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Inside the Algorithmic Kaiwai: Negotiating Anime Subcultural Filter Bubbles

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Abstract

This study extends the filter bubble concept in mass media studies to the production and circulation of anime subcultures, focusing on fan identification and resistance. Drawing connections between marketing practices and personalized algorithms in the anime industry, this study examines how they jointly shape subcultural interest circles, referred to in Japanese as Kaiwai. Anime Kaiwai functions as a self-reinforcing system in which members are classified through digital tags of audience representation embedded within character design and narrative structures to facilitate emotional identification. At the same time, engagement on social networking services further strengthens such classification. As a result, fan identities are continuously reinforced and reproduced through consumption and participation on anime entertainment platforms. Under this framework, Kaiwai is not merely an interest group but a subcultural ecosystem shaped by media industries, marketing segmentation, and algorithmic personalization. Methodologically, this study combines platform analysis, industry reports, and case studies of representative anime to examine how Kaiwai operates. The findings suggest that although anime Kaiwai are increasingly stabilized through platform logics, participatory fandom and narrative polysemy continue to destabilize complete algorithmic enclosure within contemporary digital media environments.

Keywords: Algorithmic Governance, Filter Bubbles, Platformization of Culture, Participatory Fandom, Anime Kaiwai

1 Introduction

Kaiwai (界隈) is a Japanese term commonly used to describe hobby-based or subcultural spheres formed through shared interests, identities, and media practices. In contemporary digital culture, the term frequently refers to loosely networked online communities organized around shared cultural participation. In Chinese contexts, a similar notion appears in the term Quānzi (圈子), which likewise conveys enclosure, boundary, and exclusivity in both linguistic and social usage. Rather than referring simply to a social group, Kaiwai describes a subcultural sphere structured through shared media practices, insider knowledge, and participatory engagement.

As Japanese anime increasingly circulates through streaming platforms and social networking services (SNS), anime Kaiwai has become deeply entangled with algorithmic recommendation infrastructures. Recommendation systems and platform visibility mechanisms increasingly shape how audiences discover anime and engage with fan communities. In this sense, anime Kaiwai shares structural similarities with Eli Pariser's concept of the "filter bubble," which describes how algorithmic personalization selectively exposes users to information aligned with their existing preferences, thereby narrowing the diversity of online content exposure (Pariser, 2011).

However, existing filter bubble scholarship has focused primarily on political communication, news consumption, and ideological polarization, while comparatively little attention has been paid to participatory fan cultures shaped through emotional attachment, interpretive ambiguity, and derivative media production (Pariser, 2011). Anime fandom presents a particularly important case because audiences do not simply consume media texts passively. Instead, they actively reinterpret, remix, debate, and circulate anime content through participatory practices across platforms such as YouTube and Bilibili.

Recent scholarship on the platformization of culture further suggests that digital platforms increasingly organize cultural production, circulation, and consumption through data extraction, algorithmic governance, and recommendation infrastructures (van Dijck, Poell & de Waal, 2018; Gillespie, 2014). Nieborg and Poell similarly argue that cultural production has become increasingly dependent on platform infrastructures whose economic models shape visibility, circulation, and monetization within digital media ecosystems (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). Within anime culture, viewing histories, danmu participation (real-time scrolling viewer comments overlaid directly onto videos), and derivative fan production generate behavioral data used to refine recommendation systems. Recommendation infrastructures have therefore become increasingly central not only to anime discovery, but also to processes of taste formation, audience clustering, and cultural visibility within streaming ecosystems (Pajkovic, 2022). As Ted Striphas argues, contemporary culture is increasingly shaped through computational systems that organize participation and visibility algorithmically, producing what he describes as "algorithmic culture" (Striphas, 2015). Recent computational studies on anime recommendation systems further demonstrate growing industrial and scholarly interest in entertainment recommendation infrastructures and preference prediction models (Soni et al., 2023).

Contemporary anime also circulates globally through transnational streaming infrastructures that increasingly shape media discoverability and audience formation. As Ramon Lobato notes, streaming services function not merely as distribution channels but as infrastructural systems governing visibility and accessibility within global media circulation (Lobato, 2019). This transformation reflects broader structural shifts within Japanese media industries, where streaming distribution, digital licensing, and platform circulation increasingly shape anime production and global visibility (Steinberg, 2012; Condry, 2013). Steinberg's concept of the anime "media mix" is particularly relevant here, as anime franchises increasingly operate through the circulation of characters, narratives, and affective attachments across interconnected media forms rather than through isolated texts alone (Steinberg, 2012). Anime Kaiwai similarly emerge through transmedia circulation across platforms and fan practices.

