A Thesis
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts
in Communication, Culture, and Technology

By

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Washington, D.C.
April 19, 2018
COMICCON-NETWORKED CULTURE AND PARTICIPATORY BUSINESS IN THE US, JAPAN, AND CHINA

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ABSTRACT

ComicCon represents the coming-together of a participatory fan culture and a transmedial, multigenre commercial culture. This thesis analyzes the international ComicCon culture and its business strategies, including both online social networks and real-time fan interactions during the events. This thesis first presents ComicCon from a social perspective, that is, ComicCon is both a social club and a fandom classroom. The author uses NodeXL to generate and code data on Twitter with the hashtag #animeusa to analyze the first-hand, public commentary and discussions by fans. Then the thesis goes on to compare the social-focused Japanese Doujin Market with its US counterpart, the market-focused US ComicCon. Second, in a market perspective, this thesis analyzes the marketing strategies employed by the associated media companies and fan producers. The author uses data gleaned from direct observations of the conventions themselves to analyze the value delivery networks embedded in the comic conventions. The author selects two companies as case studies--Marvel Comics in New York Comic Con 2017 and Logitech in ChinaJoy 2016. These case studies compare marketing strategies in terms of technological platforms, panel designs, product dissemination, and detailed promotional tools in the conventions. Finally, this study shows both the themes of ComicCon and the market strategies of media companies differ markedly according to different cultural preferences, technology platforms, and market environments.
Thanks to my supportive family, my generous friends, my advisor, and readers who are always by my side.
To my beloved anime.

Many thanks,
Zhihua Wu
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Chapter I: Introduction

Last October, I was standing in a Shonen Jump panel at New York Comic Con, surrounded by dozens of Japanese anime fans, who were wearing costumes of famous manga characters, such as Goku in Dragon Ball (See Appendix B, Image 1-1). The blue hair and ragged fighting uniform that “Goku” wore represented the superpower he possessed and tough battles he had been through. This cosplayer came with other fans in the same Dragon Ball fandom, and made fighting poses with other Dragon Ball cosplayers for anyone who wanted to take pictures of them. All the fans of Shonen Jump in that room were eager to hear the announcements from their admired Shonen Jump editors about the latest released anime shows. Everyone in that room was handed a poster of JoJo's Bizarre Adventure, one of my favorite boy manga in Shonen Jump's history.

In that crowded room with thrilled fans, I got a strange feeling like I knew everyone in the room; they were Goku in Dragon Ball, Naruto in Naruto, Kurosaki in Bleach, and other famous anime characters that can be easily recognized by fans. We were shouting the answers to win the prizes using our hardcore knowledge and laughing at anyone who could not answer them correctly. We made small talk on the same subject and learned new fandom knowledge from each other. But the strange feelings were still in my mind. I wondered how we could easily recognize and talk to other people without even an introduction of ourselves. How did the organizer know we all enjoyed the JoJo posters we received? Why and how could they make a quiz that only we could answer?

I assume ComicCon is a place people can quickly come to understand these fan cultures and network with each other. For instance, the Star Wars fan meet-up panel is a place for all the same Star Wars fandom lovers to meet and chat, or even acquire autograph signings and pictures from other fan celebrities. ComicCon is a fan event, at the same time, it is also a place for media...
companies, artists, producers, and distributors to quickly connect with their exact target markets. Industry leaders debut and promote their upcoming releases in various panels, rewarding fans with the chances to talk with production members. Vendors show and sell their comic posters and figures in the Exhibit Hall, sometimes wearing the costumes which are related to the company’s products. Fan artists sit in the Artist Alley to show off their works, talk shop with other artists, and interact with their fans. In general, ComicCon is the best representation of a participatory fan culture and business.

The Plan of this Thesis:

This thesis analyzes the international ComicCon culture and its business strategies, including both media technology and real-time fan interactions during the events. It presents ComicCon as a networked event, which linked with both the social networks of online fan culture and the offline conventions attended by fans. Then it goes on to compare the U.S. ComicCon culture with its Asian counterpart. In addition, this thesis analyzes the marketing strategies employed by the associated media companies and fan producers. My hypothesis claims that both the thematics of ComicCon and its market strategies differ markedly according to different international cultures, technology platforms, generations, and artistic standards. The reasons I study the international business strategies inside ComicCons are as follows:

1. ComicCon is a place to understand fans and make profits

ComicCon started as small, regional, science fiction and comics fan offline meetings in the 1940s, grew through vintage comics collecting events in the 1980s and to a mixed pop culture celebration (Jenkins, 2012). The changing environment in ComicCon reflects a pop culture
revolution. Analyzing ComicCon is a way to understanding fans and produce new sustainable strategies for media companies.

The American comic book industry is facing rapidly declining sales. According to comics news site Bleeding Cool, Marvel Comic's monthly comic book sales in August 2017 decreased by 25% from last August's (Johnston, 2017). Fans' reading habits have changed as digital entertainment content are available at endless online vendors. With an increased focus on digital media, changing to a new business model is an urgent need. Marvel Comics and DC Comics are not only launching their digital platforms but also focusing more on transforming their comic intellectual properties to movies and TV series. As a result, media companies need to research their consumers, their new demands and interests, and ComicCon is the best place for a big focus group study or participatory observation.

2. Comic industry needs global strategies

Salkowitz (2012) claims that “visual media such as comics have the potential for universal appeal across ages and cultures”(10). Comic culture attracts the global audience beyond age; it encompasses diverse genres and blurs national boundaries. The sales of Japanese anime and manga markets massively increased in the international distribution by around 260 billion yen ($2.29 billion) in 2016 (AJA, 2017). Japanese anime culture has its own unique narratives, including the complex plots develop over hundreds of episodes, various genres which are appreciated by global fans. However, the official distribution channels in this niche market are limited in other countries and are sometimes ignored by mainstream media. As a result, fans with anime interests and fan knowledge initiate local comic events. These events serve as an intermediate distributor binding domestic fans with international products. For instance, Anime Expo is the largest celebration of
Japanese pop culture in North America, organized by the non-profit Society for the Promotion of Japanese Animation (SPJA). Many notable Japanese guests are invited to attend spotlights interviews annually such as Japanese manga artist group CLAMP in 2006. Moreover, global distributors come to exhibit halls to show their international audiences new artworks and products.

It is a smart move for media companies to participate directly in global ComicCon markets. For example, China is the biggest potential anime market. The young generation in China is grown up and influenced by Japanese anime, as more than half of the 260 billion yen jump in international sales was coming from China (AJA, 2017). Comic conventions inside China are celebrating a mix of international game and comic fandoms, such as ChinaJoy, which is a digital entertainment expo held annually in Shanghai city. ChinaJoy is the largest gaming and digital entertainment exhibition held in Asia and is an ideal platform where media companies can directly interact with and conduct demonstrations for consumers. It is full of opportunities not only for the end-users but also for all ranges of international media companies.

Fandoms across cultures are always fascinating and complicated for global media companies. With the help of digital platforms, fans can enjoy the latest animation shows at the same time all over the world. Japanese animation Dragon Ball Super is broadcast on Fuji TV in Japan, and on the Toonami channel in Southeast Asia and India and is simultaneously streaming on many websites like Funimation in America and Aiqiyi in China (AnimeNewsNetwork, 2018). Marvel’s superhero movie Thor: Ragnarok was released in 38 countries and earned $109.1 million in its first weekend outside the United States and Canada (Tartaglione, 2017). Many of those works are promoted in Comic conventions, for example, the costumes of Thor: Ragnarok were on display at the 2017 San Diego International ComicCon. The topic I want to address in this thesis is how
Japanese anime studios and Hollywood distributors find a way to market directly to their international fans through ComicCon.

I plan to use quantitative and qualitative research methods for my thesis. First, I will be analyzing the first-hand, public commentary and discussions by fans, using NodeXL to generate data on Twitter with the hashtag #animeusa. In addition, I will be analyzing opinions represented by anonymous testimony posted on popular fan social media like Twitter and other websites. These public fora reveal not only the opinions of ComicCon participants but also the specific parameters that are embedded in these comments and interactions. Such parameters will accordingly enable me to classify and categorize divergent fandom networks.

Second, I will use data gleaned from observation of the conventions themselves, including official guide books, advertising posters, and collected images of some major events: New York ComicCon 2017, ChinaJoy 2016, Anime USA 2016 and Anime USA 2017. These materials and notes have already begun to suggest both why and how a typical ComicCon attendee goes to such conventions: that is, the reasons, opinions, and motivations underlying such behavior. In order to compare the divergent fan cultures of these conventions in western and eastern countries, I will also conduct an intensive review of several in-depth case studies of New York Comic Con in the US, Comic Market in Japan, and ChinaJoy in China.

Finally, on the economic level, I will analyze two companies as case studies--Marvel Comics at New York Comic Con 2017 and Logitech at ChinaJoy 2016. I will analysis their panels and activities in order to compare their marketing strategies in terms of technological platforms, product dissemination, and detailed marketing strategies in ComicCon.
Here again, my hypothesis is that fan culture is a networked culture, and the consumer behavior patterns vary according to generational divisions and cultural preferences among fan communities. As a result, different market strategies are employed according to international cultures, technology platforms, generations, and artistic standards. Before moving on to my analysis, I will present related literature in fan culture study and marketing theories.
Chapter II: Literature Review

2.1. ComicCon as a Participatory Culture

Henry Jenkins (2012) defines fan culture as a participatory culture, in which media producers and consumers are participants interacting with each other, rather than occupying separate roles. In this context, we can say that ComicCon represents the coming-together of this participatory, grassroots culture and a transmedial, multigenre commercial culture. As Jenkins puts it, “Comic-Con International is press junket, trade show, collector's mart, public forum, academic conference, and arts festival, all in one” (23). In this weekend-only utopia, participants have their diverse needs and goals. Hollywood producers come to industry panels and promote new products to their target customers. Content creators, such as individual fan artists, show up as distinguished guests in the spotlight interviews and share their news and stories with fans. Fans themselves come to a certain meetup activity which can belong to a show or a genre. Fans celebrate specific content, what we sometimes call a fandom. For instance, fans of Japanese animation director Kon Satoshi recall and discuss his works in the “The Life & Works of Satoshi Kon” panel at Anime USA 2017.

