

# The occidental otaku: Portuguese audience motivations for viewing anime

Convergence: The International  
Journal of Research into  
New Media Technologies  
1–19

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DOI: [10.1177/1354856520923966](https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856520923966)

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## Abstract

Japanese animation, widely known as anime, has a global reach. It is simultaneously broadcasted by traditional media and easily distributed and discussed among fans in the digital and online realms. However, non-Japanese audiences' motivations for watching this kind of content remain almost unstudied in some countries, with Portugal being one of them. This article presents and discusses the outcomes of an online survey completed by 568 respondents, most of them young and regular watchers of anime. A scale by Rubin and Perse (1987), originally used in regard to the audiences of soap operas, was adapted in the scope of this article. Five main motivations were found for anime viewing, with entertainment being the strongest. Age and gender are relevant predictors for the sample's motivations and also influence audience preferences regarding genres. The survey's outcomes are complemented by nine in-depth interviews conducted during an anime convention, further exploring the motivations derived from the survey.

## Keywords

Anime, audience studies, Japan, motivations, Portugal

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## **Introduction**

Digital and online media have enabled new consumption patterns and trends to emerge: the access to streaming or file-sharing platforms allowed easier access, often peer-to-peer driven, to contents traditionally barred by geographical, linguistic and economic constraints (Evans et al., 2016; Ito, 2012b; Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins et al., 2013). One of the most relevant trends in recent times has been a popularity increase in Japanese animation (anime) with non-Japanese audiences, both through traditional and new media channels.

While the growth of anime beyond Japan is widely recognized (Athique, 2016; Ito, 2012b), audience motivations for watching anime are almost unexplored in contexts such as Portugal (Jorge and Navio, 2013), whose national anime viewers are the focus of this article. Previous studies on its audiences have suggested different but interwoven reasons for anime's popularity abroad. A key idea is the openness of its cultural codes – the absence of a strong cultural odour (Iwabuchi, 2002), as explained below – which may foster its chances to be meaningful outside Japan. However, at the same time, anime can also be seen and enjoyed due to what may be perceived as its unique features – for Western eyes, at least – such as its aesthetics, themes and forms of storytelling, which may fuel escapist motivations – the desire to move away from local realities and towards representations of what is afar (i.e. Japan and its specificities). Another recurrent reason is the influence of fandom and its collective reception and different productivities (Fiske, 1992) for promoting anime's popularity and distribution abroad (Ito, 2012b; Jenkins, 2006). Not surprisingly, considering some common prejudices surrounding fandom (Jenkins, 1992, 2006), its niche status, fan practices and animation format may foster misrepresentations amongst non-viewers, who may regard anime as something childish or an odd exoticism (Jorge and Navio, 2013). Hence, an inquiry into anime viewers' motivations is a relevant endeavour, one that may not only lead to a better understanding of how Japanese animation became popular but also uncover some of the dynamics by which cultural products cross borders and disseminate through digital media. Furthermore, anime watching is often tied to more active forms of audience engagement and fandom such as cosplay and participation in conventions, which constitute another layer of analysis for the proliferation of this type of content.

This study seeks to address this gap in literature by surveying regular Portuguese anime viewers about their motivations to watch Japanese animation. Our approach to fulfilling this goal includes adapting a scale to measure anime motivations through exploratory factor analysis, assessing potential differences between groups of viewers and anime genres and tying these motivations to involvement in fandom activities. With this research, we aim to make an innovative contribution within audience studies by looking at a product that is understudied (anime) in a similarly understudied context (Portugal).

## **Anime as a global message**

Japanese animation has a global audience (Athique, 2016; Cooper-Chen, 2011, 2012; Eng, 2012; Hernández-Pérez et al., 2017; Jorge and Navio, 2013; Meo, 2016; Palumbo and Calabrò, 2017; Santiago Iglesias, 2017). However, the reasons for its popularity outside Japan are subject of opposing views, foreshadowing the complexity of its reception. Anime puts simultaneously at work global and local identities, national and international influences, transcendent and everyday thematics (Napier, 2001).

According to Fennell et al. (2012, p. 441), it is possible to ‘isolate two overarching and seemingly contradictory arguments’ regarding the international popularity of this kind of Japanese cultural content. The first sustains that anime, much like other Japanese goods, is marked by an ‘odourless style’ and, therefore, is more prone to resonate outside Japan’s boundaries, due to the openness of the cultural codes at stake, which increases the chances of it being relatable and understandable outside Japan. Koichi Iwabuchi’s idea of a cultural odour is focused ‘on the way in which cultural features of a country of origin and images or ideas of its national, in most cases stereotyped, way of life are associated *positively* with a particular product in the consumption process’ (Iwabuchi, 2002, p. 27). It ‘has more to do with widely disseminated symbolic images of the country of origin’ (Iwabuchi, 2002, p. 27), such as references to the country’s lifestyle or even to ‘racial and bodily images’ (Iwabuchi, 2002, p. 28), than with the factual knowledge about the contents’ birthplace. In fact, it is ‘hard to detect any typical Japanese physiognomy<sup>1</sup> from the characters – instead, a kind of hybrid global “look” hovers on their faces and bodies’, wrote Lu (2008, p. 172), also mentioning the recurrence of universal – and, therefore, generic or, at least, non-specifically Japanese – themes, as well as fantasy characters, hardly associated with Japanese or any other specific culture or lifestyle. Napier (2001, p. 24) evokes a similar idea: while anime may be regarded as typically Japanese by Westerners, at home, it may be perceived as ‘stateless’, occupying a space of its own. This is even more relevant considering that Japan itself is the main market of anime (Cooper-Chen, 2012; Lamerichs, 2013).