Meanwhile, anime Kaiwai differs from conventional understandings of filter bubbles in several important ways. Because anime participation often involves substantial emotional investment, interpretive disagreement, and creative labor, fan communities may remain

internally contested rather than ideologically uniform (Hills, 2002). Algorithmic recommendation may reinforce visibility within a Kaiwai, but audiences still actively negotiate meanings through commentary, memes, derivative works, and subcultural discourse. Anime fandom therefore complicates deterministic understandings of algorithmic enclosure by demonstrating how participatory culture can both reinforce and destabilize platform-driven audience segmentation.

This study argues that anime Kaiwai functions as a platformized subcultural ecosystem in which algorithmic recommendation systems and participatory fandom simultaneously reinforce and destabilize filter bubble dynamics. Building on this framework, this study further suggests that filter bubbles operate differently in fan cultures characterized by interpretive polysemy, affective participation, and high engagement thresholds. In doing so, the study contributes to discussions of platformized culture by highlighting how fan agency and aesthetic interpretation continue to shape digital cultural environments under conditions of algorithmic governance.

This study addresses three central questions: 1) how do platform recommendation systems and marketing logics contribute to the formation of anime Kaiwai? 2) how do participatory fandom practices reinforce or negotiate these algorithmically mediated subcultural ecosystems? and 3) to what extent do anime Kaiwai function as filter bubbles, and what factors may render these bubbles more porous than those observed in other digital media environments?

2 Materials and Methods

To address these questions, this study adopts a qualitative platform analysis approach combining platform observation, discourse analysis, and industry document analysis. The research focuses primarily on participatory anime fandom surrounding *Attack on Titan* across YouTube and Bilibili between 2024 and 2026.

Empirical materials consisted of highly viewed character-analysis videos, recommendation clusters, comment threads, danmu interactions, remix videos, meme-based discussions, and derivative fan interpretations associated with *Attack on Titan*. The study employs purposive sampling focused on highly engaged fan interactions surrounding interpretive conflict and participatory circulation.

Videos and discussion spaces were selected according to several indicators of platform visibility and audience engagement, including high view counts, sustained comment activity, recommendation recurrence, repost circulation, and repeated appearance within platform recommendation feeds. Particular attention was paid to videos and discussion threads centered on politically and emotionally contested topics, including nationalism, freedom, determinism, militarism, literary legitimacy, and character morality. Comparative coding examined how audiences negotiated meaning through commentary, remixing, danmu interaction, meme circulation, and interpretive debate across YouTube and Bilibili. Special attention was given to moments where recommendation visibility intersected with contested audience interpretation, allowing analysis of how algorithmic clustering reinforced circulation without fully stabilizing meaning.

To contextualize these participatory dynamics within broader industrial structures, this study additionally analyzed platform disclosures industry reports, and scholarship on streaming infrastructures, anime media industries, and entertainment recommendation systems. These materials were used not as primary ethnographic evidence, but as contextual sources for

understanding how commercial logics and platform governance shape participatory circulation within anime Kaiwai.

3 Theoretical Framework and Participatory Fandom

This section situates anime Kaiwai within theories of encoding/decoding, participatory culture, and platformized fandom in order to examine how meaning, circulation, and subcultural identity are negotiated within algorithmically mediated fan environments. Rather than understanding anime fandom as a passive audience category shaped solely by recommendation systems, this study approaches Kaiwai as a participatory and platformized interpretive ecosystem produced through interactions among media texts, fan practices, and algorithmic circulation.

The formation of anime Kaiwai can first be understood through Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model. Hall argues that media producers encode preferred meanings into cultural texts through socially shared codes and assumptions, while audiences decode these meanings according to their own ideological positions, lived experiences, and cultural contexts (Hall, 2001, pp. 166–176). This framework is particularly useful for anime fandom because contemporary anime circulation increasingly depends upon audience reinterpretation, emotional investment, and derivative participation across digital platforms.

3.1 Encoding/Decoding and Participatory Culture

Within anime Kaiwai, audiences do not simply absorb meanings encoded by animation studios or source materials such as manga and light novels. Instead, fans actively reinterpret anime narratives through commentary videos, fan fiction, memes, AMVs, reaction content, and platform discussions. These derivative practices extend the interpretive life of anime texts beyond their original industrial production. As Matt Hills argues, fan cultures generate their own forms of cultural value through ongoing reinterpretation, circulation, and affective investment (Hills, 2002). Within anime Kaiwai, meanings therefore continue to evolve through participatory circulation rather than remaining fixed within the original text.