This participatory fan culture argument is further reflected in the divergent critical approaches to comic events. And from all those discussions on fan culture as well as culture business, I select their ideas related to comic conventions, and I start to analyze them with marketing theories. There are two approaches that I consider crucial to my study. They are what I term the social approach and the market approach.
2.2. ComicCon in a Social Perspective

Many academic articles focus on ComicCon fans’ social perspectives: that is, why fans want and need to go to this social event. Eng, Lawrence (2012), for instance, argues that anime fan communities are highly social and networked. In this context, it is necessary for fans to attend anime events because their otaku (hardcore fan) knowledge requires immersion in not only information and media but also in the ongoing social exchange about shared topics of interest. If we consider fandom community is a social network, then the idea of homophily (McPherson Et al., 2001) can explain why fans want to go to ComicCons. Homophily is the phenomenon that we tend to be similar to our friends and we want to associate with others who are “similar” to us. David Easley and Jon Kleinberg (2010) suggest that in our social networks, new links are added for both intrinsic and contextual reasons. The intrinsic reasons are similar characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, and interests. ComicCon is a social club, where fans with similar interests form or strengthen the online and offline networks they already have with each other. Fans choose to come to a ComicCon rather than a bar to form friendships with others who are the same fans like them. They are selecting friends with similar characteristics. Easley and Kleinberg also argue that the contextual reasons that arise from social environment also affect the formation of links in a network. People may modify their behaviors based on behaviors and activities that they engage in, align them more closely with the behaviors of their friends (Denise B. Kandel, 1978). When fans socialize with others in the ComicCon, they tend to look like a part of the fandom community to which they belong. They wear costumes and makeup to look like anyone else in this environment and send friend requests to people in the fandom meetup panels.
The fandom environment where fans choose to attend is called a “foci,” or “focal points” of social interaction. “A focal point is constituting social, psychological, legal, or physical entities around which joint activities are organized” (Scott Feld, 1981, 1016). The friendship or connection that fans form during the ComicCon is an example of focal closure. People form links because they are jointly affiliated with the same focal point (Easley and Kleinberg, 2010).

I agree that comic conventions can be seen as social clubs and the principle of homophily can be applied to this network. Moreover, I also think ComicCon is a fandom classroom, where fans can watch animations together and share diverse fan knowledge that cannot be acquired easily in official channels. For instance, fans discuss Frieza, the notorious villain in the Dragon Ball series, who is coming back to the new Dragon Ball Super show in episode 87. In addition, old fans teach new ones the plot developments in the upcoming show, and exchange assumptions based on their fandom knowledge. This fandom classroom idea works partially under the homophily theory because fans choose to learn fan knowledge that they are interested in, especially the knowledge of the fandom they participate in. However, acquiring new knowledge requires different information and diverse networks. Fans come to ComicCon to learn new developments of their fandom and make connections with people who can share various insights with them. They might want to know a new game, a great comic they haven’t read, or new products that are sold in the ComicCon. In this condition, fans seek diversity rather than homophily in the ComicCon. Inside this network, some hard-core fans with special skills and exclusive information can promote themselves within fandom communities, even leading them to become internet celebrities. This leads in turn to increased access to other networks, information, and goods.
The social dimension is apparent in the work of Tamagawa Hiroaki (2012), who analyzes the Japanese comic market, which centers on a periodical genre known as “doujin.” Doujin is a term that describes both fan-created and fan-published manga activities for other fans. I believe that the informal market of doujin described in Hiroaki’s study is the contrast to big comic conventions in the US, because ComicCon in the US are focusing on the professional powers. Hiroaki argues that the attendees are the centers of commerce for this scene, and everyone participating in the doujin circulation is honoring the equality of participants. Fans, artists, and business parties are all “participants” in this environment. These participants present and circulate original artworks, celebrate the freedom of expression, and maintain the diversity of manga. The idea of participants makes Doujin Market a social club under the homophily theory. Everyone has the same role, there are no “customers” in doujin market, and every participant is doing their job to support this participatory community.

2.3. ComicCon in a Market Perspective

On the other hand, Jenkins (2012) and Lam (2010) emphasize not the social dimension of ComicCon, but rather what we might term the market perspective. In this regard, Jenkins suggests that ComicCon is a marketplace, where “an uncertain Hollywood goes when it wants to better understand its always unstable relations with its audiences” (Jenkins, 2012, 23). In other words, ComicCon is the place for businesses to understand their customers’ needs and wants, which are core concepts in Marketing Theory. “Needs” are the states of felt deprivation that are created when customers lack something useful or desirable. “Wants” are customers desires, which come from human needs but are not entirely necessary (Franklin S, 1986). In the ComicCon situation,
customers’ “needs” are often social and individual needs rather than physical ones (such as foods, shelters). What they desire is a place full of fantasies, where they feel a sense of belonging and affection. As for products and services companies can offer to their customers, they are designed for “wants”. Compared to the abstract feeling of needs, these wants are physical desires that are shaped by fans’ culture and individual personalities. One example is Star Wars fans who want the limited edition posters for the 20th anniversary. Wants can also be a service or an experience. Star Wars fans can buy a Star Wars BB-8 Droid toy at many stores or online, but instead, they buy it at ComicCon. Those fans want and enjoy the whole searching and buying process, and this product contain an experience they can show off to their friends by saying “I bought it at New York Comic Con.”

While understanding fans is the first step for marketers, the next step is to analyze the market and build relationships with their stakeholders. These include accountants, groups, organizations, members, or systems that affect or can be affected by an organization's actions (Edward & David L, 1983). For example, animation studios can make contracts with comic publishers, toy manufacturers and retailers. In my opinion, ComicCon is a best place to obtain access to business opportunities and build partnership with those stakeholders. Lam (2010) claims that the ComicCon market is a multimedia market that provides the freest trade possibilities. Indeed, for media industries, comic conventions are a “never-ending pool of promising new talent... a place to exploit [it] commercially, and they were willing to pay much money for direct access to these masses of otaku” (Lam, 2010, 240). Here again, for the media industry, ComicCon is a marketing site for generating publicity and for developing fan interests and consumption over the long term. These marketing sites are important distribution channels especially for what we call “fan artists”: small-
scale sellers who have limited distribution opportunities, and who accordingly disseminate their illustrations at ComicCon. I believe fan artists are both consumers and producers. They consume the original content of a fandom, and some of them also purchase fan artworks made by other fan artists. At the same time, fan artists use doujin market as a promotion channel to show their works and market directly to their customers.

2.4. Value Delivery Network and Business Power

The market perspective I described above formulates a system that consists of fandom communities and business partners. I consider this system inside ComicCon as a “value delivery network” as it is known within marketing theory. Kotler, Philip, and Armstrong (2010) suggest the value delivery network is made up of the company, suppliers, distributors, and, ultimately, customers. These business parties “partner” with each other to improve the performance of the entire system in delivering customer value. Some scholars suggest this value delivery network creates collaborative values and leads to a “win-win” position (Anderson, Hakansson, & Johanson, 1994; Kanter, 1994). As for ComicCon, companies (both content creators and publishers), fans, and fan artists all partner with each other to create the best environment. Participants in comic conventions buy and sell products, as well as share information such as the new animation projects and work opportunities; they interact with each other and benefit the entire group.

Gilbert (2017) considers ComicCon a demonstration of complementary fan/producer interests, arguing that this cultural event points to an entrenched interdependence of power, purpose, and rewards between audiences and industry. In Gilbert's view, comic fans and business partners are
depending on each other; they share the same fandom-related information and support the same fandom communities. Here, audiences and industries collaborate and reward each other. In other words, media companies need fans to share and buy their products, and fans need the latest news revealed by the industry. Gilbert also suggests comic conventions provide fan artists and small-scale businesses a way to compete with big media companies. Those companies need fan artists to promote their intellectual properties, which simultaneously expands their own fan subgroups. As a result, they allow non-media individuals like art school students to enter an ephemeral world of media power.

Yet the participants in the ComicCons obtain different levels of power when it comes to market perspectives. The power and relationships of business industries and fans are also discussed in different conventions across countries. To compare two of the biggest comic markets in the world, U.S. and Japan, I start to analyze the differences between US ComicCon and its counterpart in Japan, Comic Market. Jenkins (2012) claims that “ComicCon”, a term usually used to describe comic conventions in the U.S., emphasizes fans as consumers rather than fans as cultural producers. For instance, Comic-Con International puts the professional business parties in the center, and the subcultural activities (such as fan meetups) are based at the fringes. Ben and Smith (2014) argue that ComicCon is an opportunity for the comic companies to whet the appetites of the fans with tantalizing hints and teasers for upcoming events. Simply put, ComicCon is an important promotional venue for the film, television, video gaming, and other media industries. In most cases, typical US comic conventions are perceived as big trade shows, which provide an experience for customers to associate with their purchase. Here companies obtain most of the power, such as they
make decisions to reveal or discuss some exclusive content or showing a few clips of new releases, and they put thousands of merchandises on display in the Exhibit Hall.

However, the format of a comic convention in Japan such as Comic Market is fundamentally different from the typical fan conventions organized in the United States. Scholar Hiroaki argues that “Unlike general-purpose fan conventions, doujin markets are organized primarily for the distribution of doujin, not for panels, viewing anime, or trafficking in other kinds of merchandise” (2014, 107). To make it clear, Doujinshi is a self-financed, self-published fan work created by an individual or collaboration between individuals. Doujin market helps to keep the manga market creative and exciting, maintains the diversity of manga and also witnesses if fans retain passions for popular manga series (Napier, 2011). With thousands of Doujinshi circulating in the event, Comic Market allows a big amount of opportunities to present and distribute fans’ own artworks.

Unlike US ComicCon, which focuses on the professional powers and controlled by big intellectual property owners like Marvel Comics and Disney, Japanese Comic Market is a place where everyone is equal. Everyone can show and sell their own fan arts, and network with other participants. Hiroaki proposes that Comic Market draws heavily on the term “participant” (sankasha). “By insisting on the term, participant, the committee instills a sense that all attendees are contributing to the construction of the place, and nobody identifies as a customer” (127). Here again, Japanese Comic Market does not convey an idea of consumption or marketing; rather it attracts individuals engaged in acts of self-expression around Doujin. The biggest components of this Comic event are small-scale businesses and fan artists, as well as fan consumers.
2.5. ComicCon and Business Strategies

Firstly, I consider the hardest part of creating marketing strategies for ComicCon is fulfilling the diverse interests of fans. Rob, Salkowitz, in his book Comic-Con and the Business of Pop Culture (2012), argues that the “comics culture is a tightly woven matrix of art and commerce” (15). He thinks the problems lie in the complexities of mobilizing a massive fanbase. Comic fans have diverse and sometimes contradictory interests. For example, some fans prefer romantic developments between characters, and others enjoy reading more narratives of a villain. Companies transferring comic books to new digital media channels can also be problematic because of fans’ different reading habits. Moreover, fans’ diverse interests become a compelling issue in the global marketing. To resolve the issues of difference criteria and cultural preferences, marketing scholars use “Market Segmentation” to target and differentiate their customers. Market Segmentation is the process of dividing the market into distinct groups of buyers who have different needs, characteristics, or behaviors and who might require separate marketing programs or products (Kotler, Philip & Armstrong, 2010). For instance, American science fiction fans and Asian superhero comic fans are distinct segments in the comic market, not only because they have divergent genre preferences, but also because they belong to different countries, cultures, and generations. After defining marketing segments, marketers often attempt to reach opinion leaders within groups who are important to the target market. Those opinion leaders in fan communities can be animation producers, famous fan artists, or owners of fan forums. They are recruited as brand ambassadors, who create conversations within fandom communities to increase a certain brand awareness.
Secondly, companies want to develop marketing strategies that are sustainable for this technology era. Salkowitz suggests a cross-platform marketing strategy for media companies. He claims that media companies can use their digital devices to bring comics, games, and videos together, and “present them on a common platform simultaneously to multiple audiences in the ComicCon” (257). Salkowitz advocates that media companies manage their brands and franchises across multiple channels, giving fans a more coherent experience. For example, Marvel Comics creates its own “universes” containing dozens of superheroes, stories, and adapts their comic narratives into new movies and video games. In this way, cross-platform synergies reinforce each other’s storylines, bring richness to cultural assets, and maintain audience engagement in the long term.

