Amanda Curtis

Professor Saori Katada

EASC 360: Global East Asia Japan

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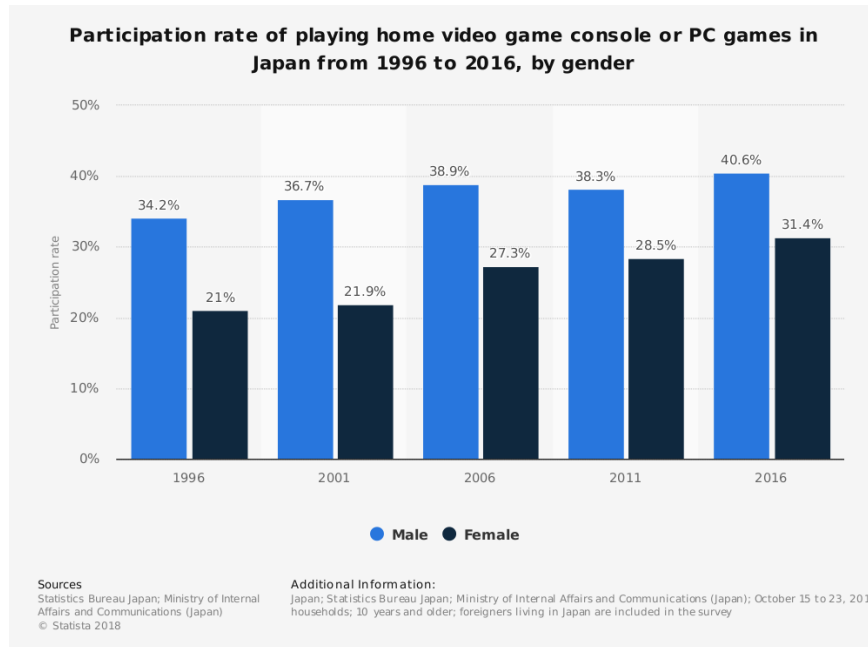
<center>Social Implications Surrounding Average Female Gamers in Japan</center>

Introduction

This paper explores how changes in Japanese societal values have transformed Japan's gaming industry, and in turn, considers how the gaming industry can help advance these social changes. Though gender inequality is still a major issue in Japan, the increasing prevalence and discussions surrounding this topic have led to nation-wide reforms and cultural changes, which can be seen in the more well-rounded female game characters and female-led game developers. By seeing how women currently perceive the social implications surrounding their gaming habits, one can better understand not only how Japanese society impacts them, but also look towards how their habits influence society.
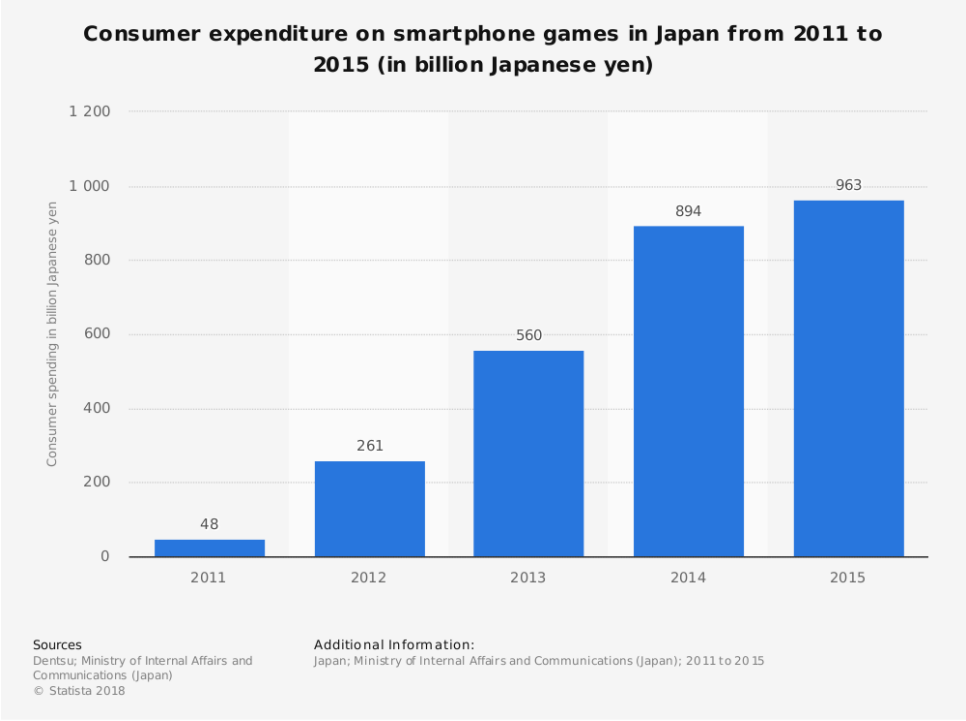
Mobile Gaming in Japan

While the first video game was not created in Japan, Japanese game developers breathed life into the industry and evolved the medium into what it is today. After the video game crash of 1983, also known as the Atari Crash, Japan quickly took over the industry and brought it back, leading narrative innovations and inspiring others around the world (Prisco). Recent statistics show that mobile gaming is on a new trend in the Japanese gaming industry.