This interpretive process aligns closely with Henry Jenkins' concept of participatory culture, in which audiences actively produce and circulate media content rather than merely consuming it (Jenkins, 2004). Anime fans routinely create analytical edits, scene compilations, character discussions, cosplay content, fan translations, and collaborative wiki archives that expand the cultural and semantic boundaries of particular Kaiwai.

Notably, participatory fandom predates contemporary algorithmic infrastructures. As Mizuko Ito notes in Fandom Unbound, many concepts now associated with networked digital culture, including "prosumers," "connectors," and "lead users," have long characterized fan communities themselves (Ito, 2012, p. 278). Anime fandom therefore should not be understood simply as a platform-generated behavior emerging from recommendation systems. Rather, contemporary platforms intensify and reorganize already existing participatory practices. Ito further argues that fan cultures operate through dynamics that are simultaneously "more accessible and more exclusive," requiring forms of cultural literacy and interpretive competence that distinguish insiders from outsiders (Ito, 2012, p. 281). This tension between accessibility and exclusivity is similarly visible within anime Kaiwai, where recommendation systems increase visibility while participatory norms maintain subcultural boundaries.

Recent scholarship further suggests that participatory fandom increasingly emerges through interactions among users, fan communities, and algorithmic systems, complicating earlier distinctions between human participation and technological mediation (Li & Pang, 2024).

Recommendation infrastructures now shape which fan interpretations become visible, circulated, and amplified within digital fandom spaces. However, algorithmic visibility does not fully stabilize meaning because fan communities continue to debate, reinterpret, and contest media texts through participatory interaction.

This shift from passive consumption toward collaborative cultural production also reflects Bruns and Schmidt's concept of "produsage," which describes how Web 2.0 environments blur the distinction between producers and users (Bruns & Schmidt, 2011). Within anime Kaiwai, fans simultaneously consume existing anime texts while producing new interpretations, discussions, and derivative media. Cultural meaning therefore remains continuously reshaped through participatory circulation.

Anime Kaiwai can thus be understood as an interpretive ecosystem sustained through ongoing exchanges between encoded industrial meanings and fan-driven decoded reinterpretations. Recommendation systems may intensify circulation within these ecosystems, but fan participation continuously destabilizes fixed interpretations through reproducing discourse and affective negotiation.

3.2 Platformized Anime Fandom as Kaiwai

Anime Kaiwai are continuously reproduced through interactions among platform recommendation systems, participatory fandom, and derivative media circulation. Kaiwai operate as platform-mediated interpretive formations instead of stable communities. The circulation of *Attack on Titan* discourse across Bilibili and YouTube illustrates how these participatory dynamics emerge through recommendation-driven platform environments.

Bilibili provides a particularly useful case because of its historical association with Animation, Comics, and Games (ACG) subculture in China (Bilibili Inc., 2024a). Although the platform has expanded into a broader commercial video ecosystem, anime-oriented participatory practices remain central to its interaction culture and platform identity. According to Bilibili's corporate disclosures, the platform recorded approximately 22.5 million monthly creator uploads during Q1 2024 (Bilibili Inc., 2024a). Its annual reports similarly identify anime, gaming, and fan-oriented content as major drivers of engagement and recommendation circulation (Bilibili Inc., 2024b).

Platforms such as Bilibili and YouTube do not simply distribute anime texts. They also enable users to continuously reproduce and circulate derivative interpretations through AMVs, fan edits, commentary videos, memes, reaction clips, and character-analysis content. These forms of participatory production demonstrate how Kaiwai emerge not as fixed interest groups but as fluid interpretive formations sustained through repeated interaction and remixing. Jenkins (2006) similarly argues that media convergence increasingly depends upon audience participation across interconnected media environments, while Ito (2012) emphasizes how fan creativity blurs the distinction between producers and consumers within digital fandom cultures.

At the platform level, recommendation systems intensify this circulation by clustering audiences around emotionally resonant or ideologically adjacent content. However, the recommendation ecologies observed across Bilibili and YouTube remained internally contested rather than fully closed. Competing interpretations frequently coexisted within the same recommendation clusters through reply chains, danmu commentary, reaction videos, and argumentative fan discourse. For example, highly engaged *Attack on Titan* discussions often contained simultaneous interpretations of Eren Yeager as a tragic anti-war figure, a nationalist extremist, or a deterministically trapped protagonist. These conflicting readings circulated

within overlapping recommendation environments rather than entirely separate ideological communities.