Finally, analyzing power and relationships between business and fans in US ComicCon and Japanese Comic Market, I also want to make strategies that help those partners get a win-win result. Salkowitz (2012) suggests that stakeholders find a balance between the protection of intellectual property and satisfying the desire of fans to participate in their media passions. In other words, media companies can set up co-creation projects using a digital platform for sharing free media content with its audience. Salkowitz presents a lot of ideas for businesses to succeed in the ComicCon, yet most of his suggestions are aiming at media companies’ general marketing goals, but cannot be applied to the specific comic conventions.

These scholarships have helped me to understand ComicCon as a place in which media companies and fans engage as part of a networked culture and business. To my knowledge; however, none of this scholarship has analyzed the specific marketing theories, content, and strategies employed in ComicCon. In response, the analytical focus of my own research is to
compare the interactions between ComicCon fan behavior, and business strategies in the US, Japan, and China. I will analyze strategies employed by associated media companies and individual doujin makers, especially in the international markets. As a result, my analysis reveals specific strategies that correspond to fans, differing preferences, generations, roles, and cultures, especially in the three most active ComicCon markets: the US, Japan, and China.
Chapter III: Methodology

Theoretical Framework:

This research is based on three fields: fan culture, marketing theory, and graph theory. I address the following questions: What kind of social networks are formed by the fandom community at the ComicCons? What are the business strategies employed by companies at the ComicCons? How can we improve the marketing strategies for business companies at different kinds of ComicCons and how do they differ in different countries?

This study builds on the field of fan culture, especially the idea of “participatory culture” (Jenkins, 2012). ComicCon is an example of a participatory culture, in which media producers and consumers are participants interacting with each other, rather than occupying separate roles. In order to analyze a fan activity like ComicCon, this study uses two perspectives--the social perspective and the market perspective. The social perspective analyzes the nature of a ComicCon: that is, why fans want and need to go to this social event. Lawrence (2012), for instance, argues that anime fan communities are highly social and networked. Lawrence claims that it is necessary for fans to attend anime events to acquire knowledge and exchange shared topics of interest. The homophily theory (McPherson Et al., 2001) suggests a tendency for people to be similar to their friends and to want to associate with others who are similar to them. To explain the meaning, nature, and connections in a fan social network, my study uses a social network analysis method to construct a graph. My research selects Anime USA as an example of ComicCons, because its small size facilitates analysis, and because it took place in December 2017 making our study a current topical project. With the basic principle of graph theory (Gary, 1985), the social network
analysis of Anime USA models fan relations revealed on Twitters. In addition, content analysis of tweets and Twitter users are also included as further evidence.

Moreover, to develop the argument within the market perspective, the study selects several cases of ComicCons that are representative for different markets. The case study of the New York ComicCon 2017 and ChinaJoy 2016 specifies reasons underlying fans’ behaviors and evaluates marketing decisions of business parties inside those conventions. Personal observations are embedded in the case study, with analysis of photos and materials like guidebook gathered from ComicCon. The theories and graphs describe networked communities of ComicCons, while case studies suggest insight into what has been done, and what can be done better, in terms of business strategies involved at ComicCons.

**Methodology:**

The study employs both qualitative analysis and quantitative analysis.

First, the study uses data gleaned from direct observations of the conventions themselves, including official guidebooks, advertising posters, and collected images of some major events: NewYork ComicCon 2017, ChinaJoy 2016, Anime USA 2016 and Anime USA 2017. The study also conducts an intensive review of several in-depth case studies of the New York Comic Con in the US and Comic Market in Japan. Second, the quantitative analysis of this study retrieved a focused collection of tweets from the large body of data. I will be analyzing the first-hand, public commentary and discussions by fans, using NodeXL to generate and code data from Twitter with hashtag #animeusa, from the time period December 3rd to 13th, during which the Anime USA 2017 took place from December 8th to 10th. This quantitative study consists of an analysis of the 906 tweets and 305 twitter accounts which were imported by software NodeXL, to calculate the
most common words and phrases that are hidden in the data. Another social network analysis
follows the description of principles of the graph theory from the book *Networks, Crowds, and
Markets: Reasoning about a Highly Connected World* by David Easley and Jon Kleinberg (2010).

These data and graph reveal not only the opinions of ComicCon participants but also the
specific parameters (reasons, relations) that are embedded in these comments and interactions.
Such parameters will accordingly enable us to classify and categorize divergent fandom networks.
Chapter IV: Social Media Analysis: Anime USA 2017

The research for this section took Anime USA as an example of ComicCon and used NodeXL and Tableau to generate code data from Twitter with hashtag #animeusa. The time period is December 3rd to 13th, during which the Anime USA 2017 took place from December 8th to 10th in Washington D.C. This quantitative study consists of an analysis of 906 tweets from 305 twitter accounts.

Figure 4-1: The most frequently used words in the 906 tweets

Figure 4-2: The most frequently used words in 305 twitter descriptions
The first research question is “What individuals were talking about during Anime USA?” NodeXL and Tableau showed the most frequently used words in the 906 tweets were: “animeusa” (275 times), “weekend” (60), “i’m” (56), “cosplay” (39), “anime” (34), “going” (32), “anime_usa” (30), and “Washington” (29) (Figure 4-1). Generally, most of the individuals were sharing the message that they were going to this event. For example, user @guessibetter tweeted “Catch me at AnimeUSA in Washington DC this weekend, Dec 8-10th…” and user trinanishimura said “Who's coming out to #animeusa today to kick it?” The second research question is “What are the attributes of people tweeting these messages about Anime USA.” From the twitter descriptions of those 305 twitter accounts, NodeXL and Tableau concluded the most frequently used words in the descriptions of their accounts were: “anime” (49 times), “cosplay” (27), “artist” (24), “games” (23), “love” (20), “video” (16), “photographer” (15), “gamer” (13), “nerd” (13) (Figure 4-2). For instance, Twitter user @eliasyagami wrote “Anime fan, gamer, streamer and unknown…” in his/her account description. The frequently used words in tweets and twitter descriptions above provide basic evidence of the homophily assumption on fans attending ComicCon, that is, people prefer to socialize with people who are similar to themselves. A twitter account can be regarded as a social identity, which individuals use to share their life, news, and information and to interact with others. The twitter description shows the social identity that a person chooses. Here in our context, individuals who tweeted #animeusa were the ones who enjoyed anime and went to ComicCon. 49 people who tweeted messages on Anime USA identified themselves as someone related to “anime”, fans of the anime culture. Many people considered themselves as anime lovers, nerds, cosplayers, or gamers.
Our third research question is “In this social network, do those individuals connect well with each other?” This research used NodeXL import feature to provide 305 twitter users as representatives of fans at ComicCon and illustrated their connections on a graph (Figure 4-3). It is not an exhaustive research. In this graph, the vertices (nodes) are twitter accounts, such as @anime_usa. The edges (links) represent maintained relationships among users including follow, mention, and reply. The edges have directions, which indicate that the relationships between two nodes (in our example, twitter users) have directionalities. For example, twitter user @sorairo_days follows @guessibetter is illustrated as a directed line pointing from node @sorairo_days to node @guessibetter. To answer our third research question, we first see this graph has 45 connected components and 37 single-vertex connected components. Connected components mean the subsets where “every node in the subset has a path to every other; and the subset is not part of some larger set with the property that every node can reach every other”
(Easley and Kleinberg, 2010, 29). 45 connected components and 37 isolated vertices fracture the whole graph, resulting in small groups of people or isolated individuals who only mentioned/replied to their in-group members or had no interactions with others. In the biggest connected component, there are 246 vertices involved, which means from the imported data, more than 80 percent of individuals are connected in one large social network, where they have relationships (mention, reply, follow) with others. The data we analyzed above can partially answer our research questions, because only following or mentioning a twitter account does not show whether or not actual communications take place. However, these data give us a high possibility of receiving information.

To determine how many people a message can reach, we not only need to find the followers of the message sender, but also the followers of those people who retweet that message. For example, @guessibetter has 5,184 followers, it sent a message with a hashtag #animeusa and said, “Catch me at AnimeUSA in Washington DC this weekend, Dec 8-10th!...” (@guessibetter, 2017). This message was retweeted by 13 twitter users, and the sum of their followers was 7,235, so there were 5,184 plus 7,235 and in total 12,419 messages are received. If we appropriate 90% of the messages are received by new people, then this message reached 11,177 people, and the rest of 1,242 people are reinforced by several messages.

The average geodesic distance (the average shortest path between two nodes in a graph with the minimum number of edges) is 3.73, which means, on average, a user can receive a message from anyone in this graph with 3.73 steps. For example, we assume user A wants to share a message to user D. First, A tweets messages on its account; second this message is received and then retweeted by B; third, user C who follows B again retweets this message; finally, D reaches
this message on the twitter from C he/she follows. In our example, 246 vertices are connected in one component, that means 246 people in the graph have access to the information sent by anyone in this social network, and they can receive the information within 4 steps. We cannot determine whether or not a twitter user decides to retweet a message, or whether he/she actually receives that message, but here this network gives us a possibility to make connections and share information. From a marketer’s perspective, if media companies want to seek to hire twitter users as brand ambassadors to promote the companies on Twitter, this research documents an idea of reaching out users to tweet and retweet the message, to propagate information to a large audience with small efforts. Hence, the real question is who are the potential brand ambassadors in this graph?

The fourth research question comes as “In this social network, what are the influential nodes?” This research selected 15 influential nodes with the biggest “degrees” in the graph. “Degree” means how many links (relationships) the nodes have. It can be in-degree (the relationship that other nodes that follow, reply, or mention the node), or out-degree (the relationship that the node follows, replies, or mentions other nodes). We refer those 15 nodes as influential nodes because they were very actively involved in this graph. These nodes were frequently mentioned, replied, or followed by others, and they also mentioned, replied, or followed many people in the graph. The influential nodes we selected are @anime_usa with 73 degrees, guessibetter (35), @sorairo_days (32), @cosplayamerica (28), @dejavudea (26), @yenra (26), @chrisdpatton (25), @ohheyitssk (25), @mooonjou (22), @trinanishimura (21), @headphonestudio (21), @blerdcondc (17), @emilyneves (15), @davetrosko (15), and @cellspex (14). Twitter account @YouTube was eliminated from the list because it was passively involved in this network. @YouTube had millions of followers, and 25 people in the graph followed or mentioned
@YouTube, however, the relationships that people followed @YouTube did not indicate that @YouTube was a part of Anime USA’s social network, but because of it was popular among general twitter users.

