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Japanese and Western cultural norms in the context of Japanese video games

An analytic and comparative study of Video game users on Japanese video games and their content

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- **Summary**

In recent years video games are becoming a more prominent part of our entertainment and media. Few people had no encounter with video games, and their numbers are decreasing. A global market that is taking over cinema and music; It is undeniable that such a large industry has a substantial impact on our society and lifestyles.

From its very creation, Japan has been one of the main pillars of the video game industry. They have influenced and shaped the new generation of entertainment even outside their territories. However, with their unique culture and society and the Japanese cultural differences to the western (Europe and North America) society, Westerners perceive and interpret these cultural differences in video games. These differences are particularly more apparent in controversial games that adopt unconventional themes such as sexual assault or child pornography as their primary focus. This study aims to see and analyze the difference between games developed by Japanese studios and the approaches by the average consumer of these games.

- **Forewords**

First of all, I would like to thank all my Passionate teachers and classmates which through their dedication to the Japanese language and culture, I found encouragement. A special thank to my supervisor and mentor, Dick Stegewerns, that one sentence and one simple guide could put me on the right path to do my research.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Video games in the Media context

We live in the age of information and communication. We are truly living in the age of marvels of technology and science. Technology has allowed us to move giant structures with a finger tap on a small device that we carry in our pockets. We can talk to people on the other part of the globe at any moment we desire. We can shoot videos and pictures as simple as it is to turn a TV on or off. All these are available through a small device we can carry in our pockets. To some extent, we are subconscious about using a lot of these features. However, using all these gadgets means that we expose ourselves to an immense amount of data and information without realizing it.

Media has become a crucial part of our daily lives. We are exposed to it without realizing it, and we process its messages and information subconsciously. In every book, TV show, movie, game or even news that we see, we are seeing a collection of information that is presented to us in a certain way by the producers of these media. We also, depending on our capacity, process these pieces of information in a certain way. It is undeniable that this amount of data will affect our cognitive intellection, consequently creating patterns in our behaviours and social interactions.

The media shapes our social and cultural patterns, conspicuous as it may be to understand it fully. With the emergence of new forms of media in the digital age, its influence is increasingly obscure. With modern technology, our consumption of media products has transformed. With devices like smartphones and services like fast internet connections, we have allowed ourselves to be more exposed to various forms of digital media. The emergence of the new phenomena, '*social networks*', supposedly has brought us closer together with a level of interconnectivity, unlike anything. All these may point to the fact that such a global entity obviously influences our mentality to culture and society. Notwithstanding, studying the influence of such a large concept may not entirely show the full significance of different aspects of it on other levels.

As Elizabeth M. Perse, a researcher on mass communication, discuss media's effect are not as simple as one may think. As it may be true that we, as consumers, can seemingly feel the influence of media, such as when we are affected by a movie causing us to be frightened or happy or cry. When it comes to studying how these are affecting our lives could

be challenging. In today's world, as access to information is easier than ever, there is an evident controversy about what exactly media is and how profound its influence is. By the same token, Perse discuss further, how in some cases in politics, media is seen as a powerful tool for politicians to influence the people to acquiesce with them. Oppositely, for some other politicians, media is a discourse for them to criticize and intrigue the populace to adopt their ideas (Perse 2001, 4–6).

This paper's primary research question will be: how different rape and sexual content is seen in video games in the context of media by Japanese gamers compared to north American and Europeans?

1.1.1 Why video games

With such a degree of intricacy, upon investigating media, it could become challenging to identify clearly how and to what degree media impacts our lives. Due to these limitations, it is better to focus on one area of media and study the effects of that one aspect. Although even by doing that, it cannot be said in confidence that the influence is clear, however, it may be possible to limit further misunderstanding in this discourse.