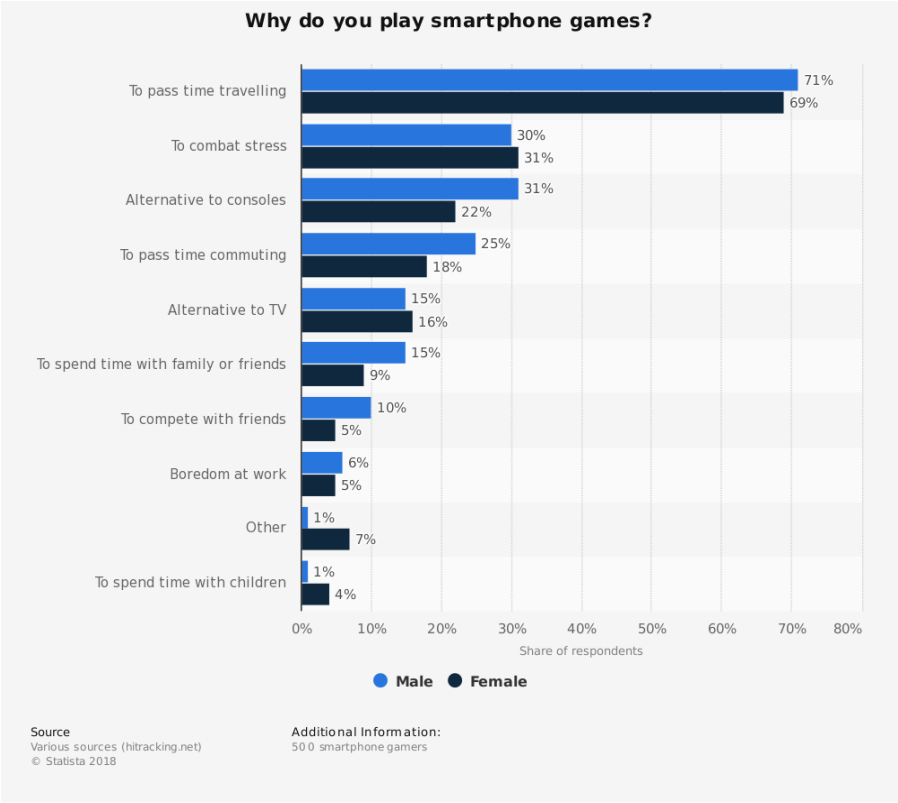**Participation rate of playing home video game console or PC games in Japan from 1996 to 2016, by gender**

Graph 1.1: Participation Rate of Playing Home Video Game Console or PC Games in Japan from 1996 to 2016

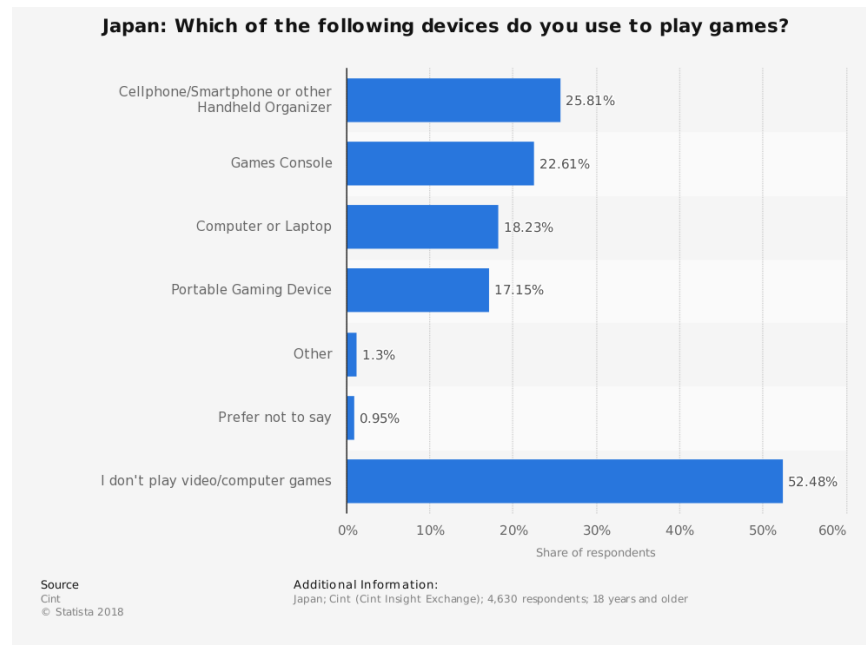**Sales revenue of console video game industry in Japan from 2009 to 2015 (in billion Japanese yen)**
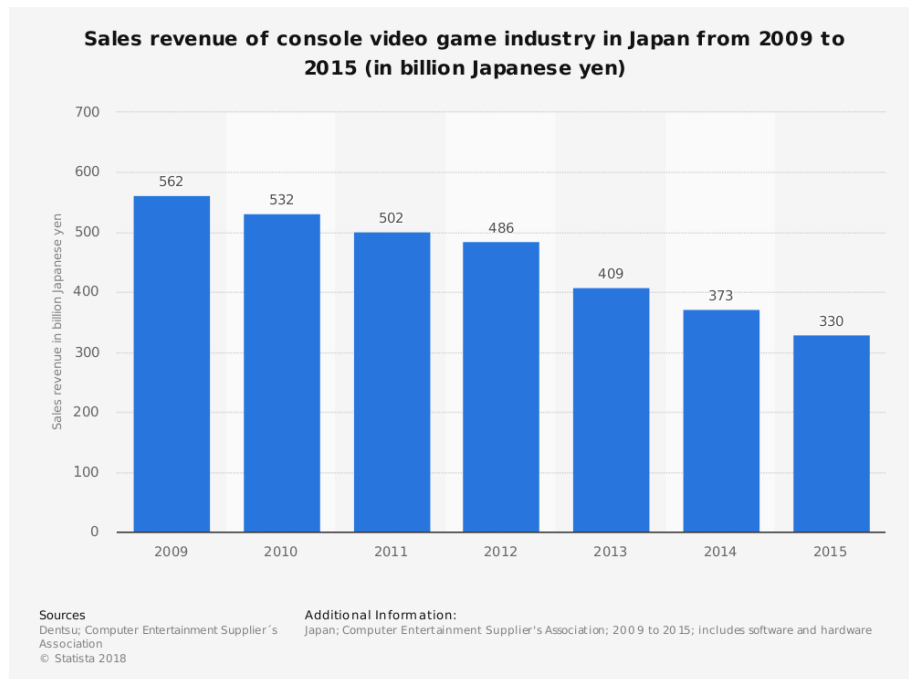
Graph 1.2: Sales Revenue of Console Video Game Industry in Japan from 2009 to 2015