This research is illustrated in a graph (Figure 4-4) composed of those 15 influential nodes. The size of nodes represents the degree number, the directed links means a “follow” relationship from one node to the other. For example, @mooonjou follows @dejavudea. The color means the identities of the twitter accounts that I concluded after a content analysis of their twitter pages. There are two identities in the 15 nodes: cosplayers/photographers in blue and anime workers/fan artists in green. For example, @sorairo is a cosplayer and attends many ComicCon like Anime USA; @guessibetter is a fan artist, who has a booth in the Artist Alley at Anime USA; @emilyneves, @chrispatton and @Trina Nishimura are all anime voice actors/actresses. The two kinds of influential nodes represent fan celebrities in the social networks: cosplayers, fan artists, voice actors/actresses, and other workers in the comic industry. Marketers might seek to hire those opinion leaders to promote their products. For example, @dejavudea promoted the dealer Collectors Anime in Anime 2017 by tweeting “For those of you guys going to #AnimeUSA please be sure to stop by @CollectorsAnime in dealers! They’re always my favorite booth to shop at during cons! They’ve got really great prices and knowledgeable staff!” (Image 4-1).
From the graph we find those influential nodes have one big component in which they highly connect with each other, especially the seven blue nodes in the graph all followed/were followed by other members among them. It looks like those cosplayers/photographers have a small circle where they share photos on Twitter and comment on each other’s work. In order to analyze the small networks within influential nodes, my research distinguishes between different levels of strength in the links of a social network. Easley and Kleinberg (2010) categorized all links in the social network as belonging to one of two types: “strong ties (the stronger links, corresponding to friends), and weak ties (the weaker links, corresponding to acquaintances)” (61). The idea is that stronger ties represent closer friendship and greater frequency of interaction and weak ties represent passive, indirect communications between nodes. Most of the interactions that happen on Twitter form weak ties, because it is very easy for a user to follow many people’s accounts without ever directly communicating with any of them. This research focused on strong ties, where
users directed and exchanged multiple messages or there was evidence showed that users knew each other in reality. From a content analysis of the previous tweets of those 15 influential nodes, we illustrated another graph (Figure 4-5) with strong ties:

In the Figure 4-5, seven blue nodes form 8 strong ties. With a content analysis of their interactions on Twitter, we found many of the interactions happened at ComicCons. Twitter user @cosplayamerica met @ohheyitssk in person on Katsucon 2014 where photographers gathered and took a group picture (Image 4-2). Cosplayer @dejavudea thanked photographer @yenra because he took many great photos for her at Otakon 2015 (Image 4-3) and Otakon 2017 (Image 4-4). Cosplayer @sorairo_days also commented on the photos taken by @yenra at Otakon 2017 (Image 4-5). Photographer @headphonestudio mentioned @cosplayamerica and tweeted “It was nice seeing you, also! Have fun at Fanime” (Image 4-6), which implied they met at Fanime Con 2012. Photographer @headphonestudio also exchanged messages with cosplayer @sorairo_days

Figure 4-5: The 15 influential nodes and their strong ties
several times about their photo shoots (Image 4-7) and their feelings about Katsucon 2018 (Image 4-8).

From those contents, we suggest ComicCon is a focal point where new friendship links are formed and people become associated with new focal points. In social network analysis, focal closure means the probability that two people form a link as a function of the number of foci they are jointly affiliated with. In our context, if two cosplayers participate in the same ComicCon, this provides them with an opportunity to become friends; and if two people are friends, they can influence each other’s choice of attending a ComicCon. The analysis of the strong ties indicated a social-affiliation network; and shows both the friendships between people (cosplayers and photographers) and their affiliations with different focal points (ComicCons). The twitter interactions between influential nodes showed a tendency of focal closure, the tendency of two people to form a link when they have a focal point in common. For example, cosplayer @dejavudea and photographer @yenra both attended the Otakon 2015, where @yenra took photos for @dejavudea, and then in Otakon 2017 they met again, and shared photos produced by them on the Twitter. This ComicCon served as a cosplay stage and linked cosplayer and photographer together. The twitter interactions also showed a membership closure, the probability that a person becomes involved with a particular focus as a function of the number of friends who are already involved. For example, the friendship between @headphonestudio and @sorairo_days led to @headphonestudio’s interests on the future KatsuCon.

The last part of this social network analysis is on the weak ties, the most common ties in the Twitter network. As we mentioned in Chapter Two, fans require new information and hardcore knowledge of their fandoms, and ComicCon can serve as a fandom class to build knowledge of
their fan knowledge. Acquiring new knowledge requires fans to meet new people, gain exposure to diverse resources, and form connections outside their own groups. And in our social network, weak ties serve to link together different tightly-knit communities that each contain a large number of stronger ties. Take the weak tie between @dejavudea and @mooonjou, for example. Photographer @mooonjou has 253 followers and had a strong tie with photographer @headphonestudios; cosplayer @dejavudea has 5871 followers and had a strong tie with photographer @yenra. However, @mooonjou followed @dejavudea, who did not follow back, neither did they any interactions on Twitter. If we connect those two nodes, the possibility of knowing new people like photographer @headphonestudios and @yenra increases. Moreover, when we look at the nodes and links in the whole graph (Figure 4-6), we can find that the two nodes belong to two different groups where people are tightly-connected within their own group. This example gives us an opportunity to connect two groups by connecting their opinion leaders, the two influential nodes @mooonjou and @dejavudea, and as a result, increasing the access of information not only to the two people but also to the two groups they represent.

Figure 4-6: The weak tie between two twitter account and their followers
This social network analysis shows a fan network among twitter users who tweeted messages about Anime USA 2017. This social network gives an opportunity for information propagation through influential nodes to a large audience, assuming that those people are willing to promote the message. The influential nodes in the ComicCon social networks are consist of cosplayers, photographers, fan artists and other workers in the comic industry. In response, marketers can seek out to these opinion leaders in the fan network, tweet, or retweet product information, and distribute messages to a large fan network. Within the network of the influential nodes, the content analysis of twitter messages shows a social-affiliation network contains both the friendships between people and their affiliations with different focal points. The twitter interactions between influential nodes suggest a tendency of focal closure, the tendency of two people to form a relationship when they attend the same ComicCon. The interactions also suggest a membership closure, the tendency that a person becomes involved with a ComicCon as a result of the friends who are already involved. In the end, this research also provides opportunities to make use of weak links between influential nodes, which can increase the access to new knowledge.
Chapter V: Analysis

5.1. Fan Arts and the Doujin Market

The term “fan arts” is used to describe artworks created by fans in a fandom and derived from that original work (novels, comic, animation). Fan arts can be paintings, drawings, fictions, or any artistic representations of the work in new contexts. Fans appropriate original narratives, adapt them to their own expressive intentions, and assign the contexts alternative meanings. Those new meanings can be a pairing (two characters a fan wants to be in a relationship), a new plot, or illustrations of an event. For example, fans of Harry Potter write plots of characters Professor Severus Snape after he is determined to be dead by the author and make him live in another alternate universe. In this way, fans share their own understanding and fantasies about a fandom, which reinforces fans’ empathy and understanding of the character Snape. (This rewriting is called “Fanfiction.”)

I believe the display and distribution of fan arts are representative parts of a comic convention, which contains both social perspectives and market perspectives. Fan arts, by their nature, are derivative products of a fandom. The artwork first circulates in the author’s own social circle, and then the author might decide to share this art with people who have similar interests. After the art is delivered to a social network such as Twitter, Tumblr, or other fan forums, it can be appreciated by a large audience. Then the author can choose to monetize his/her fan work, even with a risk of violating intellectual property, which I will discuss in the next section. There are many ways that fan artists can distribute their works, either online (eBay, personal websites) or through offline activities like a comic convention. For instance, an LA fan artist I observed at New York Comic Con (NYCC), his name is Kris Kehasukjaren. His artworks are mostly fan arts which are “inspired
by the engaging stories, relatable characters and visual intricacies unique to Japanese animation” (Kehasukjaren, 2018). His works derive from popular Shounen manga like Naruto and Pokemon, and his small booth in the artist alley at NYCC was full of fans. Kris Kehasukjaren attends several major comic conventions in the US, including NYCC, San Diego Comic Con, Anime EXPO, and Chicago Comic & Entertainment. In addition to selling fan arts at ComicCon, he also sells limited quantities of works online for a 24 hour sell, four times a year. The distribution channels of his work are very limited, perhaps because he might lack distribution channels, or just wants to avoid a mass sell and a lawsuit by intellectual property holders. In this situation, ComicCon is an opportunity for fan artists to earn money according to their values, celebrating the diversity of the fandom, and sharing artworks with fans. Hence, I discuss two similar but fundamentally different comic conventions with fan arts events in this chapter, in order to analyze the nature and differences between these two fandom markets: the Japanese Doujin Market and US Artist Alley.

**Doujin Market and Artist Alley:**

Doujinshis are defined in Japanese dictionaries as "magazines published as a cooperative effort by a group of individuals who share a common ideology or goals." (Comic Market Committee, 2014). “Doujin” (同人) literally means a group of people who share a common interest and associate closely. The word “shi” refers to a publication. Combining the words, the term “Doujinshi” (同人誌) means the fan publications.

Generally, the Japanese Doujin Market or “Comiket” focuses on a social perspective. Japanese “Comic Market” defines itself as a "space" that centers on Doujinshi distribution and celebrates a wide diversity of self-expression (Comic Market Committee, 2013). This Comic Market is not considered as a commercial market. Doujinshis are not included in the commercial
distribution system, where comics are mainly controlled by big publishers and sold in bookstores. There are no "customers" at Comic Market. This event is operated by all the participants, and for the participants. Artists, cosplayers, and corporations provide works and concepts; general participants like readers buy fan arts and, as a result, support the creative efforts; the Comic Market staff provides an open space for all forms of self-expression. In Comic Market, all “sankasha” (participants) involved including circle participants (Circles refer to doujin publishing groups. Today, even an individual author is called a circle), general participants, Comic Market staff participants, and corporate participants are considered equal (Hiroaki, 2012). The idea of Comic Market is that anyone, amateurs or professionals, can produce their creative works, and enjoy a "Day of Hare" (sunshine or special moment).