This interpretive instability complicates deterministic understandings of filter bubbles. Recommendation systems reinforce repeated exposure and audience clustering, yet fan interpretations remain unstable because anime narratives are often emotionally and aesthetically polysemic. Participatory fandom within anime Kaiwai therefore operates not only through consensus formation but also through sustained interpretive conflict, negotiation, and reinterpretation.

4 Interpretive Conflict and Platformized Kaiwai in *Attack on Titan*

Participation within anime Kaiwai depends heavily on forms of subcultural literacy that distinguish insiders from outsiders. As Akihiro Kitada argues, ironic communication and sarcasm frequently "accentuate the boundary between those who 'get it' and those who do not" (Kitada, 2012, p.70). Within anime fandom, meme formats, coded references, ironic edits, danmu commentary, and emotionally charged character discourse similarly function as mechanisms of cultural distinction. These practices reinforce communal identity while simultaneously limiting full participation to users familiar with the relevant interpretive norms.

The anime *Attack on Titan* demonstrates how a single media text can generate dramatically divergent political, emotional, and philosophical interpretations across audiences. Hajime Isayama's manga and its anime adaptation have been interpreted both as critiques of militarism and colonial violence and, by some online communities, as sympathetic to reactionary nationalism (Brinkhof, 2021). These debates circulated widely across YouTube, Bilibili, and anime commentary channels, particularly through character-analysis videos, reaction content, danmu exchanges, meme edits, and long-form discussion threads. Rather than producing a single ideological consensus, these interactions generated multiple competing interpretive clusters within the same Kaiwai.

To examine how interpretive conflict circulates across platforms, this section compares highly engaged audience interactions surrounding *Attack on Titan* on YouTube and Bilibili between 2024 and 2026. The analysis focuses on recommendation-linked character-analysis videos, highly liked comment threads, danmu overlays, remix discourse, and derivative fan interpretations surrounding characters such as Eren Yeager.

4.1 YouTube: Literary Legitimacy and Interpretive Authority

Across highly engaged YouTube comment threads, one recurring interpretive pattern involved audiences framing *Attack on Titan* through the language of literary legitimacy and institutional recognition. Highly liked comments repeatedly described the series as "something that should be discussed in an English class," "comparable to literary fiction," or "worthy of academic analysis." These comments positioned anime as deserving institutional and literary recognition.

Importantly, these interpretations gained visibility not as isolated responses, but as highly amplified comments within recommendation-driven discussion spaces. Recommendation systems repeatedly directed viewers from reaction videos to analysis essays, philosophy-themed breakdowns, and narrative explanation videos, creating clusters of interpretive discourse surrounding the series. In this sense, YouTube comment culture functioned as a participatory interpretive environment in which audiences did not merely consume anime texts but actively performed the role of analyst, critic, and literary reader.

Simultaneously, these discussions frequently involved struggles over interpretive authority. Commenters accused others of having "misunderstood the story," debated whether the narrative contained "plot holes," and used analytical language to position themselves as viewers who had "correctly understood" the text. Through these exchanges, interpretive literacy itself became a form of fan-cultural capital. As Matt Hills argues, fandom often involves the performance of specialized knowledge and affective investment as markers of subcultural distinction (Hills, 2002). On YouTube, interpretive authority therefore functioned not only as textual analysis, but also as identity performance within the Kaiwai.

4.2 Bilibili: Affective Participation and Meme-Based Interpretation

In contrast, Bilibili discussions more frequently embedded interpretation within affective interaction, meme circulation, and insider discourse. Highly viewed narrative-analysis videos focused on Eren Yeager generated extensive argumentative exchanges in both comment sections and danmu overlays, where users alternately framed Eren as "a tragic protector attempting to save the Eldian people," "an extremist reproducing militaristic violence," "a victim of determinism," or "an emotionally immature individual obsessed with freedom." Rather than converging toward a single ideological interpretation, these discussions produced multiple competing readings that coexisted within the same recommendation ecology.

The participatory nature of these interactions extended beyond plot interpretation into the emotional and linguistic reconstruction of the character itself. In one widely circulated analysis video, the creator described Eren using the slang term "**中二病**" (zhōng'èrbìng), derived from the Japanese term chūnibyō, to characterize him as self-dramatizing, emotionally unstable, and attached to an idealized understanding of freedom. Viewers subsequently reinterpreted and negotiated this framing through meme repetition, ironic humor, emotional projection, and corrective fan discourse.