One peculiar area of media which is the focus of this study is video games. Even though it may be a relatively new industry, but it is evident that it is gaining more notoriety over the last years. It is a technology hungry industry unique in its computer innovation as it is in its artistic features. Nevertheless, choosing this area to study is not because of its advanced technology (although indirectly technology also plays a role). The reasons to choose video games in the media context are two. One is interactivity. Video games are highly interactive as they put the player (the consumer) in a virtual world to follow a narrative. Although the narrative is usually pre-defined, the player is free to approach the sequences presented to him/her. This degree of freedom is unlike media predecessors. In the older forms, such as movies and TV shows, the entire narrative and settings are pre-defined, and the consumer has no control over it. Video games have changed that, as with more technological advancement, there is more freedom over the choices that the player can make in games. However, the degree of interactivity goes even further in the case of video games. As argued by Moulthrop and others, video games have a community involvement unlike other forms of media (except social media, which is heavily community based). In video games, not only the consumer is part of a smaller community to discuss and to interact with

other consumers of the same media, but it goes one step further, and with access to computer players are even able to implement their materials into games and bring their own ideas into the game world (Dovey et al. 2009, 21–25; Moulthrop 2004, chap. Go Configure). Even though, to some extent, games share their interactivity with media like movies and TV shows, the ability to freely make choices that affect the narrative to this extent is exclusive to video games. This high level of engagement is also reflected by the high level of influence that games can have.

The other reason for choosing video games as a framework for this study is its larger market size compared to other media. In 2020, video games surpassed the music and movie industries (albeit it is partly due to the COVID-19 pandemic) (*Reuters* 2020; Tripp et al. 2020). Such market size indicates this new medium's significance as it is replacing older and more traditional media behind. That means the importance of studying different aspect of this medium is ever increasing. Nowadays, as time passes, more older generations are part of the consumers of video games. Eventually, it will reach a point that video games will completely replace any other types of media as the mainstream media.

1.1.2 Content in video games

All the arguments discussed before also suggest that in the context of studying media, narrowing the field to video games are still leaving us with a vast area to work in. As video games are very technology-intensive and consist of different software and hardware aspects, many studies address the technology involved in games. These studies exclusively look into the technology involved in game development and not the content. In order to study the effects of video games on its consumers, it is imperative to study its content more than its innovation. This study aims to investigate these contents and their implications.

Video games cover a broad range of different features involved in their development. Genres aside, there are game mechanics in which games are supposed to be played by (or, as its technical term, *gameplay*). Then there is its artistic and visual aspect of it (known as *graphics*). One other necessary aspect is the software and hardware involved in it. These are among the features games have, which can vary in their target audience and development process depending on the games. These are aimed to create an environment for the player to experience the narrative intended by the game designer(s). This means that the game's

narrative defines the game's content, directly involved in the player's immersion into the game and getting affected by.

Just as video games are categorized by their gameplay, they are also categorized based on their content. Similar to movies and TV shows, they can be historical, action, science fiction and other genres of entertainment. These genres are focused on entertainment and created in such a way to create facilities for players to enjoy the content through gameplay and other aspects of the game. As days go by, one genre that is attracting more attention toward themselves is adult games, also known as porn games.

What makes these games apart from other genre and categories of games is their heavy focus on sexualized erotic content designed to arouse sexual joy for the consumers (Wysocki and Lauteria 2015, 31–32). Development of these games usually focuses more on its content than gameplay or other aspects (although it is worthy of mention that with recent innovation in technology hardware such as Virtual Reality (VR) are also finding their ways into this genre because of their high level of immersion). Even though more games are developed and published within this genre than before, this is not a new genre. In fact, the first porn game was developed in 1981 called *softporn adventures*. A basic text-based game with erotic content. After that 1980s saw a surge in the publishing of different sort of video games with this content. As it always has been with the video game industry, development studios have been part of one of the two groups, and they were either Japanese or Western¹.

Besides their geographical place, the games developed by studios from Japan always differed from those developed by western developers. On their technological aspect, there may not be an apparent difference between the two; their contents are sufficiently different that an avid consumer of video games can tell them apart. These differences also exist in porn games developed by Japanese companies.

Erotic content has always been a big part of Japanese literature (Shirane 2002). Distinguishable from western video games due to their style and content, their video games are also very different. However, as is the case with most entertainment solutions, these erotic contents were never limited to their art, literature, video, or games. As an example of

¹ In the context of this study west and western refers to developers which are based, started and mostly operate in north American or European countries. Western audiences also refer to those who culturally feel closer to north American or European countries.

