

This project explores how fans in Japan and around the world connect emotionally with Japanese musicians who keep their identities a secret—often called “faceless” (*kaodashi shinai*) artists. It looks at how these fans deepen and express their love for the music and the artists, even when the musicians remain anonymous. The study also examines how fans’ experiences differ depending on factors like language, cultural barriers, access to merchandise or events, and geographic distance.

Since the late 2010s, more Japanese musicians have chosen to stay anonymous, performing on stages hidden in the shadows and using social media without showing their faces. Despite Japan’s tradition of close, personal interactions between stars and their fans, audiences have embraced this trend. Artists like Ado, Eve, Zutomayo, and Yorushika have gained immense popularity. Their music has also caught the attention of international fans, sparking vibrant online communities across the globe—even though these musicians rarely promote their work outside Japan or perform abroad.

Being a fan is all about emotions, so this project looks at how both Japanese and international fans connect with the things they love, especially when the artist they admire stays anonymous. In this project, the “object” fans connect with isn’t just the musician or their music, but the entire “music world”. This includes the artist’s stage persona, music videos, and other content like comic books or artbooks, which “faceless” musicians often use to create a unique story or lore. Both Japanese and international fans engage with the “music world” in different ways, from simply consuming content to creating their own. The project’s main idea is that the way fans engage will be different between the two groups: Japanese fans have more access to music-related products, events, and places, so their practices tend to be more offline. On the other hand, international fans mainly engage online, putting more effort into understanding the lyrics and the cultural meaning behind the songs.

To explore these topics, the project uses a hands-on approach that combines real-world observation and in-depth analysis. It focuses on three case studies of “faceless” musicians and their fan communities, chosen based on the artists’ popularity both in Japan and around the world. Data will be gathered by watching online fan groups and social media discussions about the musicians, as well as observing fans at events and places they visit. The project will also gather insights from surveys and interviews with both Japanese and international fans, mainly conducted through video calls, to understand how they connect with the “music world” and the meaning behind their fan practices.

Reaching these goals will help us better understand the unique ways artists connect with their fans. For example, it will explore how an artist’s decision to stay anonymous influences their relationship with fans and how this is seen both in Japan and around the world. By examining how the mystery surrounding music artists shapes their reception and how fans connect to the “music world” they create, we can gain new insights into the role of personal connections and openness about their lives in shaping an artist’s commercial success.

Secondly, it will shine a light on the creative activities of music fans, an area that hasn’t been studied as much as it should. While many studies focus on how fans of movies and TV shows express their creativity, we still don’t know enough about how music fans share their stories and create meaning through their fandom. This project hopes to fill that gap and give music fans the attention they deserve.

Third, this project helps us better understand transnational fandom. Most research on digital fan culture treats fans around the world as one big group with similar access to media. However, this study focuses on how fans’ experiences and practices vary depending on their cultural background and where they live. It recognizes that transnational fandom is diverse and suggests that there are many different fan communities, not just one.

This project will bring fresh insights to the study of fandom and audiences while also giving music fans a chance to share their stories. It takes a closer look at fan experiences, offering valuable information for anyone who is part of a media fandom. By exploring what fans do and why, the project shows how certain activities can shape the overall fan experience in meaningful ways.