For example, one danmu comment responding to the characterization of Eren as a "man-child" stated, "**巨婴吗? 本来就是20岁的孩子**" ("A man-child? He's literally just a 20-year-old kid"), reframing his behavior through emotional immaturity rather than moral condemnation. Another viewer jokingly replied to a discussion of Eren's military ranking with "**冷知识 前四名是三笠和马莱三人组**" ("Fun fact: the top four were Mikasa and the Marley trio"), invoking insider knowledge and fandom literacy through ironic correction. A third commenter compared Eren's moral decline to another anime protagonist through the meme-like remark "**夜神月的含金量还在提高**" ("Light Yagami's reputation keeps increasing"), drawing intertextual parallels across anime fandom culture.

These interactions reflect what Henry Jenkins conceptualizes as participatory culture, in which audiences actively reinterpret, remix, and circulate media texts rather than passively consuming them (Jenkins, 2006). At the same time, the rapid circulation of memes, emotionally charged commentary, and intertextual references demonstrates how platform affordances shape the visibility and persistence of particular interpretations within fan communities. As Mizuko Ito argues, participatory fandom increasingly blurs the boundaries between cultural consumption, social interaction, and creative production (Ito, 2012). Bilibili's danmu system further intensifies this dynamic by allowing reactions, jokes, and interpretive commentary to appear directly over the anime image itself, transforming viewing into a collective and continuously negotiated experience.

4.3 Porous Filter Bubbles and Platformized Polysemy

These interactions demonstrate the persistence of negotiated and competing interpretations within platformed fandom environments. However, the forms these interpretations take differ across platforms. While YouTube discussions more frequently framed legitimacy through analytical language and literary comparison, Bilibili interactions more often constructed legitimacy through affective resonance, meme literacy, danmu participation, and insider humor. The distinction therefore does not reflect differing "depths" of interpretation, but rather different platformized modes of participatory fandom and cultural identity formation.

More importantly, these platform-specific interpretive conflicts complicate deterministic understandings of algorithmic filter bubbles. Recommendation systems on both platforms clustered viewers around emotionally resonant themes, character analyses, and ideological debates. However, these clusters did not produce complete interpretive closure. Competing viewpoints frequently remained visible within the same recommendation environments through reply chains, reaction videos, danmu commentary, remix edits, and argumentative fan exchanges. Rather than eliminating disagreement, recommendation ecologies often intensified sustained interpretive conflict.

The *Attack on Titan* Kaiwai therefore illustrates a more porous form of filter bubble formation. Algorithmic systems reinforce audience circulation and increase the visibility of related content, yet they do not fully stabilize meaning or eliminate interpretive plurality. Because anime narratives are often polysemic and emotionally open-ended, audiences continue to negotiate competing interpretations even within algorithmically clustered environments. In this sense, anime Kaiwai operate not as fully closed ideological filter bubbles, but as contested participatory ecosystems shaped through the ongoing interaction of fandom practices, platform infrastructures, and interpretive conflict.

5 Commercializing Kaiwai

Anime Kaiwai are not sustained by fandom alone. Rather, participatory fan practices increasingly operate in tandem with platform infrastructures, recommendation systems, and merchandising strategies. As Mizuko Ito observes in discussion of Henry Jenkins' work, "fan activity and commercial activity are becoming increasingly synergistic" (Ito, 2012, pp. 279–280). Within contemporary anime culture, fan circulation, algorithmic visibility, and commercial promotion continuously reinforce one another, blurring the boundary between grassroots participation and industrial management.

5.1 Platform Recommendation and Audience Segmentation

Anime fans do not simply consume media texts passively. Through fan edits, commentary videos, meme circulation, cosplay, merchandise collection, and SNS interaction, they function simultaneously as audiences and participatory cultural producers. Industry studies on global anime consumption indicate that fan engagement frequently extends beyond streaming itself into games, conventions, merchandise, and online fan communities (NRG, 2023). These activities generate extensive engagement data that platforms can use to classify audience preferences and predict future consumption patterns.

At the industrial level, such data have become increasingly valuable to streaming and media platforms. As Steinberg (2012) argues in his analysis of anime's "media mix," anime franchises operate through interconnected systems of circulation spanning television, games,

merchandise, social media, and character branding. Contemporary streaming platforms intensify this logic by incorporating recommendation systems that continuously track viewing histories, interaction metrics, and patterns of engagement. Recommendation infrastructures therefore shape not only content discovery but also the visibility and commercial circulation of specific genres, characters, and fan communities.