Japanese unique form of entertainment media, Anime and Manga are well known globally. In recent years both have been able to find their fan base outside of Japan, more specifically in the US and western European countries (Newitz 1994). Japanese Anime or Manga's visual features are very clear to consumers compared to their Western counterpart cartoons, and comic books. However, other than their visual features, their content is very different as well. Naturally, for any fictional work of art, they both are abstract takes from their respective culture. Due to this, the cultural implication of both works is apparent. This difference is also extended to their pornographic industry and consequently to porn video games.

1.1.3 The case of *Rapelay*

Among porn games developed today, one main difference between the two is that western developers are usually not big studios that dedicate their work to pornographic games (Lankoski and Dymek 2020, 2). On the contrary, most Japanese porn games are developed by dedicated studios. However, this difference can bring other complexity to studying this subject. As independent developers are usually one person or group of people who do not, in particular, have to follow the rules and regulations to publish their games. They are crowdfunded; hence their content is heavily dependent on what their subscriptions demand. On the other hand, Japanese porn game developers are mostly bigger studios that are dedicated to creating pornographic games.

The difference between content becomes bolder in some specific games. One of such is *Rapelay*. *Rapelay* is a game developed by Illusion studios, a Japanese studio dedicated to developing pornographic games. What sets this game apart is the content. The narrative of this game follows a rapist, which the player controls. When the player takes control of the main protagonist, they must first sexually harass an underage girl in the subway to eventually sexually assault the female character. Afterwards, the main character uses the photos gained from the sexual act to blackmail the mother and sister of the female character into raping them. The story further takes a



Figure 1 - Official Cover image for *Rapelay* (source: comshop.ne.jp)

darker turn when players are offered a choice to impregnate the female characters and choose to force them into having abortions; if players choose not to do so, their character is stabbed to death by one of the victims. The end segment shows the female character as demonic (by having the character laugh maniacally) (deWinter 2015, 2; Nakasatomi 2012, chap. The problem inherent in *RapeLay*: A form of discrimination against women). These features are only part of the choices offered to the player in this game. In contrast, the main objective presented to the player is to “break” the girls. Meaning, by making them obedient, once successful, the player has the choice to order the girls to perform any sexual act.

Rapelay gained international recognition when Amazon.com offered the game on their platform for sale in 2009. It was later revealed that a third-party reseller posted the game, and Amazon.com distanced itself from the controversy of the game (Pidd 2009). After a series of debates from different countries, the game was removed. Since then, there has

been a ban on this game in several countries (deWinter 2015, 9–10). On the Japanese side, the EOCS (Japan Ethics Organisation of Computer Software) announced that they will tighten these games' restriction and sale (Nakasatomi 2012, chap. Japanese game producers toughen self-regulation standards). The game developer also announced that due to these disputes, they removed the game and any reference to it from their website². However, the bans do not include resellers selling these games over the internet. Due to this, there is still some active online store which sells this title in Japan.

This study aims to investigate the differences in pornographic games developed by studios in Japan and western countries. More specifically, to understand what content the average video game consumer finds different or disturbing between these two developers. There are some studies toward sexually violent games or rapelay in particular, but few, if any at all, had input from gamers themselves. This paper will try to address this by utilizing questionnaires to get input from consumers.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

In most discussion, media has mostly been referring to “communication media” and the institution and organizations relating to it. It also refers to the cultural material produced by these institutions. This definition is how Martin Lister and others describe media (Lister et al. 2008, 9). In this study, however, the media refers to the new types of media that have been appearing in the last sixty years, known as new media (or Digital media). Martin Lister further discusses how the contemporary form of media is different. In the modern age, consumers of media are more engaged in its creation. He describes this by saying we have changed from “audience” to “user” and from “consumers” to “producers”. (Lister et al. 2008, 10).