The second argument pays attention to anime’s reception abroad and the national representations conveyed. According to Athique (2016, p. 125), the ‘culturally “odourless” style itself came to be seen retrospectively as distinctively Japanese’, proving once again the country’s prowess to remake something – in this case, anime, which was initially inspired by American cartoons (Lu, 2008) – to the point of turning it nationally distinctive to others (Tunstall, 2008). While Napier (2001, p. 21) also suggests the broader influence of Japanese ‘pictocentrism’ – that is, the centrality of the visuals in the country’s culture, which is more relevant there than in the West, for instance<sup>2</sup> – Azuma (2009, p. 13) notes that ‘most of the characteristics of anime since the 1980s that are seen as “otaku-like” or “Japanese” were in fact produced through the mutation of techniques imported from the United States and a positive reappraisal of the results’. Besides, according to Shiraishi (2000), while anime may not look Japanese, it can present strong national representations (hence diverging from a cultural odourlessness), such as the idea of childhood existing in Doraemon. This anime, much popular in Asia (Cooper-Chen, 2012) and also aired in Portugal, presents a hopeful relation between children and technology, far from the more common dystopian Western views (Shiraishi, 2000). This one may be particularly distinctive of the post-World War II Japan, as the latter author points out, but, as with many elements of the *otaku* culture, it is not necessarily consonant with ‘good old Japan’ nor isolated from foreign influences, being symptomatic of the country’s complex postmodern identity (Azuma, 2009). Nevertheless, within this second broad perspective, anime is a tool of the relatively recent Japan’s soft power, a symbol of the exportable ‘Cool Japan’ (Cooper-Chen, 2012; Ito, 2012b). Lu’s work (2008) is useful to understand how both perspectives regarding anime’s levels of Japanese odour, rather than being in opposition, are interwoven.

The author identifies three kinds of cultural politics underlying these contents. The first one corresponds to the depoliticization of anime, that is, the intentional search for an odourless style that ‘removes cultural barriers for reception, making anime characters more approachable’ for non-Japanese audiences (Lu, 2008, p. 174). This commercial tactic enhanced Pokémon’s or Yu-Gi-Oh’s success abroad, exemplified Lu (2008).<sup>3</sup> As a marketing strategy, blurring the contents’

origins ‘makes anime popular across cultures because it allows a broader imaginary space of identification for people of various cultures’ (Lu, 2008, pp. 175–176). However, this kind of strategy is accompanied by two others that put Japan at the centre of anime. If the characters may not look Japanese, too often the antagonists draw upon stereotypes of the West. This type of Occidentalism – the second cultural politics mentioned by Lu (2008) – presents Western-like characters – namely muscular blond ones (Lu, 2008, pp. 177–178) – as strong but arrogant and impatient counterparts that eventually are taught a lesson by the main – Japanese – character. The last form of cultural politics is closely related to the previous one but turning its attention to Japan’s leading place among other Asian countries. Lu (2008, p. 179) labels this tendency as self-orientalism, which depicts neighbour countries with prejudice while obscuring the ‘Asian-ness attached to Japanese culture (. . .); what emerges is a distant yet familiar halo around Japan’.

If Lu’s account highlights the complexity of anime’s representations, we should not neglect that it is an umbrella for very different contents. As Fennell et al. (2012) put it:

In this way, anime can and does have multiple faces. One program can be focused on Japanese culture, while another generates a fictional world unlike anything in reality, and another combines fantasy and realism. Furthermore, crossfertilization between Japan and other nations has led to products that draw from multiple cultures. (p. 443)

This necessarily impacts anime’s reception: while some are admittedly aimed at global audiences, most have the national market as the main target. Therefore, they evoke different cultural encyclopaedias for different model-readers (Eco, 1993). That is, it is not certain that the same anime is the most popular in every country, as suggested by the exploratory research of Cooper-Chen (2012) in Japan, China and the United States. For that reason, it is crucial to highlight that anime, much like any other kind of content, is not monolithic: it has different genres that convey specific elements that distinguish themselves at the moment of their creation and during their reception, influencing the kind of cultural codes that (a) are mobilized by authors while creating within the tradition of a specific genre and to a given model-audience and (b) audiences may also expect to find, at least when they are familiar with the genres at stake (Eco, 1993).

These ideas showcase the complexity entailing the creation and circulation of anime. Its odourless style, cultural features and different genres mean that anticipating audience motivations for consumption outside of Japan is a complex task. While anime producers may have had a clear code embedded in the production of animated content, this code is likely being negotiated by Western audiences, who bring their own motivations for consumption.

## **Convergence culture and fan participation**

One should also consider the impacts of convergence culture and fandom (Jenkins, 2006, 2008) in the complexification of anime’s reception worldwide. The industrial abundance of contents and formats referring to a given anime universe, forming a pervasive media mix, and the ‘peer-to-peer ecologies of cultural production and exchange (of information, objects, and money)’ (Ito, 2007, p. 91) foster different and ever-evolving receptions of the same fictional universe, one where the same object – an anime, for instance – may have different versions, with different audiences.

According to Jenkins (2006, p. 158), ‘the flow of Asian goods into Western markets’ benefited from both broadcasting and grassroot promotion. During the 1980s, fans started to share among them more or less amateur copies of anime, subtitling these themselves, ‘to fill an unmet consumer demand not being served by commercial industries’ (Ito, 2012a, p. 183): that is, anime was barely

broadcasted. Even when some series were shown in television, as Price (2001, p. 163) noted, the contents' 'surface Japaneseness' was 'often edited out or covered up by a poor translation'.<sup>4</sup> This kind of adaptation could change the original content towards more recognizable national references. The purpose was simple: to reach broader local audiences, which may not match the fans' expectations. In Portugal, the national – and still unstudied – dubbing of *Dragon Ball Z* achieved a kind of cult status due to its extreme changes,<sup>5</sup> which relied on elements such as national sayings or even references to other (at the time) popular contents broadcasted by the same network. However, the grassroot way – and its intermediaries – played 'a central role in shaping the reception of those media products, emphasizing rather than erasing the marks of their national origin and educating others about the cultural traditions they embody' (Jenkins, 2006, p. 162). While it is not a universal desire even among fans (Fennell et al., 2012), the contact with the original, unchanged content – or, at least subtitled by peers (Ito, 2012a) – is distinctive of a high commitment level towards anime. Besides, as stated by Fennell et al. (2012, p. 446), most of the fans studied by the authors, users of two English-language forums, 'not only analysed the content of the anime in isolation but considered the context of the anime's production, distribution, and exhibition'.