Consumer expenditure on smartphone games in Japan from 2011 to 2015 (in billion Japanese yen)

Sources
Dentsu; Ministry of Internal Affairs and
Communications (Japan)
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Additional Information:
Japan; Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (Japan); 2011 to 2015

Graph 1.3: Consumer Expenditure on Smartphone Games in Japan from 2011 to 2015

Why do you play smartphone games?

Source
Various sources (hitracking.net)
© Statista 2018

Additional Information:
500 smartphone gamers

Graph 1.4: Why Do You Play Smartphone Games?

Japan: Which of the following devices do you use to play games?

Device	Share
Cellphone/Smartphone or other Handheld Organizer	25.81%
Games Console	22.61%
Computer or Laptop	18.23%
Portable Gaming Device	17.15%
Other	1.3%
Prefer not to say	0.95%
I don't play video/computer games	52.48%

Share of respondents

Source
Cint
© Statista 2018

Additional Information:
Japan; Cint (Cint Insight Exchange); 4,630 respondents; 18 years and older

Graph 1.5: Japan: Which of the Following Devices Do You Use to Play Games?

The number of people in Japan playing games, both men and women, has been steadily increasing over the years (Graph 1.1), showing that the games industry is continuing to grow. However, revenues from console gaming in Japan has been decreasing (Graph 1.2). This correlates with a rise in revenues experienced in Japan's mobile gaming sector (Graph 1.3), showing that while the games industry is still growing, a significant amount of that growth is due to the rise of mobile gaming in Japan. An overwhelming majority of Japanese people reported playing mobile games to pass time while traveling (Graph 1.4). As of 2018, a similar amount of people reported playing console and mobile games (Graph 1.5), however, meaning that both platforms still hold significance. This rise in gaming, both mobile and console, is important to consider when better understanding the women who are playing these games.

Japan's Gender Inequality

The notion of harmony is core to Japanese identity, represented in the concept of *wa*. *Wa* is a set of social and cultural norms that focus on social harmony, with emphasis on the community, rather than the individual (Hirata and Warschauer, pages 7-9). While the incorporation of *wa* is essential in creating games that are truly Japanese, its rigidity impacts not only the content of games, but the social structures and hierarchies that influence Japanese society as a whole. As Japanese game developers focus on incorporating aspects of their Japanese identity within their games, they also create new obstacles. While attempting to enforce and value *wa*, strong societal pressures have resulted in the shaming and the marginalization of women, especially those who play video games. Women in Japan are treated as "the others" (Burma) due to historical and modern attempts to maintain harmony and *wa*. They are not encouraged by society to take higher, managerial positions, which serves as a major hurdle in attempts to fix Japan's economy (Kingston), particularly the gaming industry's. According to leading researchers on economic impacts of gaming industries, in order to maintain its growth, the Japanese video game industry must focus on increasing diversity in the workforce and its consumer base (Fujihara). This will only be possible once Japanese game developers better understand the complexity of *wa* and properly address women as both consumers and creators not as the "others".

Gender and Games in Japan

In Japan, there is a niche market of video games targeted specifically to women, known as 女性向けゲーム, or "women's games", which started as early as 1994 (Kim). While these games are not widely prevalent, they sometimes overlap with the more popular "dating sim"

genre, which represent almost one half of the Japanese game market (Iro). These two genres of games are highly researched, and important to acknowledge; however, they will not serve as the focus of this paper. Rather, this piece will approach the topic of females and video games more holistically in order to better understand the social dynamics involving women who play any form of video game.

The shift occurring in the Japanese video game industry impacts not only developers, but a variety of demographics. Media has a strong relationship with society, both constantly influencing each other. Video games in particular, due in part to their immersive nature, have an even more sizable impact on the people who play them. As the Japanese video game industry is evolving, so is Japanese society and the impact it has on people. The role of female characters in Japanese games has been heavily debated and the cultural shifts happening both in the industry and the country as a whole are influencing these conversations. Traditionally, Japanese developers have depicted female characters as weak, over-sexualized, or a combination of the two (Prisco). Similarly, as discussed, women in the Japanese workforce are far from equal to men, a concept that gets reinforced by the nature of these video game characters. Today, more Japanese games not only feature well-rounded female characters, but are also developed by female employees. The gender norms in Japan are slowly evolving and this change can also be seen in modern Japanese games.