Nevertheless, when it comes down to what digital means in this new media, Lister believes that this is not a migration of physical data into binary. However, it is merely the assignation of numerical values to phenomena. In order to encode these numerical values so they can be readable to computer software, then they are converted to binary. With the help of computer technology, this meant four features, according to Lister (Lister et al. 2008, 18):

² https://web.archive.org/web/20090529155759/http://www.illusion.jp/ill_info.html

- Media is ‘dematerialized.’
- Data can be compressed into small segments
- It can be accessed at a very high speed
- It can be manipulated easier

Further, Lister defines the characteristics of this new media. According to him, new media has six main characteristics. Digital, Interactivity, Hypertextual, Networked, Virtual, and Simulated (Lister et al. 2008, 16–43). Digital, as described above, is the most known feature of new media. Interactivity describes the relationship between consumers and producers. In the old media, consumption was passive. In contrast, in the new media, there is a higher degree of interaction between consumers and producers (Lister et al. 2008, 21). Hypertextual refers to the ease of accessibility to different levels of data in new media (Lister et al. 2008, 26). The networked feature is associated with the world wide web and the decentralization of both media production and consumption (Lister et al. 2008, 30–31). Finally, both virtual and simulated aspect of new media is a notion to its virtuality (as opposed to being physical in reality) and its representation of the real world (Lister et al. 2008, 35–43).

Even though to Martin Lister it is clear that media is influencing our daily lives and shapes our culture (cyberculture as he describes it) (Lister et al. 2008, chaps 4 and 5) to Elizabeth M. Perse, these effects are seen differently. She acknowledges that media with such a large amount of money and time consumption must affect our lives (Perse 2001, 4). However, further, she claims that studying media’s effects is not as simple. She argues that media’s effects are not significant in different contexts, especially considering the amount of funds and time it takes (Perse 2001, 6–8). For instance, she explains that the same material over different cultures could have different effects (Perse 2001, 8).

No matter their differences, they both agree that in some specific context, media has substantial impacts (Lister et al. 2008, chap. 4; Perse 2001, chap. 8). It is on this framework that this thesis is based on and conducted. The reason why I decided to study video games in a media context is, as Lister mentions (based on Moulthrop and Woolgar's works (Moulthrop 2004; Woolgar 1990)) that digital media, especially video games, offer a new form of interactivity called configuration. A dynamic, engaging relationship between the user and software refines each other in a feedback loop (Lister et al. 2008, 24–25).

1.3 Scope and Goals

Whilst the cultural and social effects of video games have been studied and published in various journals, there is little to no input from the gamers who consume these media. The aim of this study is to, along with the academic discussion of adult content in video games in the media context, also compare the view of video game consumers from Japan and compare it to the westerns view of the issue.

The scope of this study is to reach gamers but also to divide the input from the western users from Japanese users. The data from the Japanese audience will be further analyzed to compare their view in comparison. The data, however, is limited to those who are avid consumers of video games and can clearly distinguish the cultural implication of Japan in its video games. Due to this, the attitude of those who do not consume video games or have been victims of sexual violence is outside of this study's scope.

1.4 Thesis Structure

Chapter 1 is dedicated to an introduction to video games in the media context and the pornographic games industry. This chapter describes why video games studies are essential and how they can affect cultural and social norms. Also, there is a brief introduction to rapelay, the particular Japanese porn game which brought up controversy in porn game development. The theoretical framework and the scope and goals of this thesis are also established in this chapter.

Chapter 2 will be focused on the methodology used for this study. This chapter will discuss the methods used to collect data and analyze it. Furthermore, It will point out the challenges and limitations that this method has for this research.

Chapter 3 will examine the previous researches done in the field of media, media effects, video games in that context and the porn games and rapelay controversy. The structure follows chapter 1 and starts from a background in media and video games in that context. Finally, it moves to a review of the literature concerning rapelay and its content in Japanese discourse.

Chapter 4 is the data analysis and discussion. In this chapter, the data gathered through the survey will be analyzed and discussed. Furthermore, the content of porn games and rapelay will be studied in more details to give a better understanding of its controversy.

The fifth chapter will be a conclusion to the data analysis and discussion regarding the research question. In this chapter, It will be argued the protentional of further studies in this subject.

2 Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the methodology used to collect and analyze data implemented for this thesis research. Firstly, this chapter will explain the decisions made toward research design and justify it based on its advantages. In order to take into consideration, the limits that this research method may suffer, the disadvantages of the method will be discussed. This will be followed by this design's ability whether generating a valid result for the research question that it is intended for. It will go on to discussing the sample size method used for the survey and data collection applied by the author, as well as the approach to the data analysis. It will conclude with acknowledgement of the ethical consideration that was encountered throughout the research.

