more influence in the fandom community [or even influence the anime production companies or anime markets] than regular fans? Are there some people who come to your mind when thinking about fan influence over fandom community or even corporations?
21. Are there competitions among active fan producers? If so, could you give me some examples? Do you like these competitions?
22. Do people earn financial gains from being an active fan producer? How much do you think these financial gains matter to them?
23. To wrap up, can you tell me one thing that you think is the most important for you to be an active fan producer.

## Appendix D: The Code Book

### Initial Code Book Developed from Literature Review

accessibility to multimedia

accounts of misunderstanding from media producers

aesthetic enjoyment

challenge

collection: collect digital and non-digital products

companionship: participant use the media to feel less lonely

competition

control of content

convenience

co-viewing

entertainment

escape

fan labor/labor exploitation

fan's negative influence on media producers and/or the anime itself

fan's positive influence on media producers and/or the anime itself

fan-producer power dynamics

fantasy

guidance

habit: same as relaxation, diversion/pass time

information seeking

information sharing

interactions in online community

interactivity

monetary outcome

need for connection

online/networked communication

reassurance

recognition/self-actualization

relationships between fan producers and fans

relationships between fan producers and media producers

self-expression

skill acquisition

social utility: all the social interaction-related gratifications, which includes social, socialization, social interaction, and social ability

status

teamwork/group work

### **Developed Code Book**

non-active fannish activities

monetary consumption

fan producer vs non active fans

activities as non-active fans

collection: collect digital and non-digital products

reaction to out-group members

fandom/life balance

fannish language

creative influence in real life

return to be non-active fan

the conditions to be a fan producer

derivative nature of fan works

subjective condition: time, money, skill set, world-building in the original story

objective condition/reason for not actively producing/publishing: lacking courage

differences between fannish activities

fan translation vs fan creative works

fan labor

teamwork/group work

pressure for production

organized fan labor

fan labor/labor exploitation

burnout

convergence

relationship between fan producers

relationships between fan producers and media producers

relationships between fan producers and fans

online/networked communication

interactions in online community

multimedia platforms

fan producers' influence on fan communities



fan-producer power dynamics

motive-based gratifications

status/influence

self-expression

persistence

impulse/inspiration/灵感

reassurance

lack of similar fan works/lack of satisfaction/self-satisfaction

habit/relaxation/in the flow

guidance

fantasy

escape/reduce pressure

competition

aesthetic enjoyment

companionship: participant use the media to feel less lonely

affordance-based gratifications

skill-specific criticism/enjoyment

skill acquisition/improvement

responsibility/service community

motivated by feedback

information sharing

information seeking

fan publicizing for the show/安利

co-viewing

desire some control over the content

accessibility to multimedia

want to participate in story world

platform afforded convenience

motive and affordance gratifications

seeking connection

companionship: participant use the media to feel less lonely

indulgence/有药吃/沉迷

recognition the quality of work

monetary outcome

expressing love/ being touched 被打动

deeper connection with peers

deeper connection with original work

enjoyment/entertainment/co-play 和小伙伴快乐的玩耍

fandom transition to professional

### **Footnote**

All the excerpts of this study in original Chinese is available to view upon author's discretion. For more information, please contact the author via email: [E.J.Yi.KU@gmail.com](mailto:E.J.Yi.KU@gmail.com).