Even though many do not realize it, a significant portion of Japanese video game players are female. There are a range of differing statistics, unable to agree on the exact gender distribution of game players in Japan, with some reports saying the percentage is as low as 48%. However, a majority of credible reports cite the actual amount of female video game players in

Japan to be closer to 60%. While this number comes as a surprise to many people, the prevalence of female video game players should not be ignored.

Despite all the issues in Japan with gender inequality, Japan has the highest number of female employees in the gaming industry. As of 2010, 12.8% of the people working in the video game industry are women (Fujihara). This statistic includes women working in all aspects of the industry, such as marketing and HR, meaning that the actual number of females directly making games is significantly smaller. While this is a very low percentage, it is still the highest in the world, with the US at 11.2% and the UK at only 4% (Fujihara). There is still a large pool of untapped resources, women, for the games industry to utilize. This shows that Japan has the potential to both increase gender equality in its country and be a global leader in the games industry in regard to gender diversity.

Current research

Currently, there is limited research that focuses on social implications surrounding those who play video games in Japan. An overwhelming amount of the research debates the consequences of violence in video games. The research available related to the topic of female video game players only discusses Otakus, professional gamers who participate in eSports competitions, or female-specific games, such as dating sims. Although there is a lack of in-depth data surrounding this topic, I believe that better understanding the societal influences surrounding average women who plays games can have long lasting impacts on Japan's changing gender roles.

Methodology

Terminology

Two phrases used throughout our research are "video games" and "casual gamer." These terms have varied definitions and usages depending on the context, therefore, it is important to state the specific definitions used in this research. Video games are defined as electronic games that can be played using a specialized electronic gaming device (console), computer, or smartphone. In this definition, it is important to note that in this research mobile games are considered video games, as they are created using the same processes and mediums and share many identical properties. A casual gamer is someone who plays video games for fun, and considers playing games a pastime, as opposed to those who game competitively or consider it a top priority.

Methods

This research was approached through an ethnographic lens, with a focus on four key methods: interviews with professionals and members of our target demographic, direct observations of gaming hubs in Japan, surveys given to the target demographic, and analysis of quantitative data pertaining to the Japanese video game market.

Unstructured interviews were conducted in Japan, focusing on open-ended questions in order to build relevant case studies. In popular gaming hubs, such as arcades, themed cafes, and Pokémon centers, Japanese women interacting with the gaming community were extensively observed. The surveys addressed three core concepts: gaming environments, social aspects of gaming, and impacts of games on identity. Surveys were distributed through students at Meiji University and contacts in Japan, as well as through their friends. To better understand the

implications of data received from these three activities, data from reputable sources, mostly from the Japanese government, as well as data from the survey conducted were analyzed.

Working in the Industry

Case Study: Aya K.

Aya is an industry veteran who has played video games for a majority of her life. She joined Nintendo about twenty years ago and now works as the co-director on the *Animal Crossing* series, one of Nintendo's most popular franchises. When she first began working in the industry, Kyogoku spoke of how rare it was to see other women. However, Nintendo has been making drastic changes in increasing its diversity workforce. Kyogoku said "Recently, even in meetings, I sometimes find the same number of males and females in the room". Regarding this increase of diversity, Aya discussed the impact it has had on Nintendo's creativity, saying "Having worked on this team where there were almost equal numbers of men and women made me realize that [diversity] can open you up to hearing a greater variety of ideas and sharing a greater diversity of ideas". She has come to realize how important it is for the video game industry to employ more women in a variety of different roles, stating that it was this diversity that has led to Nintendo's recent success, both in Japan and internationally.

Every Thursday, industry professionals in Japan gather at a run-down Izakaya in Tokyo to drink, socialize, and unwind from their stressful weeks. Aya extended an invitation, allowing for a unique perspective on the lives of those working in the industry. Immediately, the noticeable lack of females had an evident impact of the social environment of this group. Of the approximately twenty-five industry professionals there, only six were female. Instead of being integrated with the rest of the group, five of these women sat in a corner, talking only amongst

themselves. While this segregation may have occurred unrelated to the lack of diversity, the overt masculinity and "bro-culture" clearly permeated the rest of the group, perhaps making these women more comfortable speaking amongst themselves. When asked to name women who play video games, all of the men present were unable to name more than three. They said statements such as "Oh, I know John's girlfriend plays" and "I'm sure I know lots of girls who play games … I just can't think of any right now". While these men claimed to know casual female gamers, it was apparent that these women did not hold enough significance to be recalled.

Aya was absent from this gathering, and when asked where she was, three men replied that she and another female developer were working late at Nintendo, all the way in Kyoto. In fact, they mentioned that the two women would likely not finish work until 10 p.m. that evening, even though there were other developers from Nintendo at this event. It seemed as if Aya and the other women were stuck in a catch-22: in order to be seen as equals, these two women have to work later than the rest of their male co-workers, yet because of this, they cannot socialize with their male co-workers and be seen as equals.