2.1 Research Design

For the sake of this research, the author has decided to make use of a quantitative approach to data collection in the form of questionnaires (Brace 2018; Cook, Heath, and Thompson 2000; Pan and Fond 2014) combined with literature review and analysis of video games content. This method is chosen because of its dexterity in data collection. The questionnaires were created and hosted on the University of Oslo platform, nettskjema.no. As this research aims to compare the two viewpoints of video game consumers of western countries and Japan, the survey was arranged into two different questionnaires. One in English for the western respondent and one in Japanese for the Japanese respondent. Both questionnaires are identical and only differ in one question regarding the familiarity of each culture of the other one.

The questionnaires are divided into four main segments. The first segment is a general question regarding age, nationality, education, and level of video game consumption is acquired. Age is also a factor that, if chosen below 18, will limit the questions shown to the respondent. This restriction is to avoid underage being presented with questions regarding sexual violence (this is a feature of the platform that the survey was created on). Furthermore, it was determined that there is a possibility that nationality may be unclear for those who have multiple nationalities or living in a country other than the one that they were born in. Since this research targets the cultural aspects, the respondents were asked to answer the nationality they culturally feel closest to. The questions were presented in the form of multiple choices.

Segment 2, 3, and 4 are presented in a matrix form to the respondent. Segment 2 is regarding violence in video games, segment three regarding sexual content (on any game, not just pornographic games). Finally, the last segment is questions regarding pornographic games and sexual violence in video games. On each segment, the respondent is presented with 4-6 statements which they can reply to by choosing how much they agree with the statement. The choices are, agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, disagree, do not know. At the end of each segment, there is an open-ended question so the respondent can have input regarding the segment's subject. The open-ended questions will be analyzed to see if there is a common pattern among respondents.

Due to the limitation at the time of research in 2020 and the global COVID-19 pandemic, the survey had to be digitally distributed. Accordingly, the sampling method used to collect the data was the convenience sampling method which the survey was published and the participants were randomly selected based on their willingness to participate. The survey was published on trending social media platforms Facebook and Reddit, targeted toward video games players. The survey was open for a period of 3 months in total. As the purpose of this study was to compare the two different groups, the author attempted to keep the number of respondents for the two groups relatively similar. Once a balance was reached, the survey was closed to avoid unbalancing the result.

To analyze the result of the data collection, the author will make use of Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS). The related data will be converted into tables and figures in the appropriate section of this thesis.

As for the literature reviews, they are divided into 3 different categories, from a more generic researches regarding media and then continuing into more narrowed studies regarding pornographic games in the context of Japanese society and culture.

To have a better understating of the main theme of this study, the Japanese video games will be analysed to find their characteristics and the author will argue how games developed by Japanese studios differ from their westerner counterparts.

2.2 Ethical Consideration and Other Challenges

The subject of this study, sexual violence, could be a difficult matter for some people to discuss. To avoid this, at the beginning of both surveys, a warning is given to all respondent regarding the content of the questionnaires.

During the data collection, no personal data was recorded from the respondent. Each person was given a random ID for the purpose of tracking. According to the university platform, the data will on their data bank be deleted six months after the last participation.

Concerning the challenges of this method, firstly, due to opting for a convenience model of sampling, there was a limited intervention and options. The respondents were chosen based on their willingness to take part in this survey.

Secondly, as mentioned, due to the nature of the subject of these surveys, the author has speculated that not every response will be unbiased. Unfortunately, this matter is an uncontrollable factor from the author's side. It is natural for people not to express their honest opinion toward this sensitive subject. Moreover, as this survey had inquiries regarding respondents' experience of playing a banned game in many western countries, it is natural for people not to give an honest answer (Fisher 2009).

This chapter has presented the methodology which is used for this research. It has outlined the method of research design and its analyses. Despite its shortcomings in some aspect, this method was chosen so the avid video games consumers' experience can also be included in this study. The major findings and discussions will be reviewed in chapter 4 more in details.

3 Background and previous research

3.1 Introduction

For many, video games may only be a form of entertainment and a way to kill time or blow off steam. Some may even associate video games with children, teens, or young adults and not something that a fully matured adult would get involved with. It can be hard for these people to imagine video games as an effective form of media that can change cultural and social norms. It may be harder to dismiss video games as a powerful media when one knows that in 2020 the total venue of video game worldwide surpassed the last generation of the entertainment, movie industry by selling over 160 billion USD with approximate 2.7 billion users on the globe (J. Clement 2021).