The Doujin Market is similar to the Artist Alley in US Comic-Con, a space at a convention where amateurs and professional artists display and sell their works. The Anime EXPO describes Artist Alley in its website as “a venue where amateur and semi-professional artists showcase their work. Artists offer a variety of handmade creations for sale, including original artwork, prints, crafts, clothing, comics and more” (SPJA, 2018). Much like Doujin Market, Artist Alley is also a great place to see the talent and creativity of anime fan communities. However, the latter Artist Alley concentrates on a market perspective. Take Anime EXPO, for example: every seller in the Artist Alley must obtain a California Seller’s Permit and also purchase an artist alley package (such as a table rental). All applicants may be required to submit additional information about their business and the art that they intend to exhibit, and the event owner has the right to determine their eligibility to participate (SPJA, 2018).
Another big difference between the US and Japanese fan arts markets is how they deal with copyright issues. Even though there are many copyright disputes associated with the Japanese Doujin market, the legal infringements by dojinshi are often overlooked. First, doujin makers compose derivative works for a “transformative” purpose, such as to comment upon or parody a copyrighted work. Second, the distribution of dojinshi is limited in scope, which might not cause market harm to the original. These parody works are produced by amateurs for one-day events, twice a year, and are not sold in the commercial market (John, Ingulsrud and Kate, Allen, 2009).

In contrast, US Artist Alley emphasize the protection of intellectual property. In the Anime Expo Artist Alley Standard Terms and Conditions policy statement, there is a section called Anti-Piracy Policy/Grey Market Goods, which states “Sale, distribution, or display of ‘Infringing Content’ is strictly prohibited at the Event.” In its sales policy, Anime EXPO states it has zero tolerance for any pirated, grey market, unlicensed, or bootlegged products (counterfeit merchandises), costumes, characters or artwork. This difference comes from two distinct legal system and results in huge limitations of fan-created artwork in America. Every artist or amateur cannot display, sell, distribute or make available of any “Infringing Content” that violates any copyright, trademark, patent, trade secret, privacy or publicity rights. Fan artists can only use a fair use exemption (17 U.S.C. § 107) to argue their rights to produce fandom derivative works in ComicCon.

The disputes involving intellectual property also show power relations between fans and content creators. In the Doujin Market, fans and business partners seem equal in supporting creative expression. In fact, fans and fan artists are central to the Doujin Market, and business partners are located at the fringe in the building, which is the contrast to ComicCon in the US.
There are Corporate Booths, a relatively small place, designed for corporate participants in Japanese Comic Market. These corporate partners include game manufacturers, animation production studios, and book publishers; they are located in the Corporate Booth, similar to the exhibit hall in the US ComicCon. In the Corporate Booth, companies set up shop to promote their brands and give away plenty of promotional material for free. Attracted by the spending power of otaku, more and more companies unrelated to anime are looking to profit from the increasing activities. For instance, in April 2016, department store Marui set up a booth for the first time and collaborated with upcoming anime Kuma Miko: Girl Meets Bear, sending promotional stickers with anime characters (Clegg, 2016).

In contrast, within the US ComicCon, the artist alley is just a small portion of the large trade show. The mainstream programs are industry booths in the exhibit hall and crowded schedule of corporate panels. Those panels are often held by big media companies like Marvel Comics for their business plans. In the next section, I take Marvel Comics as a case study and analyze its fandom activities and business plans at the New York ComicCon 2017.

5.2. Case study of Marvel Comics at New York ComicCon 2017

Here, using self-observation and published materials that I gathered from the New York ComicCon 2017 (NYCC), I take a close look at Marvel Comics and its activities in it. Marvel Studios is one of the biggest sponsors of NYCC, and one finds its commercial ads all around NYCC, including its official guidebook.

Throughout NYCC, I find the evidence of the value delivery network in Marvel’s business model, including a number of intermediaries, distributors, retailers and ultimate customers. First,
in the Exhibitor Hall, the stage of Marvel Entertainment, LLC is in the middle of the show floor, where a ten-foot spider man robot is standing around the stage. This spiderman robot is produced by Sphero, a physical robotic toy company. Sphero recently launched its new product, a multi-mode interactive Spiderman licensed by Marvel Comics on June 15, 2017. This big robot is the main attraction for Marvel fans, and also a promotion tool for spherio. Next, going to artists’ alley, we find that artists are displaying fan arts, including some parody illustrations of characters from Marvel’s universe. After that, coming to the main stage, Marvel Television is presenting their agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.(an American television series created for ABC, based on the Marvel Comics organization S.H.I.E.L.D.) The entire cast and executive producers come together to answer fans’ questions and show some never-before-seen footage.

The most representative parts of Marvel’s value delivery network can be found in its featured panels. More than fifteen panels designed for Marvel and its business partners are set throughout this four-day event. The first kind of panels, product-oriented panel, is a showcase panel that focuses on Marvel’s famous legacy, such as “Marvel Legacy: X-Men, and Marvel Legacy: Avengers”. Production team along with movie stars come to share latest news and discussion of the shows. It features large announcements about upcoming storylines, sending trailers and footage to directly market to its fan groups. The second kind of panel is a business-oriented panel, mainly designed for business contractors. Such as “Meet Marvel-Retailer Panel.” This panel only opens to retailers and has special giveaways for those potential business partners. Other examples of this kind of panels are “Netflix Presents Marvel’s-The Punisher and Hulu” and “Marvel Television Presents Marvel’s Runaways” panels. Both of those panels are presenting Marvel’s broadcasters Hulu and Netflix at the center and attract Marvel’s fanbase to those business partners’ channels.
The third kind of panels are an audience-oriented panel, serving a wide range of fans or we call customers. “Marvel: True Believers” panel is a private panel discussion opens only to hard-core fans, who are Marvel Unlimited Plus members and Marvel MasterCard holders. They can enjoy an exclusive experience with content creators and receive merchandise as rewards for their loyalty. Another interesting audience-oriented panel is “Marvel Legacy: Breaking into Comics the Marvel Way.” This panel has both business features and audience features.

The “Breaking Into Comics The Marvel Way” panel started in 2010, when Marvel Comics feature eight-page stories from a wide variety of new artists who submitted their fan arts to Marvel Comics. For example, artist Mike Carey illustrated the history of Psylocke (a character of Marvel Comics, in association with the X-Men) for a look at her past and powers. This panel is a showcase of new talent discovered by Marvel's Editor CB Cebulski, “It will spotlight Marvel's new policies on submissions for writers and artists, offer examples of samples scripts and penciled layouts & pages, talk to established creators on how they got their foot in the door,” said by CB Cebulski (Doran, 2009). In addition, this panel shows fans and artists how comics are made and how they are physically produced, and after the twelve finalists are selected by Marvel’s editors, their works will be published by Marvel. For Marvel Comics, this panel can be seen as a project, which incorporates fan artists, a way to gain new ideas from the outside, and a career fair to recruit talented artists. For fans, it is an information session for any artists interested in working in the entertainment industry while simultaneously attract many interests of many fans: “please let it be Mike Carey writing about the New Mutants in Asgard. I heard some nice things about his writing”, “I'd like that... Especially if it meant Carey writing Cannonball again. I loved his work on 'Rogue's
Team’ from pre-Messiah CompleX”, posted by PYH000 and xerox_kitty on the fan forum Comic Vine in 2010 (xerox_kitty et al, 2010).

Here at NYCC, Marvel thus expands its business model with the whole value delivery network (a network made up of the company, suppliers, distributors, and ultimately customers). Not only does Marvel collaborate with its investors and manufacturers like Sphero to produce the best products to its customers, but also Marvel coordinates with its broadcasters, distributors, and retailers, to develop the perfect distribution channel arrangements. And finally, for the ultimate customers, Marvel not only directly delivers its products, but also maintains a good customer service experience by answering questions and giving rewards to fans. Those business partners share information containing both fandom news and business promotion and share resources including media products and customers in comic conventions. These business partners interact with each other, increasing brand awareness at each other’s’ panels or stages. Media companies identify distribution channel alternatives with retailers, minimize the total channel cost of meeting customer-service requirements, and analyze consumer needs with their fans’ feedbacks generated from other parties. The whole value delivery network is made up of Marvel itself, suppliers, distributors, and ultimately customers, and they partner with each other to add value to the products or services, thereby increasing its overall value for the customer.

5.3. Different Criteria and Cultural Preferences

While business strategies provide insights into how organizations think about ComicCons, it is important to note the different cultural preferences of Comic Con by their respective audience. Jenkins (1992) argues that fandom originates in response to specific historical conditions. And this
subculture is defined by its cultural preference and styles of consumption, such as fan artists consuming and producing arts. When I compared US comic fans and their Japanese counterparts, I found cultural differences lie in their identities as “geek” and “otaku,” respectively. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines "Geek" as a slang term originally used to describe eccentric or non-mainstream people (Merriam-Webster, 2018). Currently, the word connotes an enthusiast obsessed with a hobby or intellectual pursuit. Konzack (2014) claims that geeks like to escape from this world into another world, and those worlds are shaped by science fiction, horror fiction, and superhero comics. I also agree with his opinion that original geek culture was predominantly male because it came from WWII war games and computer culture which were dominated by male.

Meanwhile, otaku literally means “someone’s house” (おたく) in Japanese. However, nowadays this term describes a kind of people with obsessive interests, commonly the anime and manga fandom. Similar to geek culture, Otaku is frequently regarded by others as an escape from reality — people who are unable to distinguish reality from the imaginary (Saito, 2007). When we look at the cultural preferences of geek and otaku, unlike US comic fans’ passions for science fiction or superhero stories, “moe” (萌え) is the main attraction for otaku. “Moe,” Japanese verb meaning “to bud or sprout”, is a neologism used to indicate an effective response to fictional characters. Moe is referred to “pure love,” the ultimate expression of male platonic love (Galbraith, 2009). The elements of moe can be a maid outfit, cat ears, giant eyes, sweet voices, and innocent looking anime girls. Otaku scholar Okada Toshio (2008) states that moe is most strongly felt among the “third-generation otaku,” or Japanese born in the 1980s, who watched Neon Genesis Evangelion in middle school and grew up amid a wealth of anime, manga, games, and character merchandise following the seminal anime series.
Cultural differences shape the distinct tastes of US and Japanese comic fans, influencing comic conventions across countries. On the one hand, superhero images and science fiction discussions are prevalent at US ComicCons. Marvel and DC Comics present their teams of heroes in panels like “Marvel’s Legacy” and “DC’s Universe” in New York ComicCon. In contrast, marketers disseminated moe culture, such as cute merchandise and accessories in Asian comic conventions. In Japanese ComicCons, there are "hand-shaking events", where fans can simply shake the hand of the idols they adore. As comic culture continues to attract a global audience, fan groups form organization target on their fandom for fans like them. For example, the Northern Virginia Anime Association (NVAA) is an Anime club and a free community-based Japanese anime club in Fairfax County, VA. NVAA started to organize comic conventions for Japanese anime fans in the United States, and Anime USA started. AnimeUSA is a good example of what can be done when we pay attention to cultural differences in the comic conventions, as various parties try to employ culture-sensitive marketing strategies. I take Anime USA as an example, to analyze its marketing strategies target on Japanese anime fans in the US.