Importance of Women in the Industry

After speaking with Aya and seeing the success Nintendo has earned after increasing diversity in its workforce, it is clear that increasing the number of women in the video game industry has sizable impacts on the industry as a whole. Nintendo has credited *Animal Crossing: New Leaf*, the newest installment of the series that was co-directed by Aya, with helping the Nintendo 3DS, Nintendo's newest handheld console, sell over 42.7 million units. This game sold more copies than every other game on the 3DS that was not *Mario* or *Pokemon*, Nintendo's two biggest series (Hudson). While a large portion of *Animal Crossing: New Leaf*'s success comes

from addressing women as consumers, which is discussed further in the next section, officials at Nintendo stated that the game's success would not have been possible with having a development team composed of almost 50% women (Hudson). Nintendo serves as a case study for the success that increasing diversity can have on a video game development team. By increasing the number of women on the team, Nintendo was able to drastically increase its creativity and in turn garner higher profits than expect. As Japan's economy is slowly stagnating, it is essential for companies to find new ways to stay competitive and fiscally successful. Increasing women on teams can not only help video game companies increase revenues, but also presents the opportunity for companies all across Japan to revitalize its aging workforce and promote better gender equality in Japanese working society.

      Women increase the creativity and success of teams, and they also encourage and motivate other female employees in the games industry and in all of Japanese society. According to Masahito Fujihara, a researcher who explores the influences on Japanese female game developers, female game developers act as mentors for other women in the industry, and those who wish to join it. They are essential to the success of new generations of female developers (Fujihara). While the number of women working in Japan's video game industry is startlingly low, and they continue to face double standards in the industry, there is hope for future female game developers. With the help of veteran female developers such as Aya, the number of women in the industry can continue to rise, increasing creativity and success for the industry as a whole. Additionally, the Abe administration claims that the way to reverse Japan's aging population is to have more women in the labor force, particularly in leadership positions ("Still a struggle for working women"). Encouraging women to join the video game industry will in turn increase the number of women working in Japan and help empower women across the country. These women

will serve as role models to other women in the games industry, as described by Fujihara, but also show women in all industries in Japan that they too can become just as successful as their male counterparts.

The Gaming Industry's Reaction

Game Themes Permeating the Country

One specific aspect of Japanese culture that the video game industry has helped revitalized is the "*kawaii* culture". Regardless of genre, the traditional elements of *kawaii* culture, such as cutesy, feminine characters, are visible in a substantial amount of Japanese video games. The rise of Pokémon, filled with kawaii elements, has shifted the video game industry in Japan, from being drenched in overt masculinity to embracing girl-friendly content and cute animations, appealing to boys and girls alike (Ito). This was noted especially in the field research, where, in a sample of 3 different Pokémon stores, approximately 90% of the employees were younger females. This is likely playing into the tropes surrounding kawaii culture, as employing "cute", young women better fits the core concepts of *kawaii* culture than any other demographic.

Unlike the numerous arcades scattered across Japan, in both the Pokémon centers and the video game themed cafes, the overwhelming majority of customers were female. At the Pokémon center, these female customers would come alone, with a group of female friends, or with one male. Very rarely would men come alone, or would there be a group consisting of a majority males. The female customers were predominantly younger women, though some older women were noticed as well. The demographics of the customers at the themed cafes differed. While almost all of the customers noted were women, they were mostly women who came alone.

At one specific cafe, the Koei-Tecmo cafe in Ikekuburo, there were four women who came within one hour of the cafe's opening. All four women were middle-aged and sat alone, spending most of their time on their phone and taking pictures of the decorations. In contrast, video game arcades were predominately businessmen, filled with men in suits looking to pass time. The ambiance of these arcades centers around the nostalgia of "retro" video games, as opposed to the *kawaii* themes adorning the cafes and Pokémon center, resulting in a masculine culture that multiple women in our surveys cited as a reason for not going to arcades.

Marketing towards Women

Every woman spoken with for this research said that they discovered new games through their friends, while a few mentioned being inspired to buy games from advertisements on television and YouTube. This shows a large potential for the video game industry to target women through more diverse advertisements. Nintendo recently has been a leader in increasing the presence of women in video game advertisements. Of the women interviewed who mentioned advertisements, a majority of them mentioned Nintendo advertisements as important factors in finding new games to play. Nintendo has changed their advertising from treating the majority of video games as males to also including women. One Mother's Day in Japan, Nintendo ran a highly visible advertisement that played repeatedly on subway television monitors, which said "This May 13, buy your mom a Nintendo DS" (Kohler). While some women interviewed mentioned that a majority of advertisements do not represent them well, they greatly appreciated newer advertisements that treat female gamers as normal as male gamers. Showing more advertisements that feature normal female gamers would help normalize the idea

that women play video games too. It would help people all across Japan, both men and women, begin to see women as video game consumers as well.

Women as Consumers

While the advertisement of games is important to attract women to buy video games, it is the narrative components of games that keep women playing. Every woman we spoke with, regardless of age or gaming habits, discussed the importance of good stories in games. To them, video games hold the same narrative value as the movies that have shaped the world. Not only has Nintendo been more cognizant of women in advertisements, but the company has also been more considerate of females as video game players. According to Keiichi Yano, a designer of the Nintendo DS game *Elite Beat Agents*, "we [Nintendo] take into consideration what the female gamer community is interested in and what DS games are selling for female users" (Iro). By being cognizant of female consumers, Nintendo has been successful in attracting more women to buy their games, in turn increasing sales.

Not all Japanese game companies are as conscious of female casual gamers. Instead of featuring powerful heroines, 28% of Japan's top selling games overtly sexualized women and 21% featured violence against women (Lim). While these statistics might deter some women, 20% of those who play Yakuza, a popular Japanese video game franchise that is rooted in gore, violence, and sex, are female. When the directors of the series were asked about this, they replied "While that is something to be happy for, Yakuza is something that is made for male players, so we will be careful not to be too conscious of the female users and derail from what we want to make". Instead of discussing this further, the directors changed the subject to the increase of players from other parts of Asia, refusing to talk about women any longer (" 『龍が如く』 10周

年の先へ── 名越稔洋氏に訊く、変わっていくものと変わらないもの”). Though women are interested in more traditionally masculine games, including multiple women interviewed for this paper, many game developers are still refusing to acknowledge these women.