With such a significant impact in the 21st century, it would have been natural that researchers from various fields would start looking into different aspects of this new form of entertainment and its effects on us, both as individuals and in societies. At the beginning of this industry, most studies focused on the technical aspects since it was not commercialized very much and had not found a significant number of users. However, toward the end of the 1990s and beginning of the 21st century, researchers started shifting their interests toward other effects of video games, starting with mental and cognitive effects. As more time passed, new studies emerged on personality and individual effects and research cultural and social impacts. (Wolf, Perron, and Routledge 2003, 109–21; Kowert and Quandt 2015, chap. 1).

Nowadays, with the specialization of research fields, the technological and the more technical part of video game studies have, more or less, separated itself from other aspects. There are now more focused studies on cultural characteristics and the influence of video games or video game culture. This culture is one of the main themes in “*Video game as culture*”, written by Daniel Muriel, a sociology researcher and Garry Crawford, British sociologist (Muriel and Crawford 2018). This book discusses how video games have influenced the digital age and the new form of media. Moreover, it is discussed how rooted the influence of video games can be. They explain the reason that why such a thing as video game culture exist and why it is essential to study it is because of various impacts that these video games can have on one’s life:

“The video game is, ...the prototypical cultural form of digital culture; it is – so to speak – its purest form. Video game and video gamers are thus seen as (at least) one of the main products and driving forces of our contemporary society. ...it is obvious that, even if video games are not the most important product of a digital culture, they are certainly still an essential one – and along with this, comes a video game culture.” (Muriel and Crawford 2018, 18)

However, as Soraya Murray, a digital media scholar describes, “*Culture as a term is not singular, but a panoply of things.*” (Murray 2017, 3), culture is not just one entity or a singular term that can describe its entire meaning but, it is made of various other social, personal, ethnics and other features. The same is true regarding the study of game culture; there are more than one aspect of video game culture and its effects on societies. One of these aspects, which has been the subject of many debates, whether inside video game discourse or in a more general context, is sexuality and gender.

Throughout recent times, there has been numerous studies and debates with themes revolving around sexuality and gender. However, the focus of this study is these sexualities in the context of video games, more specifically the differences between the western and Japanese perspective toward this. To this end and to give a background of previously carried research on this matter, as video games are part of mass media (or digital media) first, there must be a discussion of studies toward media's influence on culture then video games.

Furthermore, when researchers study the development of the Japanese gaming industry (AKA *geemu*), mostly every study points to the fact that this industry, unlike in the US, was born and shaped by the influence of the market rather than the culture of where it was made (Navarro Remesal and Loriguillo López 2015, 1–3; Picard 2013). This feature is a vital notation as these two industries developed differently throughout their histories. One is concentrated toward those who develop the game meanwhile the other is toward market trends. In other words, it could be argued that those developers that follow trends in their local market are following their local culture and what society demands. This argument is critical in this research as the main focus is to study pornographic games and their influence.

The actual market share of adult-only games is difficult to estimate as numerous games are developed by independent developers. Their source of income is mostly through crowdfunding platforms such as *Patreon*. However, a study in 2019 estimated a market value

of approximately \$30-40 million dollar (Whale 2019). The industry is expanding, and with more tools and platforms in recent days, it has become easier to develop and publish these games. There also exist larger publishing platforms with extensive capital that focus on adult games, one being *Nutaku*.

Nutaku is an adult gaming exclusive platform that has partnered with Japanese developers to publish their games in the western market³. In February 2021, they announced that their website had reached 50 million users (Bella Blondeau 2020). Even though it may seem like an impressive number of users, this only accounts for one platform specifically targeted toward English speaking audiences.

Nevertheless, a large number of users for adult content is nothing new, and there are many studies done regarding the porn industry, its effects and other aspects of it (Diamond and Uchiyama 1999; Williams 2004). Most studies done in this field are related to fields other than video game. However, as this new form of entertainment is replacing traditional forms such as pictures or even videos, more researchers are showing interest in studying sexual content in video games. One example of extensive study in this field is *Sex in the Digital Age (2018)* by Paul G. Nixon, Media scholar and Isabel K. Düsterhöft, International Law scholar. In this book, authors have looked at how in the modern era, sex and sexuality has changed. How modern technology and ideology has affected sex and its related industries. In this book, there is a dedicated chapter regarding video games and sex which will be looked upon in more detail further in this chapter.