Many of these intermediaries were 'pop cosmopolitans' (Jenkins, 2006) trying to escape from local communities and representations towards more diverse and global ones – or, at least, towards 'stereotyped images of Japan within their construction of "transcultural" fan identities' (Hills, 2002, p. 12). Despite the possible escapist motivations mentioned above, which are also present in more recent works (Palumbo and Calabrò, 2017), fandom is recurrently seen through the lens of participatory culture (Jenkins, 1992). For instance, anime's popularity in the United States – namely the ones that were not commercially distributed outside Japan – has much to do with college fan clubs, fans' networked produsage and, nowadays, participation in online sites (Cooper-Chen, 2012; Eng, 2012; Fennell et al., 2012; Ito, 2012b). Considering the Portuguese reality, there are few scholarly works regarding anime's reception. The one that focuses more strongly on this national context was written by Jorge and Navio (2013), who interviewed managers of national *otaku* sites and surveyed 100 fans.<sup>6</sup> The authors described a small but organized community, which perceived itself as at the margin of the rest of the society, one where online sites, such as forums, and offline meetings – informal meets and bigger conventions – contributed to the presence of anime in the everyday lives of *otaku*. That is, the sociability around anime relied on the convergence of face-to-face and mediated encounters (Fiske, 1992; Hills, 2013). Besides, Jorge and Navio (2013) highlighted the surprising main profile found among the fans' – mostly teens and young adults – self-descriptions: the not-so-committed fans – more willing to watch regularly anime, to search for related contents and to buy merchandising – were the majority, not the ones whose practices were more consonant with the classical descriptions of highly productive and communitarian fans by Jenkins (1992) or Fiske (1992). However, broader and/or newer studies regarding the Portuguese youth media practices point out to the same direction: this is a generation of regular media consumers, but with scarce or rudimentary production and participation practices (Amaral et al., 2017; Pereira and Moura, 2019; Pereira et al., 2018). This article, considering the clues pointed out by Jorge and Navio (2013) and the current state of the national media practices briefly described above, aims to map and explore the habits and motivations of the Portuguese *otaku*.

Following the lack of previous research on anime motivations in the Portuguese landscape, we formulate the goals of our research as a set of research questions:

- **RQ1:** What are the main motivations for anime watching among Portuguese *otaku*?
- **RQ2:** Do these motivations differ among gender and age groups?

- **RQ3:** What motivations are tied to heavy viewing?
- **RQ4:** What motivations predict the degree of fandom?
- **RQ5:** Do motivations predict one's favourite anime genres?

RQ1 has an exploratory purpose, to map out the main motivations for anime viewing. RQ2 looks at how different demographic characteristics, such as gender or age, may affect motivations, since these variables have proven to be significant in previous studies (Jenkins, 1992, 2006). In particular, age could be a relevant variable since anime is sometimes associated by non-viewers with children, to whom, like any other cartoon, these contents were originally broadcasted in Western markets (Hernández-Pérez et al., 2017; Jenkins, 2006). This is perceived as a social constraint by the *otaku* themselves (Jorge and Navio, 2013; Palumbo and Calabrò, 2017). RQ3 and RQ4 focus on the degree of commitment and involvement, relating viewing motivations to the number of episodes watched per week and the degree of fandom. Finally, RQ5 accounts for the nuances that different genres entail in terms of why viewers may be interested in anime.

## Method

A survey was the main method used to assess the habits and motivations of anime audiences in Portugal. The survey was targeted at regular anime viewers and included a screening question in the beginning to exclude non-regular viewers. Participants were recruited through the institutional email channels of two large Portuguese universities and through participation appeals published on major Portuguese anime fan forums and Facebook groups. These respondents received no monetary compensation for their participation.

A total of 568 participants completed the survey, with 470 being regular anime viewers. Almost all lived in mostly urban municipalities, following a national classification of the Portuguese communes by Statistics Portugal:<sup>7</sup> only 12 respondents from the overall sample lived in municipalities with a majority of mostly rural or, at least, averagely urban communes. From the 470, 2 participants were excluded for giving nonsensical responses to the survey, making the final sample size equal to 468. The sample is balanced in terms of gender (49.1% female), with 58.3% of respondents having completed a higher education degree. However, it is important to note that students are overrepresented (69.7%) and that the mean age was 22.72 (SD = 4.59). This is a natural occurrence considering the way our survey was distributed. Although the sample is not representative of the general Portuguese population, it does match the profile of anime fans covered by previous studies (Jorge and Navio, 2013). No data on race or ethnicity were collected in accordance with the Portuguese Constitution.

Results of the survey were complemented in the discussion section by nine in-depth interviews to anime fans conducted in October 2018 at the Iberanime event in Porto, the largest Portuguese anime convention. The interviews were conducted by one of the researchers, who randomly approached fans during the event. Since convention goers do not typically attend alone, a total of three groups – composed of three female and six male subjects, between 16 years old and 30 years old – were interviewed. First, the survey's measures and results are presented and then the outcomes of the interviews are discussed.

## Measures

Motivations to watch anime were measured by a 20-item scale with five response options ranging from *completely disagree* to *completely agree*. The scale was translated and adapted from a

**Table 1.** Pattern matrix for anime watching motivations.

I watch anime . . .	Component				
	Socio- informational	Entertainment	Pass time	Escapist	Parasocial
because it is an interesting topic to discuss online	<b>0.734</b>	0.008	0.099	0.132	0.170
because it is an interesting conversation topic	<b>0.677</b>	0.103	0.105	0.070	0.089
to be with other people who watch	<b>0.676</b>	-0.123	0.159	0.178	0.125
to learn new things	<b>0.667</b>	0.188	-0.167	-0.162	-0.154
to discover things about myself and others	<b>0.596</b>	-0.082	-0.111	-0.376	-0.082
to feel smart	<b>0.590</b>	-0.106	0.035	-0.099	0.105
to learn about other cultures	<b>0.589</b>	0.277	-0.127	-0.065	-0.151
to think about the world and life	<b>0.430</b>	0.119	-0.151	-0.471	0.011
because it is fun	-0.046	<b>0.828</b>	0.024	-0.048	-0.136
because I enjoy it	0.028	<b>0.701</b>	0.032	0.140	0.097
to relax	0.101	<b>0.650</b>	0.069	-0.287	-0.142
because I like the way things are drawn or animated	-0.009	<b>0.609</b>	0.094	0.127	0.260
it is exciting	0.081	<b>0.540</b>	-0.245	-0.199	0.177
when I have nothing better to do	0.115	-0.074	<b>0.833</b>	-0.109	-0.049
to spend the time	0.021	0.187	<b>0.794</b>	-0.167	-0.010
to get away from everything	-0.002	-0.062	0.163	<b>-0.803</b>	0.176
to forget about my work, my studies or other concerns	-0.025	0.166	0.313	<b>-0.656</b>	0.094
because the characters are attractive	0.061	0.118	0.111	0.032	0.702
to place myself in the characters' place	0.185	0.063	-0.212	-0.315	<b>0.613</b>
because I like to imagine myself in the world of the anime	0.135	0.010	-0.183	-0.370	<b>0.608</b>
Cronbach's $\alpha$	0.83	0.75	0.72	0.73	0.83