As Aya and Yano discussed, developers at Nintendo approach casual female gamers in a completely different way. By increasing the number of women on the *Animal Crossing* development team, Nintendo was able to easily address both males and females as consumers. Katsuya Eguchi, the producer on the *Animal Crossing* series, said "we wanted to make sure that the content allowed all the players to express their individuality, that it is was something men and women of all ages would enjoy." This method was so successful that within one month of *Animal Crossing: New Leaf*'s release, the largest consumer was women aged 19 to 24, a completely new phenomenon for Nintendo (Hudson). Not only were more women buying the game, but 56% of those who purchased a 3DS with *Animal Crossing: New Leaf* were women, a statistic that stunned everyone in the industry, especially the CEO of Nintendo (Inoue). By choosing to actively include women as not only developers, but also as active consumers of content, Nintendo was able to produce a critically-acclaimed game that is enjoyed by people of all different demographics. While some developers continue to ignore women, such as the developers of *Yakuza*, Nintendo has experienced significant financial success by addressing women, showing once more how the Japanese economy can benefit from better addressing female casual gamers.

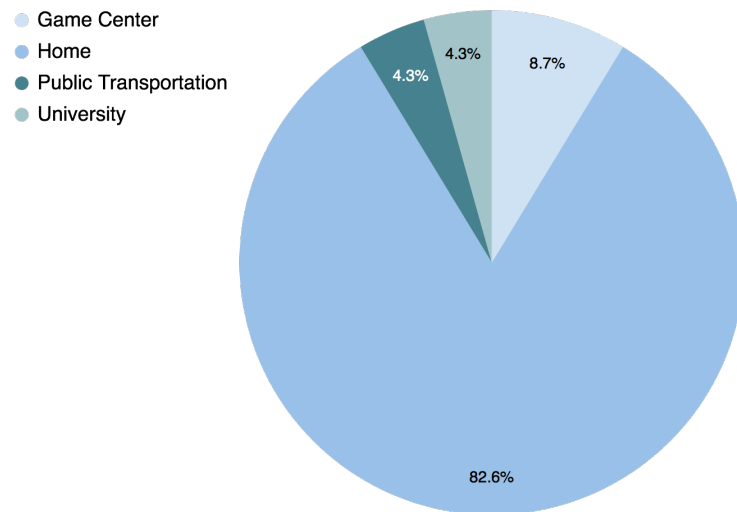**Playing Games in Public:**

Case Study: Moeka S. (age 18)

Moeka, a university student in Tokyo, has played video games since she was in elementary school. She loves playing video games, specifically RPGs (role-playing games), because of their rich stories. Her uncle designs online video games, and while her direct family does not play games, she was inspired to love games because of him. She mentioned how it is extremely popular to play video games and a majority of her friends play them. Video games help her bond with her friends, as they talk about the games they are playing and new games about to be released frequently.

Moeka's console of choice is her Nintendo 3DS, and although it is a portable console, she only plays it at home. When she was younger, she would play her DS on the train, but now she is too embarrassed to, afraid that she will look "too childish." Moeka mentioned seeing businessmen playing DS's on trains frequently, but has never seen a woman play it in public. This was odd for her, as she said, "But I know lots of women are playing video games as they are very popular." However, Moeka said that many women are playing games on their phones on public transit, as opposed to using dedicated portable consoles.

When asked about video game hubs, specifically arcades, Moeka appeared to be uncomfortable. She has never been to a video game cafe, arcade, or big gaming store before and showed no desire to go. Speaking specifically of arcades, Moeka said she would never go, saying "there are too many males there who are not my friends, and they make me uncomfortable." While Moeka is proud of her love for video games, she does not feel comfortable being seen in public associating with games unless she is surrounded by her friends.

The social double standards

Where do you usually play video games?

- Game Center
- Home
- Public Transportation
- University

4.3% 4.3% 8.7%

82.6%

Graph 2.1: Where do you Usually Play Video Games?

Moeka's fears of playing video games in public are shared by a majority of the women interviewed for this paper. 82.6% reported playing video games at home (Graph 2.1), showing that though women are playing more portable games, they are still choosing to play them at home instead of in public.

Do You Play Video Games?