Anime USA - A Japanese Style ComicCon in A US Market:

Anime USA is an annual three-day anime convention held during the fall around D.C. and Northern Virginia by The Northern Virginia Anime Association. Anime USA’s mission is to promote and educate the public about Japanese arts and pop culture. Anime USA typically features an anime music video contest, cosplay contest, host club or maid café, and tabletop gaming and workshop rooms. In the previous chapter, I state two major differences between the US and Japanese ComicCons. The first, the focus on professional businesses in US ComicCons and the focus on fans’ self-expression and the social exchange of ideas in Japanese ComicCons. The
second, the different cultural preferences of a geek fan in the US and an Otaku fan in Japan. In my opinion, Anime USA is more like a Japanese style of ComicCons. Anime USA started in 1999, formed by a group of Japanese anime fans, and has developed into a non-profit educational organization to host the convention since 2004. This kind of small ComicCons in the United States is featuring one or several fandoms and becomes, what I call, a “social club” for its fandom communities.

Why is Anime USA different from other US ComicCons? Unlike those big trade show conventions, such as the San Diego International ComicCon, Anime USA presents itself in a social perspective. The ComicCon is organized by a relatively small base of comic fans (compared to a large amount of American comic fans like Marvel and DC fans) in the US-- that is, Japanese anime fans. Anime USA is not sponsored by big media companies, it is an event “Of Otaku, By Otaku, For Otaku” (NVAA, 2018). It is both a fandom classroom and a social club. On the one hand, Anime USA serves as a fandom classroom where fans can watch anime together and share diverse fan knowledge. Many workshops like “Intro to Japanese Cuisine” and “Myth of Japanese Martial Arts” to educate anime fans on Japanese culture are set up in Anime USA. On the other hand, this ComicCon is also a social club to meet friends and celebrate certain fandom, such as “Digimon Meetup” and screening popular anime series in the panel rooms. There are no business parties involved, no commercial advertisement and no stuff of media companies come to showcase their stories. Third, Anime USA is also famous for its Anime Music Videos (AMV) contest, which are similar to the activities in the Japanese Doujin market. Anime Music Videos are fan-made videos and consist of clips from one or more Japanese animated series or movies. The footages of anime music videos are set to an audio track with a remix of meanings. Here, fans are not only consumers
but also creators of fandom products. Similar to fan artists, fans adapt borrowed materials from
fan culture into new contents and recombine the original creation and artistic innovation. Those
videos create new stories to express fans’ own thoughts and fantasies.

Moreover, Anime USA differentiates itself in its activities which are targeting on specific
fandom tastes and needs. The obvious needs are Otaku’s needs of moe. For example, there is a
Maid café named “My Cup of Tea Maid Café” open inside Anime USA. At this café, young and
attractive waitresses are dressed in cute outfits. Those maids not only serve you food and drinks,
but also play board games, dance and take pictures with customers. There are also many maid café
rituals performed by maids such as maids greet customers with “Welcome home, Master”. Maid
café is a cosplay restaurant found predominantly in Japan. Waitresses wearing a French maid
costume or wearing costumes of anime characters, and often wear animal ears with their outfits to
add more appeal. Those attractive and innocent-looking girls portray an obligated character which
caters to the fantasies of male otaku, fans of anime, manga, and video games. Psychoanalyst Saitō
Tamaki (2007) suggests that maids are characters inspired by anime, manga, and computer/console
games, which provide what calls a “fictional context” which is “deliberately separated from
everyday life”. The maid café inspires a sense of moe, and create a fantasized place catered for the
otaku in ComicCon. We will conclude that Anime USA is a typical Japanese-style convention
which focuses on self-expression and serves the culture preference of Japanese anime lovers. Its
non-profit business model and otaku-oriented activities defined itself as a place where general US
media companies will not go.

I have discussed their differences of Japanese and US ComicCons in both social and market
perspectives, and also the various criteria and preferences of their target audience. Please keep in
mind that a comic convention defines itself by the fandom it serves, not by the countries they are in. Anime USA is a Japanese style comic convention even though it is based on the US market. As I move forward to the Chinese market, more evidence supports my opinion that the ComicCon, culture and business strategies utilized there are, here again, shaped by fans and fandom culture.

**Chinese ComicCon, Born of Culture and Boom in Business:**

When I ask my Chinese friends about the differences between Chinese ComicCons and American ones, I get various answers. One said, “We have different tastes, we enjoy Japanese moe culture and they (American fans) love battles and fights in superhero comics.” Another one said, “US and Japanese ComicCons are very detailed and organized, but Chinese ones are messy with kids and business gamblers.” Indeed, Chinese comic fans are Generation Y (born in 1977-1994) and Generation Z (born in 1995-2012) who grew up when Japanese anime industry boomed. Chinese mainstream media often call these fans Zhainan (Otaku man) and Zhai nv (Otaku girl). With a cultural influence, these fans started to organize non-profit comic conventions to celebrate Japanese anime cultures. Many small-scale ComicCons are not well-organized in the Chinese market. Media often criticize the distribution of counterfeit and copyright-infringing products in the Chinese ComicCons, and fans also complain about disappointing shows performed by amateurs. However, with the advent of information technology and development of culture business, the Chinese comic market has become a big potential business, attracting both Japanese anime companies and Hollywood producers, as well as game industries.

Fans in Chinese markets are much younger than fans in the other two countries. From personal observations of my friends and I, Chinese fans in ComicCon are often in their teens and 20s. But average fans in San Diego ComicCon are estimated 30-49 years old (Forbes, 2015), and Japanese
Doujin Market is 20s-30s (Komiketto, 2005). The younger generations in China enjoy moe culture not as a male’s fantasy but as a good sense of surprise and expectation for the cute things (Baidu Baike, 2013). “Moe” is translated in Chinese as “Meng” to describe the affections of cute people and things. Vendors sell moe merchandise like toys and buttons with cute anime images in ComicCons. And there are many events in the ComicCon designed for moe culture fans. A friend of mine said she attended a ComicCon in China which had a Maid Contest. Young girls dress like maids sing and dance on the stage several times a day, and then go around the whole convention center to talk with people and take pictures. At the end of this convention, the audience votes and chooses the most popular maid in this contest. This kind of event is not celebrating any specific fandom, but a general moe culture that is shaped by Japanese anime culture. The audience of the Maid Contest are not the male otaku, but the younger generation who enjoys moe culture.

In addition to moe culture, I find game industry is entering into Chinese ComicCon and developing rapidly these years. Games are often considered the most profitable business in Chinese pop culture markets, while the anime business is controlled by Japan, and movie business is dominated by the US. Here I take ChinaJoy as an example of fully developed Chinese ComicCon, to analyze the game industry and its business strategies employed in the most influential ComicCon in China.

**The Chinese Game Industry:**

When we consider Chinese ComicCons, video games are always at the center of this market. China’s fast-growing games industry has dominated the whole culture industry in China and serves the world’s largest game market. According to a report from IHS Markit, the 600 million gamers in China generated $25.6 billion in revenue, which represents 25% of the world game industry's
global market value over 2016 (Harding-Rolls and Cui, 2017). According to the Ministry of Culture of China (MOC), the revenue of China’s online game industry reached RMB 32.3 billion at the end of 2010. It surpassed the combined revenue of traditional movies, television, and audio/video production in China (MOC, 2011). Compared to the huge value of game industry, China’s animation industry is struggling to survive. In the total gross value RMB 50.5 billion of Beijing’s animation and game industry in 2016, the animation industry contributes only 3%, 1.5 billion (MOC, 2017). Challenged by Japanese and the US’s animation products, China’s comic and animation companies try to make profits in a new way. The rise of the “pan-entertainment” industry gives them new insights and opportunities.

The “pan-entertainment” industry is a term coined in 2011 by Cheng Wu, chief executive of China’s largest internet company, Tencent Holdings Ltd. Cheng writes that “any form of entertainment will no longer exist in isolation but will be a full cross-media connection and symbiosis” (Sohu, 2017). The concept of pan-entertainment refers to multi-level products developed from intellectual property, such as games, anime, drama, films, and related toy products (Liao, 2017). This term is constantly highlighted by media and government reports, and as a result draws much attention from venture firms. In the view of the pan-entertainment industry, original comics, novels, and animations constitute the biggest part of the intellectual property of a work. These works can then be recomposed and adapted into movies, TV series and games. For example, The Legend of Qin, a popular Chinese animated TV series has been recomposed into a TV drama, animation movie, computer games, and mobile games.

The development of the pan-entertainment industry requires collaboration across different partners, including content creators, publishers, distributors, advertisers, and others. ComicCon is
a great platform for these collaborators. We discussed a “value delivery network” (in Chapter Two) which is a system that consists of fandom communities and business parties. We also discussed it in the case study of Marvel’s business panels at New York ComicCon. Here, in the Chinese ComicCon, the value delivery network of media companies connected with their “pan-entertainment” strategies. In ChinaJoy 2015, Tencent chief operating officer Mark Ren said in a speech that his company’s ambition is to create a series of “pan-entertainment” businesses that link more and more users together (Takahashi, 2015). In the next section, I take ChinaJoy as an example of a fully developed Chinese ComicCon, to analyze the fan culture and business in the game industry. I will explain the fan base and media companies’ pan-entertainment strategies employed in the most influential ComicCon in China.


China Digital Entertainment Expo and Conference (ChinaJoy for short) is the most influential event in the Asian digital entertainment industry. ChinaJoy showcases online games, web games, and hardware products related to digital entertainment and the gaming industry. It is the biggest digital entertainment event for the general public, game and animation fans, and game and media companies in China (ChinaJoy, 2017). In this chapter I analyze a company-- Logitech (China) Technology Co., Ltd, a Swiss-based provider of personal computer and mobile accessories. The company focuses on developing personal gaming products in the Chinese market, and ChinaJoy is the best place to market to its Chinese audience. I select this case as a global marketing example featured in China’s most influential Comic Convention, ChinaJoy 2016. Logitech’s ChinaJoy four-day marketing plan is obtained from personal observation, media reports and online resources.
Business Objective of Logitech:

Logitech’s goals are to attract new fans by a series of online and offline activities at ChinaJoy 2016, engage customers and fans with professional gamers and with Logitech’s new products, and convert fans into customers as well as Logitech’s brand advocates. The new products that Logitech wants to promote are the Logitech G810 and G610 keyboards and the G900 Chaos Spectrum wired/wireless gaming mouse. These products are specifically designed for game players, featuring accurate optical sensors and lightweight construction. They are popular among gamers of League of Legend, a multiplayer online battle arena video game. And all electronic-device fans who enjoy high-end products also long for these products. “Unleash your talent” is the slogan in this marketing plan, and the business goal is to expand Logitech’s leading position in Chinese gaming industry.