Note: Values in bold indicate the factor to which each item was assigned.

previous scale on motivations for watching soap operas (Rubin and Perce, 1987). Some items that did not make so much sense in the context of anime, such as ' . . . so I can learn about what might happen to me', were replaced by items deemed to be more suitable for the genre.

To assess if the 20 items for viewing motivations could be grouped in broader constructs, we conducted factor analysis with principal component analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy had a suitable value (.87), while Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ( $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that the scale is suitable for factor analysis. Unlike in the original scale, which had six components, Principal Components factor analysis extracted five factors according to Kaiser's criterion. A direct oblimin rotation was used since we assume some motivation types may be correlated, with the factor loadings being reported in Table 1. Our subscales for Entertainment ( $M = 4.32$ ,  $SD = 0.58$ ,  $\alpha = .75$ ), Pass Time ( $M = 3.09$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ,  $\alpha = .72$ ), and Escapism ( $M = 3.31$ ,  $SD = 1.18$ ,  $\alpha = .73$ ) have similar content to the original ones. However, our factor analysis has grouped information and social motivations on a single subscale, which we labelled Socioinformational ( $M = 3.06$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ,  $\alpha = .83$ ), and grouped two items that were distributed amongst other components in the original scale which seem to be related to Parasocial

interaction ( $M = 3.36$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ,  $\alpha = .83$ ) (Horton and Whol, 1956). The attractive characters item was removed from this final scale since ignoring it improved the scale's reliability substantially. Each component's score was averaged to comprise a measure for that specific kind of motivation.

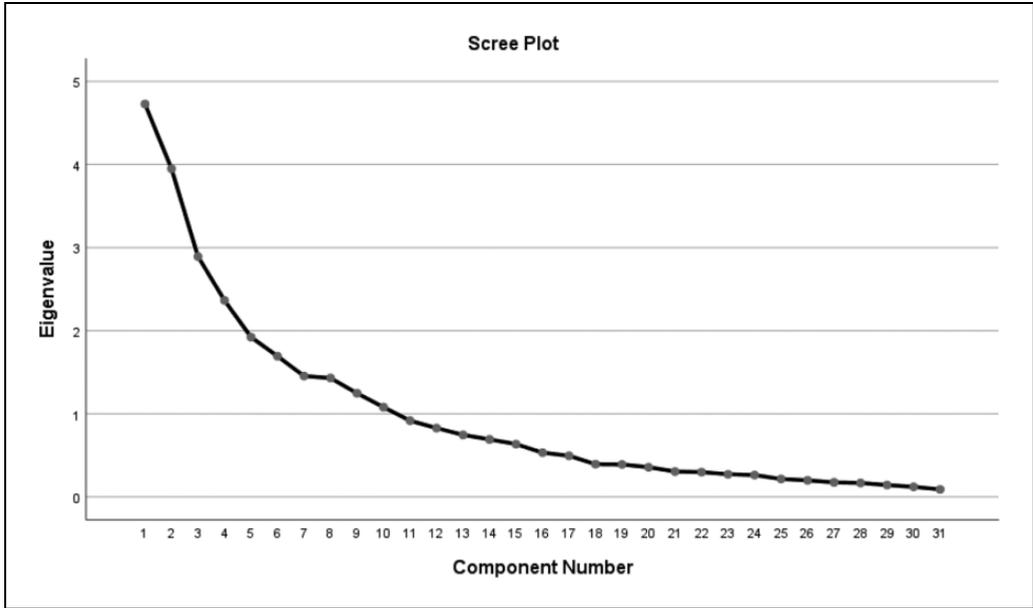
In terms of definitions, Entertainment refers to thrill seeking or other kinds of emotional enjoyment as a reason to watch anime, while Escapism is connected to seeking distractions or immersive experiences that remove the viewer from their everyday issues. Passing time is self-explanatory and refers to viewing as a way to remain occupied in the absence of more appealing activities. Socioinformational motivations deal with both the social and the informational aspects of anime viewing, tied to seeking social experiences and learning. Since socialization processes are connected to learning, it makes sense to group these two concepts. Finally, Parasocial interaction stems from the original definition suggested by Horton and Whol (1956), which defines a face-to-face like interaction with fictional media characters.

The degree of fandom, in turn, was assessed through six binary questions that asked respondents about a series of previous typical experiences related to anime fandom. The items concerned participation in anime conventions, cosplay, reading manga, drawing manga or anime, visiting anime websites or forums, and membership of fan groups on social networks. The number of 'yes' answers to these items was then used as an indication of the respondent's degree of fandom ( $M = 2.97$ ,  $SD = 1.67$ ). Note that this measure emphasizes the ubiquity of anime and the diversity of activities rather than (self-stated) intensity. While referential definitions of fandom (Fiske, 1992; Jenkins, 1992) highlight its relevance to the fans' identities (individual and social), which is translated in higher degrees of commitment and interest, and in more complex practices, the diversity of the fans' activities is a common ground shared by them. Besides, works such as the ones presented by Jorge and Navio (2013) or Bourdaa and Lozano Delmar (2016) emphasize the relevance of those transmedia practices in the fans' self-concepts of fandom.