- Yes
- No

47.8%   52.2%

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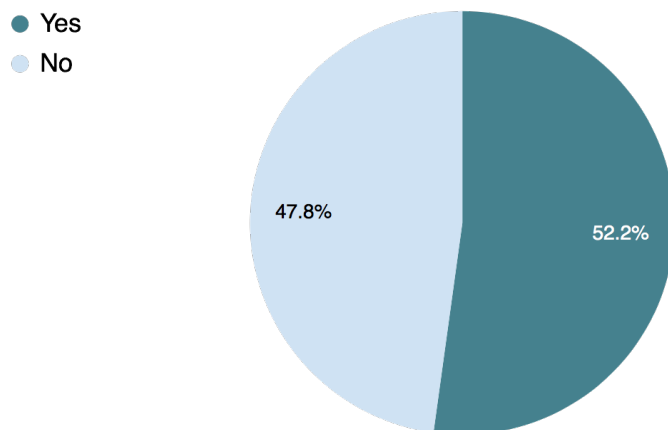
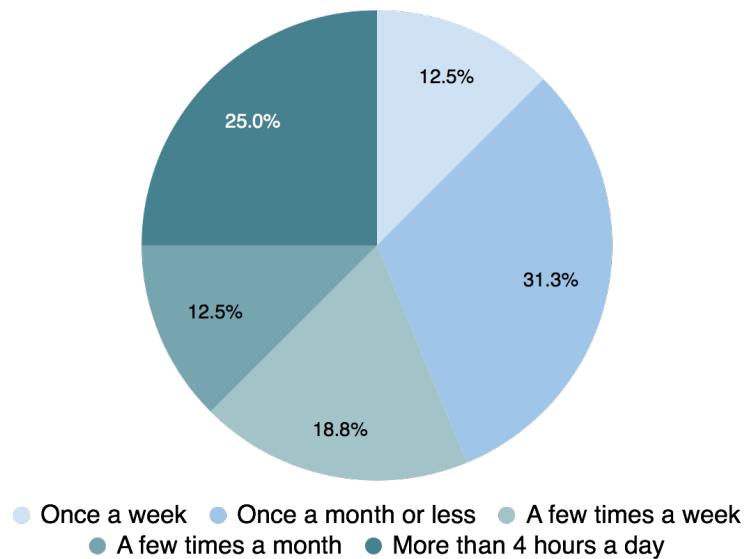Graph 2.2: Do You Play Video Games?

Do You Play Games on Your Phone?
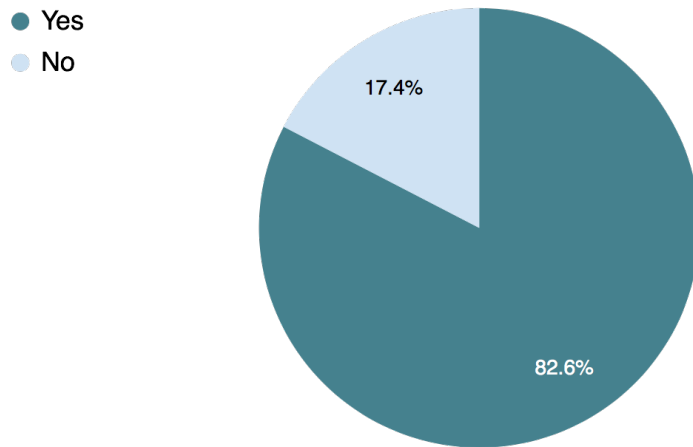
Graph 2.3: Do You Play Games on Your Phone?

Though most women are playing games, they do not believe that they are playing "video games." While only 52.2% of the women surveyed reported playing video games (Graph 2.2), 82.6% reported playing games on their phone (Graph 2.3). Every woman who said that they did not play video games reported playing games on their phone, and every woman who said they did not play games on their phone said that they played video games, showing a large disconnect between these two questions.

How Frequently Do You Play Video Games?

Graph 2.4: How Frequently Do You Play Games?

Of the women who reported playing video games but not mobile games, two women explained this reasoning by citing video game addiction. While there was no statistical difference between the different frequencies that women reported playing games, every woman who reported playing games for over four hours a day reported playing mobile games (Graph 2.4), giving validity to these women who will not play mobile games. They felt that if they had games on their phones, it would be too easy to play video games and it would have a negative impact on their productivity.

However, a majority of the women who said that they did not play video games, but play mobile games, had a different line of reasoning. According to the women interviewed, they felt that they were not a part of the "gamer" crowd. Video games were not for them. Though women are becoming increasingly prevalent in the video game industry, they still feel like the "other." This is a highly researched subject, with multiple papers reporting that "otaku-like engagement with media" tends to be socially acceptable for boys, while girls who show large amount of

interest in this subject, particularly video games, are more likely to be ostracized (Lim). Even professional video game players face the same social backlash that these casual gamers do. Yuko, a professional *Street Fighter* player, recalled that when she first started competing in tournaments, she was treated poorly because she was a woman. While now, she is treated with more respect, she had to work much harder to be accepted by even the more otaku part of society (D'Anastasio). It is clear why many women do not report playing video games, even when they are spending a significant amount of time playing games on their phones. Though women are not a minority in the video game industry, they are still treated like one.
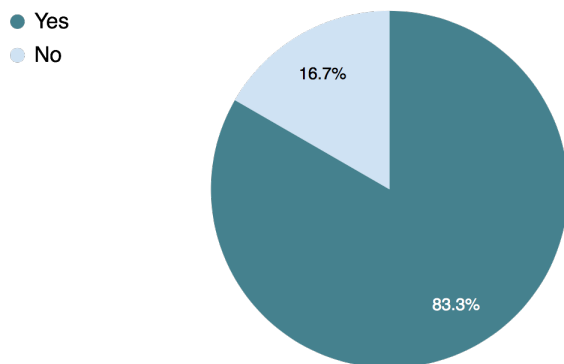
Case Study: Kaki H. (age 38)

Kaki, like the other two women interviewed for case studies, has been playing video games for a significant portion of her life. While Kaki is not ethnically Japanese, she has lived in Japan for all of her life, and identifies as Japanese. She works full-time as an attorney and finds herself with limited time to play video games. Though, she frequently plays mobile games to pass time while traveling.