Adult-only games by themselves are not that much different from traditional formats of porn. If anything, one can consider that porn created in the virtual world could be a better alternative since no real people are involved in actual sex and sexual activities. Considering many existing studies and various humanitarian movements against the porn industry, a shift to virtual porn may be the solution to solve issues raised by these individuals and communities. However, if everything is in the virtual world and no actual people are involved, hurt or in any way part of the sexual activity, is that still better?

Although the development of pornographic games is not exclusive to Japan, it might have originated there, with the first games with graphical features appearing in Japan in the

³ <http://www.dmm.co.jp/en/netgame/foreign/>

early 1980s and getting more attention in the late 80s when visual novels came to be (Kabashima 2009; Nobushige 2006). with more time passing the western developers have joined in the development of these games, however primarily these erotic games are associated with Japanese developers, which eventually made *Hentai*⁴ a buzzword in the English language to refer to porn games developed by Japanese Companies (McLelland and Network 2011, 1–2).

The theme of porn videos and games are mostly similar as both aim to simulate an erotic situation for the audience. Nevertheless, when cultural differences come to play, there might be differences between what is considered acceptable in Japan compared to the rest of the world. This difference was apparent in the game *Rapelay*.

Since the release of this game on the global market, there have been various discussion of the freedom that is allowed on video games (Fennelly 2009; Lah 2010). all these ultimately led to this game being banned. However, the arguments regarding the amount of freedom those game developers are allowed to have and the cultural and social impact that a video game can have are still valid and is the goal to some other researchers (deWinter 2015; Galbraith 2017; Nakasatomi 2012).

Other than the studies directly regarding *Rapelay*, there are other studies concerning sexual content in video games. Considering these studies, which are done in other forms of popular media such as Manga, Anime, and movies, will help to differentiate between video games and other forms. Accordingly, toward the end of this chapter, this paper will analyze and compare different studies done regarding the game itself and other forms of pornographic contents in the digital media discourse.

3.2 Media and culture in the modern world

From the beginning of human history, we needed a way to communicate with each other to share our knowledge and convey our message. To this end, we developed a variety of different tools, from its primitive form of spoken languages to more complex structured languages and scripts. This development led to new forms of communication tools such as

⁴ 変態 Hentai is a Japanese loanword which in English is used to refer to Anime, Manga or game pornography

books, letters, written messages, and literature. All these different forms of communication are the early examples of media (Lule 2012, 33–34).

However, as time passed, human societies changed and became more complicated, rendering these old forms of communication somewhat ineffective. Although written literature has been used as a form of conveying writers' message to the reader, not all had the same access to these resources. On the one hand, there were physical constraints, meaning one book written by one author could only be read by those who had physical access to the book itself; on the other hand, there were other issues with language barriers and those in the population who could not read or understand these forms of communications.

Nevertheless, with the invention of the press, photography, better quality papers, and filming, communication and media were changed drastically as now it was more accessible to people and “mass”. Hence mass media was born.

By Merriam-Webster dictionary's definition, mass media is “*a medium of communication (such as newspapers, radio, or television) that is designed to reach the mass of the people—usually used in plural*” (‘Mass Media’ n.d.). In the definition as well, mass media has two important features. One is that it is a form of communication, meaning it is essentially a tool for the creator to convey its message to the audience(s). the other is that it is designed to reach many people. The latter also means that the message that the creator, whether intentionally or not, can influence its audience through media.

Such features have made mass media a powerful tool for transmitting information and messages to a large population. Through this information, many can be influenced and unknowingly follow a particular way of thinking.

Furthermore, with recent technological advancements, processing and transmitting messages and information has changed drastically to the point of creating a new phenomenon called “digital media” (Smith 2013). With such ease of access to this amount of information in today's age, it is crucial to study media and different types of media. Our day to day lives are so intertwined with digital content that it has affected our social behaviour, and our cultures have been affected by it.

One of the best examples of studies in this field is gathered in the book *New Media: a critical introduction* (Dovey et al. 2009). This book, tries to answer the question “what is new about “new media” (Dovey et al. 2009, 9).