ChinaJoy 2016, July 28th – 31st

Logitech had a multi-level booth in the exhibition hall. The first level contains a big show stage, gaming experience zones for casual customers and hardcore fans, gaming competition zones for professional game players, and a check-out counter for customers. The second level is occupied by a VIP interview room designed for online streaming of this event, a control center to operate electronic devices and also storage for Logitech’s products. An employee’s lounge is also located on the second floor, providing space and refreshments for employees, models (showgirls), and also VIP guests (including Logitech’s business representatives, professional gamers and e-sports commentators). There are several screens set around the stage, surrounded by plenty of posters hanging on the walls.

Event Review
Main Stage:

At this event, Logitech invites the female dance group Luckyrocky to play a warm-up show, followed by several cosplayers (paid by Logitech) to perform a small drama play where cosplayers act out a scene from the game League of Legend. Showgirls, similar to the models (Image 5-1) go around the venue and showcase Logitech’s new products to customers. Fans are invited to take photos with cosplayers, play quiz games, and win lottery prizes on the main stage.

Gaming competition zones and gaming experience zones:

Several famous Chinese League of Legends teams composed of professional game players are invited to Logitech’s booth. The team RNG (Royal Never Give Up), which is the winner of the 2016 League of Legends Pro League Spring Split are invited to the competition zones. These players compete with each other using Logitech’s gaming products (the keyboards and electronic mouses I described earlier). They also play games with randomly selected lucky fans in front of a live audience. All the game scenes are broadcast on the big screen, and also stream live at Panda TV, a Chinese live streaming website famous for video game streaming service. In addition, famous e-sports (a form of competition using video games) commentators also give a running commentary on these competitions in a live broadcast on the Internet. In the gaming experience zones, fans and casual customers are encouraged to try Logitech’s products and also play games like League of Legend, using their gaming devices. Employees and showgirls come around these experience zones to explain and promote these products. After finishing all the gaming competitions, Logitech schedules interviews to ask players about the game experience, including their comments on the new keyboard and mouse.

Cooperation with other businesses:
On July 28th Logitech invites its business partner Juhuasuan, which is one of the biggest online retail platforms in China, to announce the official launch of the Logitech G610 gaming keyboard. These two companies aim to create a gaming intellectual property + live + e-commerce platform, and create a cost-effective gaming ecosystem in China, which I will discuss later. Many electronic business partners, professional game players, and e-sports commentators are also welcomed to witness this business cooperation (PR Newswire, 2016).

Online activities:

In addition to the online streaming of the game competitions I mentioned above, Logitech implements other online programs to reinforce its promotions during the ChinaJoy period. For example, a real-time live streaming video called “Discovering team RNG’s training center” is shown on Panda TV. E-sports commentator Xiaolou comes to RNG’s training center and team members’ dormitories, to report on their training process and everyday life. During this streaming, Xiaolou and other online celebrities interview team members about their training schedules, gaming habits, and personal lives. In the end, they give Logitech's products as presents to them. This video is streaming simultaneously on several channels of League of Legend game players, as well as Logitech’s official channel. This program attracts millions of viewers, increases brand awareness of Logitech, and also encourage the audience to come to its business booth at ChinaJoy.

Case Analysis

This case is a great example of a market-oriented comic convention in China. Logitech uses ChinaJoy as a show stage to launch its products and increase its brand awareness among game enthusiasts. Logitech’s booth in ChinaJoy is a place for Logitech to fulfill its customers’ needs and wants. Logitech fulfills customers’ needs and wants, such as needs for game enthusiasts to
socialize and join the game competitions and wants for high-end electronic products. It creates a place full of digital devices and gaming experience, gathering fans and professional players as well as online celebrities to its shows. On the one hand, Logitech presents products for individual needs, and gaming competitions for social needs, granting a sense of belonging to fans. On the other hand, those products and buying experience are designed for customers’ wants. The high-end gaming devices that are chosen by professional players are desired by fans. The products and also the chance to play games with star players are both wants that Logitech provides to its customers at this convention.

There are many marketing strategies employed in this event. First, Logitech uses market segmentation to target and differentiate their customers. Its target customers are game players, especially those who want high-end electronic devices. Those customers are often male fans of League of Legend and watch online game streaming shows. Logitech reaches out to opinion leaders within the League of Legend fandom: that is, professional game players, e-sports commentators, and online game streaming celebrities. These opinion leaders are recruited as brand ambassadors to increase Logitech’s brand awareness. These opinion leaders are engaged in the entire buying process: they showcase the new products online and offline, play games using Logitech devices, and make comments on the products to share information with fans. This strategy is very efficient and cost-effective, especially because those opinion leaders use social media such as Weibo to attract fans, resulting in thousands of audience members coming to the Logitech booth during this four-day event.

Second, Logitech uses digital devices such as large broadcast service on multiple channels to bring casual customers, game players, electronic devices enthusiasts at ChinaJoy, and online
audiences together. It launches its products simultaneously on both ChinaJoy’s stage and online platforms like Juhuasuan. The potential customers try Logitech’s devices in the game experience zones and interact with other fans of League of Legend. These activities are also streaming online, under the titles like “RNG vs fans at ChinaJoy”. About 1.4 million people have watched these streaming programs, hundreds of comments and discussions were posted under those videos. In addition, multiple channels cooperate with each other, for example, the competition between two famous game teams iG and RNG was an eye-catching topic during ChinaJoy. It triggered fans’ discussions even before the competition, and fans of either iG or RNG came to the Logitech booth to support their favorite team. During this competition, e-sport commentators broadcast the real-time situations to fans both online and offline. And after the game finished, players were also interviewed by broadcasters. They answered fans’ questions, shared their game experience, and at the same time heavily promoted Logitech’s new keyboard and mouse. The audience was engaged in this event and shared various information and experience with new products.

Third, we again find a value delivery network, a network made up of companies, suppliers, distributors, and ultimately customers in Logitech's marketing plans. At ChinaJoy 2016, Logitech coordinated with several business parties including the online retailer Juhuasuan, the online streaming platform Panda TV, and the professional e-sport teams iG and RNG. Without their help, Logitech could deliver only electronic devices to its customers. But all those business parties inside this value delivery network add immeasurable value to the target audience that Logitech desires. Juhuasuan is an e-commerce platform owned by Alibaba, the world's largest and most valuable e-commerce business. It is a combination of customers to customer retail platform marketplaces like eBay and a group shopping site. It provides products for group shopping for a limited period, such
as selling ten thousand of Logitech’s new keyboards in two days. At the same time, Juhuasuan also sells ASUS smartphones and other electronic devices on its websites. Juhuasuan, Logitech, and other companies make ChinaJoy their promotion site, attracting their target customers to its sale event, “electronic celebration” in July 28th.

The combination of the game industry and e-commerce platforms is a great way to minimize marketing cost and increase brand awareness in different markets. If we define Juhuasuan’s target customers in this context as game players and electronic device enthusiasts who usually shop online, then Panda TV has done a more precise marketing segmentation focusing on fans. Panda TV, a popular Chinese online streaming platform mainly engaged in the online live streaming of games, and also broadcasts live e-sports events. Many famous professional game players, as well as e-sports commentators, are contracted with Panda TV. “League of Legends” is one of their most popular games, streaming on hundreds of user channels. The fans of League of Legends submit, view, and add commentary subtitles (bullet comments) to those videos, related to their fandom. Some professional game players have their own channels with millions of followers. These followers constantly check the game players’ latest uploaded videos and keep in touch with their live streaming schedule. When it comes to ComicCon events, many game players will record and update their experience of the event and share with their fans. During the ChinaJoy 2016, millions of audiences watched live streaming of the competitions of famous game teams iG vs RNG. This video is not promoted on its own: rather, it is shared by not only attendees of ComicCon, Logitech’s official channel, but also game players, fans of League of Legends, and fans of League of Legends's game players. This video is streaming simultaneously on several channels, both online and offline at ChinaJoy. On the one hand, ChinaJoy attendees-- like the general audience--
have limited knowledge and can benefit from this live streaming. Big screens on Logitech’s booth broadcast the video game competition, with a live discussion and comments from e-sports commentators. The commentators contextualize exciting moments and help newer viewers learn the games, leading to a more satisfying spectator experience. On the other hand, all those gaming events are also streaming online, viewed by the online audience who cares about this event but cannot come to ChinaJoy. This game broadcasting creates a sense of a shared moment, which helps to glue together the community surrounding this fandom. In return, these events increase brand awareness for Logitech, and also encourage the audience come to its business booth at ChinaJoy 2016.

Many media use a term “gaming intellectual property + live + e-commerce platform,” used by Logitech and Juhuasuan at ChinaJoy. This term is used to describe the participants in pan-entertainment industry strategies. “Live” refers to the offline activities (like ChinaJoy), “e-commerce platform” refers to online shopping platforms like Juhuasuan, and “gaming intellectual property” means games like “League of Legends.” The idea is to combine online and offline activities with the creative industry, and form connections among content creators, producers, users (consumers) and other relevant cultural and creative subjects. The famous game, League of Legends, is a large intellectual property owned by Tencent Ltd. Its value lies in not only the game industry but also its derivative products like toys and electronic mouse devices. It has a big influence on a large number of the game fans. ChinaJoy is a marketing channel, a platform, and also an experimental place to test new business opportunities. Logitech combined hardware and software (games), coordinated with an online shopping platform, and used game experience zones and competition zones to educate customers about their products. All the strategies Logitech used
at ChinaJoy enhanced customers’ buying experiences and delivered value to its customers through various business partners, during ChinaJoy 2016.

**Comparison of ComicCon in the US, Japan and China:**

If we take ChinaJoy as an example of Chinese ComicCon, we can say that its size and economic influence can compete with the big comic conventions in the US and Japan. Generally, big comic conventions in China are like those in the US, focusing on the market perspective, that is using ComicCon as a market tool and promotion site for the business parties. However, compared with the content creators in the US (like Marvel Comics), the original content creators in the Chinese market have limited power. The culture business in China is controlled by large Internet companies, like Tencent Holdings Ltd and Alibaba Holdings Ltd. Take Tencent as an example, it started the game business in 2003 and became the largest gaming company in the world (by revenue) in 2017. Coordinating with its game business, Tencent also started a comic and animation business in 2012, a digital book publishing business (Tencent Literature) in 2013, and further on in 2014, “Tencent Pictures”. Tencent keeps obtaining influential intellectual property (IP) and creating animated series and films based on books, comics, and video games. ComicCon is thus a great meeting point for Tencent to search for new ideas, popular works, and the next business opportunities.

Pan-entertainment business strategies in the Chinese market reflect joint venture businesses. Two and more business parties share ownership, returns, and risks in an unstable emerging market. Internet companies provide online platforms such as streaming channels; toy companies and other manufacturers advertise their products with the help of Internet sites. And content creators ask for investments from other parties. This strategy helps companies not only share opportunities and
risks but also gain scale efficiencies (a firm operates at the most productive scale size when the fixed cost of a product reduces with output increases) by combining assets and operations.