When asked about the social implications surrounding her gaming hobby, she replied that she has faced no backlash. However, she said "people in Japan have generally been more forgiving of it since I have an outgoing personality and don't 'look like an otaku'". Her highly regarded profession has an impact as well: "I find that I'm more defined by my job [attorney] than my hobbies anyway". Kaki mentions that she is able to escape the harsh alienation that many casual and professional female gamers face in Japan. Similar to Aya and Yuko, Kaki has had to work extra hard to prove herself and to not be treated differently than her male counterparts.
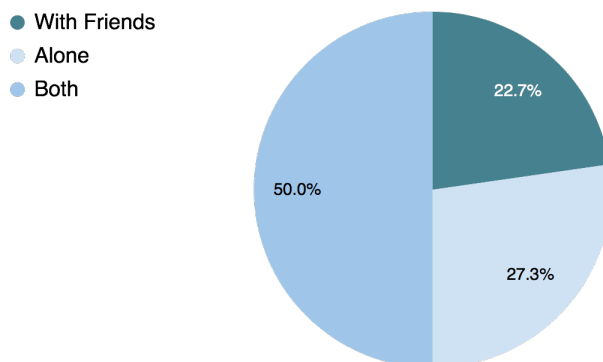
Impact of Games on Social Life

When asked about the impact video games have on their social lives, women discussed both positive and negative aspects. Every woman spoke highly of the narrative elements of games, citing them as one of the core reasons why they play games. These stories do more for women than just entertain them, but rather they help them understand the world better. One woman stated, "video games help me expand my views of the world". Two women spoke of video game addiction, with one going as far as saying "the amount of time I have been sleeping has decreased" due to video games. However, the same could be said about the mass amounts of television that people across the world tend to binge-watch.

Graph 2.5: Do Your Friends Play Video Games?

Graph 2.6: Do You Play Games Alone or With Friends?

The overwhelming majority of women interviewed and surveyed said that video games served as a way to foster communication skills. For many, games are an important conversation topic for friends and help bring these women closer with the people around them. One woman said "people say that those who play video games often are not good at communicating. But for me, it became a chance for conversation and a place to make new friends". 83.3% of women surveyed said that their friends play video games (Graph 2.5), and almost every person who reported having friends play video games said that they played video games with their friends either some of the time or all of the time (Graph 2.6). For these women, video games are a social activity, bringing them closer with their friends. Video games might have some negative impacts on social life, a similarity shared with other mediums. However, video games have had a sizeable impact on almost every woman we spoke with, even the casual gamers who spent very little time playing games. They not only broaden understanding of the world and different groups of people, but they help improve communication and social skills in the women that play them.

Discussion

Challenges

While conducting research, there were three major issues that inhibited further exploration of the topic. Firstly, it was difficult to find women to speak with. Through students at Meiji and connects already established in Japan, a pool of thirty-five women were surveyed. The sample was moderately sized; however, it was limited in age range. Besides two women aged 38 and 40, all of the women were aged 18 through 22. Additionally, having in-depth conversations with industry professionals proved to be a challenge, since many had signed non-disclosure agreements, preventing them from speaking about specifics. Instead, conversations were broader,

and Aya referred me to in-depth interviews with relevant information. As an elementary-level Japanese speaker, communicating with Japanese women was a challenge, especially since many researchers, professionals, and casual players do not speak English. If given more time, this research could be expanded by pooling from a larger audience of women from more diverse backgrounds. More researchers and professionals would have been interviewed, ideally with a translator or better Japanese skills.

Importance

Video game culture has not only seeped into modern Japanese society, but has become an integral part of the nation's identity. This presence can be seen throughout the country and even across the globe. At the 2016 summer Olympics closing ceremony, Japan proudly shared increasingly prominent aspect of their society with the rest of the world. To introduce the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was transported on stage through an iconic green warp pipe, sporting Mario's plumber cap. In order to remain relevant amiss a sea of rapidly evolving technical advances in Japan, the video game industry has strategically integrated itself into the daily lives of many Japanese, regardless of demographics. However, the Japanese video game industry needs to better incorporate women in order to sustain their growth and role as a national and global leader. As shown in this research, video games have an important and sizable impact on the lives of women throughout Japan. They help foster communication and social skills, strengthen friendships, broaden views of the world, and inspire women through captivating narratives. There is no doubt that women are playing and creating games, but society has caused them to feel uncomfortable and unequal to their male counterparts, despite recent social changes.

There is potential for the video game industry to make a change in Japanese society. By becoming more conscious of women, such as targeting them in marketing techniques and portraying them as "normal", instead of the "other", men and women in Japan would be more aware of women as casual gamers. Acknowledging and understanding their presence would help encourage women to feel more comfortable playing games in public. As more women begin to play games in public, it is likely that others will quickly follow. Women currently hide their gaming habits because of the lack of visible female casual gamers. Simply put, more women seen gaming equals more women play games in public, and likely altogether. Additionally, as seen in the overwhelming success of Aya's female dominated team at Nintendo and their newest *Animal Crossing* release, women make the video game industry stronger. By better utilizing women as both consumers and employees, better overt, visual representation can help the video game industry remain economically strong.

Now it is time for video game companies to pick up the pace and treat women as equals to men, both in marketing of games, game content, and employees. Women should not have to feel uncomfortable to play games in public. They should not have to work longer nights to be seen as equals. This research shows that, with the right attitude, the video game industry can help improve the lives of Japanese women by changing social norms, and in turn advancing all of Japanese society.

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