Anime watching frequency was assessed using a self-reported measure of how many episodes the respondent watches on an average week. Although self-reported measures can be unreliable and susceptible to overestimation (Prior, 2009), the impossibility of collecting behavioural data means that no better alternative could be considered. While the data seem to confirm the tendency for exaggerated figures ( $M = 8.84$ ,  $SD = 10.72$ ), only values above 70 episodes per week were treated as outliers ( $n = 19$ ) since binge-watching habits could make watching 10 episodes per day feasible, albeit unlikely. Although some respondents reported watching 0 episodes per week on average, they were not excluded from the analysis since answers to open-ended questions showed that these were fans who had watched anime regularly in the past, but could not presently find the time to do so, meaning that they fit the criteria of our study.

Finally, we also assessed anime consumption habits in terms of genres. Because participants may not always be familiar with certain industry designations for genres (e.g. *Shounen*), and since there is no guarantee of consensus among those that are, we used an indirect approach to assessing genre preferences among anime viewers. Each respondent was asked to list their three favourite anime series. Their responses were then crossed with the community led anime database *myanimelist.net*, which categorizes each series in terms of genres. Each series was coded in a binary way (1 or 0) for each of the genres and an individual score was obtained by adding the values for each respondent. This score therefore varies between 0 and 3 for a total of 37 different genres, with 0 indicating none of the respondents' favourite series belonged to that genre and 3 indicating all of their favourite series belonged to the genre.

Since 37 genres would be too numerous to analyse in relation to five motivations, dimension reduction statistical techniques were used to group the genres in meaningful clusters, similarly to



**Figure 1.** Scree plot for anime genres component extraction.

what was done for the motivation scales. As a first step, six genres that appeared in less than 5% of the sample ( $n < 29$ , *Dementia*, *Harem*, *Josei*, *Kids*, *Space*, *Vampire*) were excluded from the analysis since they were unlikely to yield representative and generalizable results. The remaining 31 genres were subjected to exploratory factor analysis using principal components analysis. The KMO measure of sampling adequacy had a suitable value (.67) while Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ( $p < .001$ ), indicating that the data are suitable for factor analysis. Since Kaiser's criterion of eigenvalues higher than 1 suggested a number of components that was still too high for analysis, a scree plot (Figure 1) was used to determine the number of components at six.

Table 2 lists the rotated pattern matrix with factor loadings for each of the six genre groups. Items included in each of the components are highlighted in boldface. Varimax rotation was used since we do not expect genre components to be correlated and factor loadings under .40 were omitted. Component 1 was labelled as *Shounen* ( $M = 0.91$ ,  $SD = 0.70$ ,  $\alpha = .87$ ) since other genres in this category embody characteristics of shounen genre. This type of anime series usually targets a younger (usually male) audience and focuses on the journey of a hero who fights against evil and grows up in the process. Well-known examples of this component are series like *Dragon Ball* and *Naruto*. Component 2 was labelled *Mature* ( $M = 0.28$ ,  $SD = 0.37$ ,  $\alpha = .84$ ) because genres like horror or psychological tend to target an older audience who is clearly distinct from the shounen one. Component 3 was labelled as *Shoujo* ( $M = 0.25$ ,  $SD = 0.37$ ,  $\alpha = .66$ ) since this reflects the kind of anime normally produced for a young female audience, being usually a counterpart to the more male-oriented shounen anime. A popular example of this category would be the *Sailor Moon* series. Component 4 was labelled *War & Sci-Fi* ( $M = 0.24$ ,  $SD = 0.37$ ,  $\alpha = .66$ ) based on the comprised genres. Although the *Drama* genre also loaded under this component, its inclusion would have made the scale unreliable ( $\alpha = .54$ ). Component 5 was labelled *Everyday Life* ( $\alpha = .53$ )

**Table 2.** Pattern matrix for anime genres.

Genre	Component					
	Shounen	Mature	Shoujo	War & Sci-Fi	Everyday life	Historical
Shounen	<b>0.887</b>	-0.001	-0.063	-0.041	0.152	-0.058
Fantasy	<b>0.776</b>	0.003	0.310	0.099	-0.001	-0.157
Action	<b>0.764</b>	0.151	-0.031	0.419	-0.076	0.101
Comedy	<b>0.740</b>	-0.119	0.156	-0.021	0.341	0.257
Adventure	<b>0.737</b>	-0.132	0.260	0.169	-0.072	0.109
Super_Power	<b>0.726</b>	0.073	-0.327	0.032	-0.056	-0.023
Martial_Arts	<b>0.536</b>	0.041	-0.116	-0.273	-0.176	0.122
Mystery	-0.076	<b>0.878</b>	0.042	0.005	-0.021	0.012
Psychological	-0.054	<b>0.848</b>	-0.094	0.166	-0.057	-0.013
Police	0.09	<b>0.766</b>	-0.188	-0.184	-0.035	-0.001
Thriller	0.017	<b>0.763</b>	-0.177	-0.107	0.068	-0.016
Supernatural	0.076	<b>0.715</b>	0.207	0.129	0.031	0.003
Horror	-0.125	<b>0.483</b>	0.292	0.459	-0.148	-0.068
Romance	-0.052	0.007	<b>0.690</b>	-0.006	0.420	0.171
Shoujo	-0.009	-0.083	<b>0.668</b>	-0.152	0.192	0.022
Demons	0.06	0.036	<b>0.662</b>	0.000	-0.153	0.071
Magic	0.468	-0.104	<b>0.552</b>	0.048	-0.051	-0.164
Sci_Fi	-0.001	0.072	-0.246	<b>0.695</b>	0.034	0.321
Military	0.323	-0.072	0.079	<b>0.641</b>	-0.073	-0.088
Mecha	0.008	-0.092	-0.287	<b>0.632</b>	0.020	0.201
Seinen	-0.107	<b>0.451</b>	0.219	0.469	-0.080	0.119
Drama	0.325	0.199	0.266	0.439	0.397	-0.135
School	-0.014	-0.047	0.002	0.148	0.746	-0.015
Music	-0.110	0.011	0.132	0.048	0.611	-0.053
Slice_of_Life	-0.174	0.036	0.175	0.040	0.610	0.143
Sports	0.055	-0.086	-0.037	-0.079	0.443	0.033
Ecchi	0.086	0.002	-0.068	-0.087	0.355	-0.048
Game	0.094	0.112	-0.005	-0.044	0.154	-0.111
Samurai	0.073	-0.039	0.058	0.047	-0.039	<b>0.833</b>
Historical	0.004	0.070	0.273	-0.009	-0.065	<b>0.784</b>
Parody	0.048	-0.011	-0.142	0.179	0.073	0.564
Cronbach's $\alpha$	0.87	0.84	0.66	0.66	—	0.73

but did not produce a reliable scale with an  $\alpha$  above .60 and was not therefore not included in the subsequent analyses. Component 6 was labelled *Historical* ( $M = 0.11$ ,  $SD = 0.30$ ,  $\alpha = .73$ ). Although the *Parody* genre also loaded in this component, its inclusion would lead to a less reliable scale ( $\alpha = .64$ ).