Scholarship on platformization similarly argues that cultural production is increasingly organized through platform infrastructures that structure visibility and monetization algorithmically (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). Within anime ecosystems, recommendation systems cluster audiences according to affective preferences and behavioral similarity, reinforcing repeated exposure to related genres and narrative tropes. Bilibili's 2024 annual report, for example, identifies algorithmic optimization and targeted advertising as central components of its platform growth strategy (Bilibili Inc., 2024a). User interactions including viewing duration, danmu participation, sharing behaviour, and search histories are transformed into commercial data used to identify and retain "high-value" audiences.

Importantly, this process does not simply market individual anime titles. Rather, it stabilizes broader subcultural formations by repeatedly associating specific aesthetic preferences, emotional investments, and consumption habits with identifiable audience categories. Recommendation systems therefore contribute to the consolidation of Kaiwai as commercially valuable audience ecosystems.

5.2 Cool Japan, Branding, and Transmedia Consumption

The commercialization of anime Kaiwai must also be understood within the broader context of Japan's transnational cultural industries. Government-supported initiatives such as Cool Japan frame anime and manga as globally marketable cultural assets, encouraging investment in international distribution, merchandising, and digital platform expansion (Cabinet Secretariat of Japan, 2024). According to the Association of Japanese Animations (2024), the anime industry reached a record market scale of ¥3.8407 trillion in 2024, reflecting the growing global integration of streaming platforms, merchandise economies, and transmedia promotion.

This industrial expansion reflects a broader shift in contemporary branding practices. As Banet-Weiser (2012) argues, branding increasingly operates through the commercialization of identity and affect rather than through products alone. Within anime Kaiwai, fandom itself becomes a marketable identity category structured through emotional attachment, visibility, and participation. The stereotypical "otaku" consumer is therefore not merely a demographic category but an economically legible audience identity shaped through platform analytics and commercial segmentation.

Anime marketing increasingly packages lifestyles and affective orientations alongside media products. This logic resembles the marketing strategies discussed in PBS Frontline's *The Persuaders* (Dretzin et al., 2004), where corporations promote emotional identities and aspirational lifestyles rather than isolated commodities. In anime culture, recommendation systems and merchandising strategies similarly reinforce particular modes of fan identity by repeatedly circulating related characters, genres, aesthetics, and emotional narratives across platforms.

At the same time, fan participation remains central to this commercial ecosystem. Streaming activity, fan discussion, derivative production, and merchandise consumption collectively generate data that platforms use to refine recommendation systems and predict future engagement trends. Through this feedback loop, fan participation itself becomes part of the industrial infrastructure shaping anime circulation. Recommendation algorithms amplify genres and narratives that already demonstrate strong engagement, while producers

increasingly rely on these engagement metrics to guide future adaptations and media investments.

Consequently, anime Kaiwai function not only as fan communities but also as platformized subcultural markets continuously reproduced through interactions among participatory fandom, algorithmic recommendation, and transmedia commercialization.

6 The Self-Circulation of Kaiwai

6.1 From Filter Bubbles to Self-Reinforcing Kaiwai

Anime Kaiwai are sustained not only through fan participation, but also through feedback loops connecting platform recommendation, audience engagement, and commercial media production. As audiences interact with anime through viewing histories, comments, memes, fan edits, and derivative works, these activities generate behavioral data that platforms use to refine recommendation systems and cluster users according to shared preferences. Over time, repeated circulation within these recommendation environments strengthens the visibility and cohesion of particular Kaiwai.

This process contributes to increasingly saturated subcultural ecosystems in which commercially successful genres become easier to reproduce and monetize than entirely new audience formations. Rather than continuously investing in unfamiliar genres, producers and platforms often expand already successful Kaiwai through targeted marketing, transmedia circulation, and algorithmic recommendation. The rapid expansion of isekai anime illustrates this tendency. Industry analyses estimate that isekai titles accounted for approximately 15% of new anime releases in 2024 (Persistence Market Research, 2024), while scholarly studies have identified recurring narrative structures centered on transportation to alternative worlds, escapism, and self-reinvention (Price, 2021).

This tendency resembles what Horkheimer and Adorno describe as the standardizing logic of the culture industry, in which commercially successful cultural forms are repeatedly reproduced and commodified (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2001). Although individual anime series vary aesthetically and narratively, recommendation systems and market analytics encourage industries to privilege recognizable genres, character archetypes, and narrative tropes associated with stable audience demand. Contemporary anime production therefore increasingly operates through interactions among platform data, fan engagement metrics, and transmedia marketing infrastructures.