The other differences between China and the US ComicCons are that China’s ComicCons are more open to the general public. Unlike San Diego ComicCon, where tickets are sold out in hours by eager fans, the developing Chinese ComicCon is seeking customers from a larger audience. Rather than a fan celebration, it markets itself as a large exhibition of the culture industry. As a result, it is hard to find any educational panels like “Gender Identity: Understanding Through Art” at ChinaJoy, nor do we find any fans’ meetup panels. Similarly, in China, fans of a certain fandom like the “Legend of Qin” are more likely to come to the animation company’s business booth, buy products, and view cosplay shows offered by the company. Famous cosplayers are sometimes paid to join those business booths as a brand ambassador, to showcase products to fans. In a word, large size ComicCons in China are the most business-focused conventions, compared with their counterparts in the US and Japanese markets. At the same time, there are also many demographic and cultural differences in those three markets as I discussed earlier in this chapter.
Chapter VI: Conclusion

I started my analysis of ComicCon from the perspective of a fan, regarding ComicCon as a place where people can readily come to understand fan cultures and also network with each other. ComicCon is a great representative example of a participatory fan culture and related media business. It provides a site for scholars to study fans and for businesses to market directly to various fans across cultures all at once. In chapter two, I summarized scholarship on both fan culture studies and marketing theories from two perspectives: the social perspective and the market perspective. From the social perspective, ComicCon is a social club, where fans with similar interests form or strengthen the online and offline networks they already have with each other. At the same time, ComicCon is also a fandom classroom, where fans acquire fandom knowledge by immersing themselves in not only information and media but also in the ongoing social exchange about shared topics of interest. From the market perspective, ComicCon is the place for businesses to understand their customers’ needs and wants. “Needs” are abstract feelings such as fans wanting a place full of fantasy, “wants” are physical desires like products that are shaped by fans’ cultures and individual personalities. As a result, ComicCon is the place where companies come to research their fans’ needs and wants.

I use multiple methodologies, both quantitative and qualitative research methods, for my thesis. First, I used NodeXL to generate data on Twitter with the hashtag #animeusa, from the time period December 3rd to 13th, during which the Anime USA 2017 took place from December 8th to 10th. This quantitative study analyzes 906 tweets and 305 twitter accounts, contains the first-hand, public commentary and discussions by fans, and illustrates a fan network among Twitter users who tweeted messages about Anime USA 2017. From the imported data, we learn that more
than 80 percent of individuals are connected in one large social network, where they have relationships (categorized under “mention”, “reply”, and “follow”) with others. The average geodesic distance is 3.73, which means, on average, a user can receive a message from anyone in this graph with 3.73 steps.

These findings give us an opportunity for information propagation through influential nodes to a large audience, assuming that those people are willing to promote the message. Within the network of the influential nodes, the content analysis of twitter messages shows a social-affiliation network contained both the friendships between people and their affiliations with different focal points. The twitter interactions between influential nodes suggest tendencies of focal closure and membership closure. In other words, the data partially proves my hypothesis about ComicCon’s social perspective. Two people may form a relationship when they attend the same ComicCon, and also a person may become involved with a ComicCon as a result of the friend networks they have. This research also provided opportunities to make use of weak ties (relationships with few communications, corresponding to acquaintances) between influential nodes, which can increase the access to new knowledge. And in return, this finding supported my argument that ComicCons can serve as fandom classrooms.

Second, my methodology also included data gleaned from direct observations of the conventions themselves, including official guide books, advertising posters, and collected images of ComicCons across different countries: NewYork ComicCon 2017, ChinaJoy 2016, Anime USA 2016 and Anime USA 2017. Again, from the social perspective, I found that the Japanese Doujin market was a great example of participatory fan culture. “Doujin” is a term that describes both fan-created and fan-published manga activities for other fans. Here, fans, artists, and business parties
are all “participants” in this environment; those participants present and circulate original artworks, celebrate the freedom of expression, and maintain the diversity of the comic/manga industry. In contrast, a typical ComicCon in the U.S. focus on the market perspective. Simply put, in this case ComicCon is a marketing site for generating publicity and for developing fan interests and consumption over the long term. Throughout the case study of New York ComicCon, I found the evidence in a value delivery network in Marvel’s business model, including a number of intermediaries, distributors, retailers and ultimate customers. Companies in the value network partner with each other to add value to the products or services, thereby increasing its overall value for the customer.

To analyze specific marketing strategies employed by companies in the ComicCon, I also conducted an intensive review of the case study of Logitech at ChinaJoy 2016. Logitech used ChinaJoy as a show stage to launch its products and increase its brand awareness among game enthusiasts. To do so, Logitech created a place full of digital devices and gaming experience to fulfill customers’ needs and wants. It also cooperated with business partners in its value delivery network, launched a sale event with online retailer Juhuasuan, invited professional game players to start game competitions using their products, and live-streamed game competitions on the online streaming platform Panda TV. All those business parties inside this value delivery network add immeasurable value to the target audience that Logitech sought out.

In addition, comparing three different countries and fans, I also conclude that companies should pay attention to the generations and cultural differences across countries. Chinese fans in ComicCon are often in their teens and 20s, but average fans in San Diego ComicCon are estimated 30-49 years old, and Japanese fans in the Doujin Market are 20s-30s. In addition, I revealed the
cultural preferences of comic fans in the U.S. and Japan. For example, unlike US comic fans’
favors for science fiction or superhero stories, “moe” (a neologism used to indicate an effective
response to fictional characters) is the main attraction for otaku in Japanese comic conventions.
Finally, my case study of Anime USA, a Japanese-style comic convention indicated its differences
in activities, such as the maid café is targeting on specific fandom tastes of a Japanese otaku.

Limitations and Future Research:

First, this study depicts case studies of different kinds of ComicCons in three countries,
which cannot fully reveal the divergent fan cultures of these conventions in western and eastern
countries. Second, the twitter data imported by NodeXL is only a small data set, not exhaustive or
fully representative of all the twitter users who may have used the hashtag. We do not know
NodeXL’s algorithm of selecting which nodes to import and it is hard to find consensus about how
much of a social network is representative of the larger whole. In fact, very little work has been
done on the generalizability. What I have is the evidence from a subset of users that provides
insight into user behavior, though it is not generalizable to all users. Third, this study has begun to
suggest both why and how a typical ComicCon attendee goes to such conventions, but the reasons,
opinions, and motivations underlying such behavior need to be further researched with an in-depth
ethnographic study. In the end, I am always amazed by fan culture studies because of the complex
relationships among consumers, producers, and fan artists who we might call “prosumers”. The
results of my research reveal only a small part of the fandom world, but I believe it’s the beginning
of an endeavor to understanding fans, and their networks, cultures, and businesses from the inside.
Appendix: List of Images

Image 1-1 Cosplay (photo was taken by the author)

Image 4-1

Retweeted 1 time

**dejavudea** @dejavudea · 5 Dec 2017
For those of you guys going to #AnimeUSA please be sure to stop by @CollectorsAnime in dealers! They’re always my favorite booth to shop at during cons! 🌋)Math

They’ve got really great prices and knowledgeable staff! 🤔🌟

**Gold** @GoldenOnyx
Hihi fellow Tweeters! So my name is Gold. My hobbies are music, gaming, shopping, traveling, going to cons, buying art, and going out with my friends!
Cosplay in America @cosplayamerica · 15 Sep 2014
RT @Hennickson_ Photographers Gathering group shot at Katsucon 2014.
@eleventhphoto @cosplayamerica @OhHeyItsSK

Image 4-2

Image 4-3

dejavudea @dejavudea · 27 Jul 2015
A lot of our sailor senshi photos spoke quietly about the friendships behind the cosplays. Thank you @yenra

Image 4-3

dejavudea @dejavudea · 27 Jul 2015
Some of the very generous gifts given to me this #Otakon //w//, not everything is pictured but in my... Instagram.com/p/5poBb6PGJl/
Image 4-4

dejavudea @dejavudea

Our Idolmaster Rainbow from Otakon 🌈

📸 by @yenra at yenraphotography.com!

#IdolMaster... instagram.com/p/BZCi-qal5IU/

Yenna Photography

Yenna covers the convergence of inner and outer beauty, which happen so often in moments of timeliness when community is at play at fairs, festivals, and cons.

yenraphotography.com

4:25 PM - 14 Sep 2017

2 Retweets 17 Likes

Image 4-5

Yenna @yenra @yenra - Feb 22

More ultra wide environmental portriatique with SunsetDragon on Katsucon Thursday. @Sakuranyt Pullinwide Katsucon19

Sarah @Zora’s Domain @sorano_days

Replying to @yenra

I am in LOVE with your wide angle shots from this weekend!! You’re killing it Ken!

4:53 PM - 22 Feb 2018

1 Like

Tweet your reply

Yenna @Tekko @yenra - Feb 22

Replying to @sorano_days

Aww thank you! I’m so excited about my new approach!

Sarah @Zora’s Domain @sorano_days - Feb 22

We too!! When I saw you were shooting wide this past weekend I couldn’t wait to see the results and they haven’t disappointed! I love everything <3
HeadphoneStudios ☆ @photo editing @HeadphoneStudio · 10 Jun 2012
Repeating to @cosplayamerica
@cosplayamerica There must be some sort of con voo-doo going on holy crap 😅;

HeadphoneStudios ☆ @photo editing @HeadphoneStudio · 28 May 2012
Repeating to @cosplayamerica
@cosplayamerica It was good seeing you, also! 😊 Have fun at Fanime!

Sarah @ Zora’s Domain @sorairo_days · 29 Oct 2014
@sorairo_days @Katsuya_Weller soooo it looks like it’s going to be really cold on Saturday? Unless we’re shooting mostly inside i’d want to change cos

HeadphoneStudios ☆ @photo editing @HeadphoneStudio · 29 Oct 2014
@sorairo_days We’re gonna mostly be outside so which ccs would you like to change into that you’d be comfortable weather wise?

Sarah @ Zora’s Domain @sorairo_days · 29 Oct 2014
@sorairo_days @katsuya_weller mirai from kyukai no kanata would be best...the kotori outfit just has a lot of openings and not ideal for cool weather 😅

HeadphoneStudios ☆ @photo editing @HeadphoneStudio · 29 Oct 2014
@sorairo_days Unless you know a good area b/c it’s been forever since I last was up north so I’m trying to remember everything hahaha

Sarah @ Zora’s Domain @sorairo_days · 29 Oct 2014
@sorairo_days @katsuya_weller what places were you thinking of in ballstory/arlington?
Image 4-8

Image 5-1 Showgirls (Photo was taken by the editor of i3baby.com,
Works Cited:


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The Northern Virginia Anime Association (NVAA), Anime USA, 2018, https://animeusa.org/


@guessibetter, “Catch me at AnimeUSA in Washington DC this weekend, Dec 8-10th! I'm laughin' because it's pretty much 80% LANCE MERCH”, December 6, 2017, https://twitter.com/search?f=tweets&q=Catch%20me%20at%20AnimeUSA%20in%20Washington%20DC%20this%20weekend&src=typd