## Results

The means from our motivation scales reveal that entertainment motivations are predominant among Portuguese anime viewers ( $M = 4.32$ ,  $SD = 0.58$ ) by a large margin. These are then followed by parasocial ( $M = 3.36$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ) and escapist ( $M = 3.31$ ,  $SD = 1.18$ ) motivations. In

**Table 3.** Demographic predictors for motivations.

	Socioinformational $\beta$ (SE)	Entertainment $\beta$ (SE)	Pass time $\beta$ (SE)	Escapist $\beta$ (SE)	Parasocial $\beta$ (SE)
Female	0.08 (0.07)	0.01 (0.05)	0.08 (0.10)	0.16 (0.11)***	0.04 (0.11)
Age	-0.19 (0.01)**	-0.22 (0.01)***	-0.12 (0.02)	-0.20 (0.02)**	-0.16 (0.02)*
Higher education	-0.12 (0.08)*	0.05 (0.06)	0.03 (0.11)	-0.00 (0.12)	-0.03 (0.12)
Student	-0.10 (0.16)	-0.12 (0.12)	0.01 (0.23)	-0.10 (0.24)	-0.15 (0.24)
Working	-0.01 (0.16)	0.03 (0.12)	-0.07 (0.23)	-0.05 (0.24)	-0.16 (0.24)
$R^2$	0.06***	0.03*	0.03**	0.06***	0.04**

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

turn, passing time ( $M = 3.09$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ) and socioinformational ( $M = 3.06$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ) motivations display the lowest means. When conducting paired samples  $t$ -tests to compare the means, we find significant ( $p < 0.01$ ) differences across all means except between parasocial and escapist motivations ( $t = 0.81$ ,  $p = 0.419$ ) and between passing time and socioinformational motivations ( $t = 0.44$ ,  $p = 0.658$ ). Answering RQ1, this allows us to set a clear-cut hierarchy of motivations with entertainment at the top, followed by escapism and parasocial interaction and with socio-informational and passing time motivations at the bottom. This clearly establishes anime as part of the entertainment industry, with potential educational or social purposes being considered less important by viewers.

To answer RQ2, a linear regression was run for each of the motivation types for watching anime. The standardized coefficients, standard errors and significance are reported for each dependent variable in Table 3. This allows us to gauge the influence of each demographic predictor on motivations to watch anime. Age was a significant negative predictor for all motivation types except for passing time, which may indicate that the overall motivation to watch anime may decrease with age. However, it is also noteworthy that socioinformational motivations tend to decrease for respondents with higher education ( $\beta = -0.12$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $p = 0.024$ ) and that escapist motivations are higher for female viewers ( $\beta = 0.16$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Although the explained variance values are quite low, ranging from 3% to 6%, results nevertheless show that different demographic characteristics have an impact on one's motivations to watch anime. Educated respondents may have already acquired the knowledge they could obtain from anime from other sources. Regarding gender differences, despite significant differences in terms of geography, time and media product, it may be that Radway's (1991) conclusions regarding the escapist motivations of women to read romance novels also apply to anime. It is likely that higher social constraints are placed upon the everyday lives of female viewers that lead them to see anime as a way to escape. Although plausible, both of these explanations warrant further research beyond the context of this study.

To assess predictors for the number of episodes watched per week (RQ3), a negative binomial regression was performed since the dependent variable concerns overdispersed count data (Table 4). Respondents who are studying watch a lower number of episodes per week. Additionally, younger audiences tend to have heavier viewing habits. In terms of motivations, parasocial motivations are the significant driver of an increase in viewing frequency, while viewing to pass time is a negative predictor of the number of episodes per week. This suggests that maintaining a connection with the

**Table 4.** Negative binomial regression for number of episodes watched per week.

Parameter	B(SE)
Intercept	3.34 (0.67)***
Gender ( <i>female</i> = 1)	-0.14 (0.11)
Age	-0.03 (0.02)*
Higher education	-0.19 (0.12)
Student	-0.52 (0.23)*
Working	-0.34 (0.22)
Socio-informational	0.13 (0.09)
Entertainment	0.02 (0.10)
Pass time	-0.11 (0.05)*
Escapism	-0.09 (0.05)
Parasocial	0.11 (0.05)*

Note: Deviance = 420.02, Akaike information criterion = 2653.33.

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

**Table 5.** Linear regression for degree of fandom.

Parameter	$\beta$ (SE)
Gender ( <i>female</i> = 1)	0.18 (0.14)***
Age	-0.16 (0.02)**
Higher education	-0.02 (0.16)
Student	-0.09 (0.33)
Working	0.12 (0.33)
Socio-informational	0.10 (0.12)
Entertainment	0.15 (0.14)**
Pass time	-0.07 (0.07)
Escapism	0.02 (0.07)
Parasocial	0.13 (0.08)*

Note:  $R^2 = 0.18$ ,  $F(10,454) = 9.61$ ,  $p < 0.001$ .

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

fictional characters in anime is the main reason why viewers develop heavy viewing habits, as opposed to more casual motivations like passing time.

Regarding RQ4, a linear regression was run to assess predictors for the degree of fandom (Table 5). In this case, gender was the strongest predictor of involvement in fandom activities, with female viewers being significantly more involved than males. In terms of demographics, age was the other significant predictor of fandom, with older audiences being less likely to take part in those activities. Concerning motivations, both entertainment and parasocial interaction were significant positive predictors of fandom participation. Not only does parasocial interaction drive heavier viewing habits, but it also leads to more participation in fan activities.