Importantly, fan participation itself becomes part of this circulation cycle. Online discussions, fan art trends, derivative videos, and engagement statistics function as cultural signals that help producers identify commercially viable themes and characters. Recommendation systems amplify these trends further by increasing the visibility of already popular genres and interpretive communities. As a result, Kaiwai increasingly function as self-reinforcing ecosystems in which fan participation, recommendation infrastructures, and industrial production continuously shape one another.

6.2 Case Study: The Isekai Kaiwai

The isekai Kaiwai illustrates how recommendation systems, audience demand, and industrial production mutually reinforce one another within contemporary anime ecosystems. While individual series vary narratively and aesthetically, many isekai works revolve around themes of escapism, self-reinvention, and alternative social mobility (Price, 2021). Popular titles

frequently depict protagonists who begin in conditions associated with alienation, burnout, or hikikomori-like withdrawal before reconstructing their identities within alternative worlds.

Popular isekai series frequently depict protagonists who begin in conditions associated with social alienation, burnout, or hikikomori-like withdrawal before reconstructing their identities within alternative worlds. In ABEMA's 2025 ranking of popular isekai anime, titles such as *Re:Zero − Starting Life in Another World*, *Mushoku Tensei: Jobless Reincarnation*, *That Time I Got Reincarnated as a Slime*, and *Overlord* all centered on protagonists who reconstruct their identities after entering alternative realities (ABEMA, 2025). These recurring themes of escapism, recognition, and self-reinvention contribute to the continued visibility and circulation of the isekai Kaiwai across recommendation-driven platforms.

6.3 Case Study: Harem Kaiwai and Affective Recommendation

A similar dynamic can be observed within the harem Kaiwai, where recommendation systems amplify narratives centered on intimacy, emotional attachment, and gendered fantasy. In many harem anime series, socially passive protagonists become the focus of romantic attention from multiple characters, allowing audiences to engage with fantasies of recognition, affection, and emotional security.

Scholars such as Hiroki Azuma (2009) and Patrick Galbraith (2011) argue that affective attachment plays a central role in contemporary otaku culture, where audiences often prioritize emotional resonance, moe, and character attachment over narrative coherence alone. Within platform environments, recommendation systems intensify these affective economies by clustering audiences according to shared preferences for particular character dynamics, romantic tropes, and aesthetic styles.

The harem Kaiwai therefore illustrates how recommendation infrastructures increasingly organize not only media visibility, but also affective participation itself. Nonetheless, these narratives remain connected to broader social concerns surrounding intimacy, loneliness, and identity formation in contemporary digital culture. Rather than functioning simply as isolated niche genres, harem anime communities demonstrate how emotional attachment, platform recommendation, and participatory fandom intersect within contemporary anime ecosystems.

7 Discussion

The preceding analysis suggests that anime Kaiwai are shaped simultaneously by algorithmic recommendation, commercial media infrastructures, and participatory fan practices. While recommendation systems and marketing strategies reinforce relatively stable audience clusters, fan participation and interpretive conflict also introduce forms of instability that complicate deterministic understandings of filter bubbles. Therefore, anime Kaiwai operate as porous subcultural ecosystems in which algorithmic visibility and fan agency continuously interact.

7.1 Participation Beyond Passive Algorithmic Consumption

One factor that complicates algorithmic enclosure is the relatively high commitment threshold associated with anime fandom. Participation in anime Kaiwai often requires substantial investments of time, emotional attachment, cultural literacy, and financial resources. Fans frequently engage not only with anime texts themselves, but also with games, merchandise, cosplay, fan fiction, remix culture, and platform discussions.

A 2024 entertainment survey reported that 94% of anime fans purchased anime-related merchandise within the previous year (Dentsu, 2024), illustrating the degree of affective and

economic participation involved in fandom culture. Such commitment encourages forms of reflexivity that complicate simplistic models of passive algorithmic exposure. Fans often evaluate the aesthetic, emotional, and cultural value of the Kaiwai they participate in because their available time, attention, and financial resources remain limited.

Anime Kaiwai also involve forms of identity formation that are not fully reducible to recommendation logics. Because anime fandom often exists somewhat outside mainstream cultural hierarchies, participants may experience greater freedom to construct alternative forms of cultural belonging and self-identification. As Melianto and Syamsudin (2024) argue, aesthetic participation within digital cultural communities contributes to both individual and collective identity formation. Within anime Kaiwai, recommendation systems may reinforce existing preferences, but fan participation ultimately remains dependent on emotional attachment, aesthetic interpretation, and subcultural affiliation rather than algorithmic determination alone.