To answer RQ5, each of the five genre components was used as a dependent variable with the five motivation subscales used as predictors (Table 6). Because some of these genres are strongly defined by the audience they target, age and gender were also included as predictors. Despite the

**Table 6.** Motivation and demographic predictors for favourite genres.

	Shounen β (SE)	Mature β (SE)	Shoujo β (SE)	War & Sci-Fi β (SE)	Historical β (SE)
Socio-informational	0.01 (0.05)	0.05 (0.03)	-0.12 (0.03)*	0.06 (0.03)	-0.05 (0.02)
Entertainment	0.06 (0.06)	0.01 (0.04)	0.04 (0.03)	0.03 (0.04)	0.10 (0.03)*
Pass time	-0.02 (0.03)	0.09 (0.02)	-0.07 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.07 (0.01)
Escapist	-0.04 (0.03)	-0.07 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	-0.05 (0.02)
Parasocial	0.14 (0.03)*	-0.12 (0.02)*	0.03 (0.02)	-0.07 (0.02)	0.09 (0.02)
Female	-0.19 (0.06)***	0.01 (0.04)	0.29 (0.04)***	-0.25 (0.04)***	0.07 (0.03)
Age	0.02 (0.01)	-0.10 (0.00)*	-0.01 (0.00)	0.11 (0.00)*	0.15 (0.00)***
R <sup>2</sup>	0.06***	0.03*	0.09***	0.08***	0.05**

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

large sample size, results concerning the *Historical* genre should be interpreted with caution since the distribution for this variable had a high kurtosis (7.31). Results show that gender is the strongest predictor for three of the five genre groups. As expected, males tend to watch more *Shounen* anime, while females prefer *Shoujo*, shown, respectively, by negative and positive coefficients in the table. Additionally, male viewers tend to select *War & Sci-Fi* anime as their favourite genre as well. Although the *Shounen* and *Shoujo* anime are usually directed at younger audiences, we see here that age does not play a role in predicting favouritism of these genres, probably because most of our sample was already over 18 years old. It is noteworthy, however, that younger viewers actually preferred genres within the *Mature* category, while older viewers favoured *War & Sci-Fi* and *Historical* anime. While it is difficult to pinpoint a specific reason for this apparently counterintuitive finding, it may be that younger viewers have broader access to this type of content than previous generations, since the *Mature* genres were not among those initially chosen for television broadcast in Portugal. Even if these older fans now also have access to *Mature* anime, nostalgia may be driving them to select the broadcasted, non-*Mature* series from their childhood as their favourite ones.

In terms of actual motivations, parasocial motives were a positive predictor of favouring *Shounen* anime and a negative one for *Mature*. Identifying with the characters therefore seems to be more important when following a hero's journey, rather than in the usually more complex *Mature* anime genres. Socioinformational motivations were a negative predictor for *Shoujo* anime, indicating that viewers who watch shows with romance and directed at a female audience tend to do it less to discuss it with other viewers and to learn about the world. This offers a stark contrast with the motivations found in studies about the comparable live acting genre of soap operas. Finally, entertainment was also a significant positive predictor for watching *Historical* anime.

## Discussion

Our study revealed unique insights into Portuguese anime viewers' motivations. The fact that entertainment was the main motivation is not surprising, considering it aligns with the findings from the scale's original article (Rubin and Perse, 1987). However, the finding that parasocial and escapist motivations surpass socioinformational and pass time motivations is a relevant one. The 'odourless' style of anime makes it a very flexible viewing experience (Fennell et al., 2012), subject to very personal interpretations. Therefore, unlike soap operas, it does not provide a clear

and common social referent that is shared in discussion. The fact that anime is also a niche product in the Portuguese media landscape also undermines its value as a conversational topic outside fandom. In fact, during the anime event where the nine interviews were conducted, all respondents agreed that anime is commonly seen as a genre for children and, for that, they often feel criticized by non-anime fans. In contrast, the fact that activities like cosplay are prominent for anime fans embodies the immersion and connection tied to parasocial motivations and is an example of how fandom can still be a place to develop more particular (and very meaningful) tastes (Fiske, 1992; Jenkins, 1992). Because the more intensive experiences of anime watching favour these higher levels of involvement, this means that anime is not seen as something viewed to simply pass time.

In terms of gender differences, female respondents were more driven by escapist motivations. This is in line with earlier studies on fandom (Jenkins, 1992), where fans were still part of a niche pathologized by the mainstream. For females, who used to take the lead in practices such as fan (re)writing (Jenkins, 1992), their fandom of sci-fi contents like *Star Trek* was particularly important to assert identities and to cope with an overall patriarchal society and media contents created mostly for male audiences (with the exception of genres such as soap operas). Sci-fi, despite having male model-audiences in mind, was a sufficient open-ended genre to foster their appropriations and extrapolations of the original contents to make them more suitable to their world visions and ambitions and to their storytelling preferences (Jenkins, 1992). This might also be the case of anime in Portugal, where these contents are still watched by a niche not always kindly perceived by the rest of society and whose themes, as mentioned in the theoretical framework, might be open enough to more easily resonate across cultures (Lu, 2008). Females' escapist motivations might also help to understand their significantly more regular presence in fan activities: much like the pop cosmopolitans studies by Jenkins (2006) or the fan fiction writers about *Star Trek* (Jenkins, 1992), the movement away from the mundane was also a way of approaching others who were also in the margins and who would share niche interests.

Age was tied to a reduction in a number of different motivations for watching. However, because all coefficients were negative, it is more likely that age is associated with a reduction in motivations in general than to a specific change in the motivation profile. Since there is a considerable age gap between all interviewees, it was possible to verify that the younger they were and the fewer responsibilities they had due to more flexible schedules, the more episodes they watched per day or week, in line with the results from the survey. On the other hand, as adulthood and professional life became priorities, consumption hours decreased significantly. The complexification of one's life while getting older might also explain this decrease of motivations, despite the popularity that anime may retain among adults, as suggested by the survey's open-ended questions mentioned above. During the interviews, a young woman (aged 30) referred that she does not have much time available to watch anime due to her professional life. Besides, she also mentioned that, after being an *otaku* for a while, she watches less anime each day: 'now that I feel part of the community [anime consumption] is lower. However, when I discovered anime, all I wanted was to watch the maximum of episodes I could'. This later motivation was also verified among other interviewees, with the older ones being more selective about the series to watch, since professional schedules and obligations occupy most of their time, and the younger ones still being on the 'discovery phase'.