7.2 Polysemy and Interpretive Conflict

A second factor that destabilizes closed filter bubbles is the polysemic nature of anime itself. Anime narratives frequently contain symbolic ambiguity, layered characterization, and open-ended ideological meanings that encourage multiple interpretations. Unlike politically polarized information environments organized around factual claims or ideological alignment, anime discourse often revolves around subjective interpretation and affective investment.

The case of *Attack on Titan* illustrates this dynamic clearly. Across YouTube and Bilibili, audiences interpreted the series both as a critique of militarism and as sympathetic to reactionary nationalism. Fans defended competing readings through narrative analysis, meme circulation, emotional projection, and argumentative commentary. Instead, competing interpretations frequently coexisted within the same recommendation ecologies.

This interpretive plurality resembles what Stuart Hall conceptualizes as negotiated and oppositional decoding, where audiences actively reinterpret media texts through their own social and ideological frameworks (Hall, 2001). In this sense, anime Kaiwai differ from more rigid forms of algorithmic polarization because disagreement itself becomes a central mode of participation. Rather than eliminating alternative viewpoints entirely, participatory fandom often sustains ongoing interpretive contestation within platform environments.

7.3 Toward More Porous Filter Bubbles

Taken together, these findings suggest that algorithmic recommendation systems do not fully determine cultural participation within anime fandom. Instead, anime Kaiwai demonstrate how participatory culture can simultaneously reinforce and destabilize algorithmically mediated audience segmentation. Recommendation infrastructures still shape visibility, circulation, and monetization, but fan agency remains significant because participation depends heavily on affective investment, interpretive flexibility, and subcultural literacy.

These findings also carry broader implications for platformized cultural environments. First, the relatively high commitment threshold associated with fandom participation may partially mitigate passive forms of algorithmic consumption by encouraging more reflective engagement. Second, the polysemic qualities of artistic media may weaken attempts to classify audiences according to stable ideological categories. Finally, the anime Kaiwai illustrates the importance of platform ethnography for understanding how users actively negotiate recommendation systems through remix practices, commentary, and participatory circulation. Rather than viewing users solely as passive subjects of algorithmic governance, the case of anime fandom demonstrates that platformized cultural ecosystems are continuously shaped

through reciprocal interactions among algorithms, media industries, and participatory communities.

8 Conclusion

This study examines how anime Kaiwai emerge as platformized subcultural ecosystems shaped through the interaction of participatory fandom, marketing segmentation, and algorithmic recommendation systems. Extending the filter bubble framework beyond political communication, the study argues that anime Kaiwai operate through processes of audience clustering, affective participation, and transmedia circulation that reinforce the visibility and cohesion of specific fan communities. Recommendation infrastructures and commercial media strategies increasingly organize how anime is discovered, circulated, and monetized across streaming platforms and social networking services. At the same time, fan participation continuously reproduces Kaiwai through commentary, remix practices, memes, and derivative cultural production.

However, the findings also suggest that anime Kaiwai differ from more deterministic models of algorithmic enclosure. Unlike low-investment social media environments, participation in anime fandom often requires substantial emotional commitment, cultural literacy, and long-term engagement. Moreover, the polysemic nature of anime narratives enables competing interpretations to coexist within the same recommendation ecologies. As demonstrated through the case of *Attack on Titan*, fans frequently negotiate meanings through debate, irony, meme culture, and interpretive conflict rather than through ideological consensus alone. Anime Kaiwai therefore function less as fully closed echo chambers than as porous filter bubbles shaped by ongoing interaction between platform infrastructures and participatory culture.

This study nonetheless has several limitations. The analysis focuses primarily on YouTube and Bilibili and therefore cannot fully account for variations across other platforms, regional fandoms, or media industries. In addition, the discussion of recommendation systems relies largely on platform observation, public reports, and visible patterns of circulation rather than access to proprietary algorithmic data. Future research could combine platform ethnography, computational analysis, and fan interviews to examine how algorithmic governance and participatory fandom interact across different transnational media environments.

All in all, anime Kaiwai demonstrates how platformization does not simply produce passive algorithmic audiences, but also generates contested cultural spaces in which users actively negotiate identity, meaning, and participation. Anime Kaiwai therefore demonstrates how algorithmic governance and participatory culture remain mutually constitutive rather than mutually exclusive within contemporary platformized media environments.

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