In terms of number of episodes viewed per week, parasocial interaction was the main driver of heavier consumption habits. This suggests that motivations like escapism and entertainment do not necessarily lead viewers to watch more episodes, but people who are driven by establishing relations with the characters and the world of anime are prone to viewing more. In fact, two female

interviewees pointed three main motivations: accompanying the character's evolution throughout the series, feelings they had towards the show or characters and life lessons they could learn from the events in the series. This may also relate to the different motivations for watching different genres, since survey respondents who preferred *Shounen* anime had higher parasocial motivations than those who watched *Mature* anime. It is noteworthy that this relational aspect is an important aspect of the *otaku* culture and lifestyle in Japan, with several products such as figurines, body pillows and other merchandise that enables fans to bring their fictional characters to the 'real' world. To a certain extent, the prominence of parasocial interaction motivations for heavy viewers may be mirroring the Japanese context.

Overall, our study showcases the complexity that underlies anime consumption in a non-Japanese context. The motivations for watching anime are different depending on one's age, gender and education, hinting at the fact that individuals with different profiles are driven by different reasons to watch. This might be symptomatic of the odourless feature of anime (of its cultural openness) but also of the diversity (of contents, of representations, etc.) that this kind of content encompasses, which stresses the need to further investigate beyond stereotypes or categories too broad that enable us to grasp the nuances of anime reception. In turn, these motivations are connected with different viewing habits, with parasocial interaction being a clear reason for watching a higher number of episodes and involvement in fan activities.

The complexity of anime does not mean, however, that there is an absence of patterns in anime consumption. This is illustrated, for instance, when we look at the different genres. While certain audience characteristics match the ones implied by the original Japanese genres, such as males watching more *Shounen* anime and females preferring *Shoujo* anime. Other features are not mapped so cleanly to a Western context (e.g. younger viewers preferred *Mature* anime and age was completely unrelated to *Shounen* anime, traditionally aimed at younger audiences). This might be a good example of the intricate relation established by the more or less prevailing cultural odour of anime and the specificities of a foreigner context of reception, as well as with individual motivations (Napier, 2001); one that should be developed in future studies.

While the *otaku* community tends to be stereotyped, especially by those who do not belong to it, our research points at a more complex portrayal of anime. While anime has certain characteristics that make it distinctive, its genres, audiences and motivations are diverse enough to warrant a nuanced and complex approach. As such, future quantitative and qualitative inquiries into anime consumption should clearly distinguish the viewer who watches *Shounen*, who relates to the characters and who participates in conventions, from the one who prefers *Mature* anime and for whom relating to the characters is not the main reason to watch. In conclusion, talking about the anime community may make as much sense as talking about the moviegoing community. It is a useful term to identify the format, but also a broad one that encompasses many realities, including some that defy the codes of the context of production where the format originated.

## Limitations and future research

Although this study provides a glimpse into Portuguese anime viewers' motivations, it is nevertheless a limited portrayal of this audience. The fact that the survey was distributed through university email addresses and online communities and social network groups limits the scope of this study to a subsection of the audience that is restricted either in terms of age or in terms of following online communities. It is therefore possible that a substantial part of anime viewers that does not fit in these categories was not captured by our study. Additionally, the fact that self-

reported measures were used to estimate the amount of viewing may have also skewed the results, since audiences are not always accurate at estimating their media consumption habits (Prior, 2009).

Future research may look into different countries and contexts to find out if there are significant differences in audience motivations to watch anime. Furthermore, because non-anime viewers often have preconceptions regarding anime fans, it may be interesting to explore and compare non-viewers perceptions of motivations to watch anime with the actual motivations of anime viewers. Overall, this article highlights the heterogeneous motivations and profiles of anime viewers, showing that future studies should address the complexity and richness that the anime format entails in terms of its contents and audiences.

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### Notes

1. Iwabuchi (2002, p. 28) uses the word *mukokuseki*, 'literally meaning 'something or someone lacking any nationality', to describe anime's characters. However, its use also suggests 'the mixing of elements of multiple cultural origins' (Iwabuchi, 2002, p. 71).
2. According to Napier (2001, p. 21), 'most commentators on manga suggest that the origins of the form go back at least to the Edo period (1600-1868)'. To her, 'certainly some images from earlier periods would not seem out of place in contemporary anime or manga', as the author compares the grotesque of Katsushika Hokusai's print, from 1824, *The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife* with some of 'anime's more sadistic pornography' (Napier, 2001, p. 21).
3. The (apparent) westernization of anime's characters did not begin as an exportation tactic, as Cooper-Chen (2012) notes. The author traces its origins – namely the big-eye style – to the work of Osamu Tezuka, to whom Walt Disney's cartoons were an inspiration even when creating for national audiences.
4. Promoting Japaneseness – while 'telling the audience what "authentic" Japan looks like' (Kamm, 2017, p. 46) – may be also a commercial tactic, even if directed to more niche markets (Kamm, 2017).
5. The Portuguese dubbing is the subject of two videos from the YouTuber MasakoX: the original 'IS THIS DUB THE "ULTIMATE" DUB?|A Dragonball Discussion' (<https://youtu.be/cyNBnBNc56Q>) and the sequel 'THE INSIDE SCOOP OF THE "ULTIMATE" DUB w/ João Loy|A Dragon Ball Discussion' (<https://youtu.be/dSUJwMY6JcY>), where the actor who voiced Vegeta explained the changes, evoking demands from the network who broadcasted *Dragon Ball Z* and the need to make the contents resonate with national audiences.
6. The master's thesis of Castanheira (2012) and Pinto (2013) also approach some traits of the Portuguese *otaku*. The first one is an international study and one-third of its sample is made of Portuguese fans. The second is focused on national cosplay. Both highlighted common features already mentioned by the international texts already cited: the importance of fansubbing (Castanheira, 2012) or the convergence of online and offline sociability as a crucial element to foster the fandom (Pinto, 2013), for instance.
7. More information about the national administrative division at [https://www.ine.pt/xportal/xmain?xpid=INE&xpgid=ine\\_cont\\_inst&INST=6251013&x](https://www.ine.pt/xportal/xmain?xpid=INE&xpgid=ine_cont_inst&INST=6251013&x).

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