This book is dedicated to the changes in media, both technology-wise and changes in the culture. While pointing out the changes that media has gone through in how it is produced or consumed, the authors describe the changes of how subliminal these changes are:

“... some of us still watch 90-minute films, in the dark, at the cinema, or gather as families to watch in a fairly linear way an evening’s scheduled ‘broadcast’ television. But many do not consume their ‘media’ in such ways. These are old habits or practices, residual options among many other newer ones.” (Dovey et al. 2009, 9)

To further emphasize this, we as humans live in times that we have decided to call the ‘Information Age’, and there is a good reason for it. An average person living in the digital age is bombarded with vast amounts of information compared to an average person living in the 18th or 19th century. To illustrate this massive change James Potter compares the amount of information we are exposed to with how information was accessed two centuries ago:

“Until about two centuries ago, the majority of the population could not read, and even if it could, there were few books available.[...] Time, however, is a big problem. If you were to try to read only the new books published this year, you would have to read a book every 3 minutes for 24 hours each day with no breaks over the entire year— that is 20 books per hour and 480 books each and every day. All that effort would be needed just to keep up with the new titles published in the United States alone! You would have no time left to read any of the other 66 million book titles in existence worldwide. And this example is limited to only books!” (Potter 2012, 8)

Considering both what is said on *New Media: a critical introduction* and combined with James Potter's work, it can be said that the media we are exposed to has been through drastic changes and might not be what we expect it to be. These all confirm and emphasize that we are under a bombardment of a massive amount of information in the modern age, to the extent that we cannot process these by ourselves. That is how this information is tools in the hands of those who have the means to communicate them to the mass. What we see, hear

or do in the media discourse are just selected information for us by the producers of this specific media that we are exposed to.

The undeniable fact is that in the 21st century, media and communication and those who control them have the means to feed our minds with specific information that they see fit. This factor could be quite indisputable to many, but the degree to which we unconsciously expose ourselves to be fed this information is still not very clear. Whether it is a hidden agenda or not by the media producers, our minds process these data and are influenced by it.

3.3 Sex and Sexual contents in video games

The technological advancement of the modern age has changed the way of communication and has made the information easier to access. With computers available in most household these days, computer-related media is also accessible. One such media is video games, a form of entertainment which by many is viewed only as a way to pass the time for adolescents. This view has caused many to overlook its effects not only on individual levels but, more importantly, on social and cultural levels.

It is uncommon to talk about race or sexuality when discussing video games. Mostly they are seen as pass times with trivial storylines and simple mechanics only to keep us entertained for a short period of time. However, with the growth in this industry and the competitive market, the need for more complex games has arisen. With more complex games came more complex depth in the social and cultural influence of this medium.

With this industry's growth to one of the leading entertainment influential media, studies have been carried out regarding different aspects of video games. One such study is done by Karen E. Dill and Kathryn P. Thill regarding sexuality portrayed in video games. In their study which games that are considered a new cultural icon for the younger generation, they focus on the portrayal of characters in video games regarding how the audience interprets male and female characters. Although video games are not necessarily exclusive to the younger generation, their study has shown how the younger generation perceive gender roles in video games.

This study which was conducted mainly around video game magazines, showed that there is indeed a clear distinction between males and females' interpretation:

“Though older generations are not attuned to video game culture, video game characters are icons in youth popular culture. Character images tell blatantly sexist stories about gender, and research is just beginning to reveal and analyze those stories. The vision of masculinity video game characters project is that men should be powerful, dominant, and aggressive. The story video game characters tell about femininity is that women should be extreme physical specimens, visions of beauty, objects of men’s heterosexual fantasies, and less important than men. An emerging trend, though, is that these sexy, curvaceously thin beauties are also now typically violent.” (Dill and Thill 2007, 861)

This notion regarding masculinity of this media is also mentioned in the book *Game Cultures: Computer Games As New Media: Computer Games as New Media:*

“The narrative worlds of computer games are heavily coded as masculine, not only in terms of content but also in how they are marketed, located, exchanged and reviewed. The use of ‘booth babes’ at games expositions, the use of highly sexualized imagery in the packaging and advertising of games, the Nintendo ‘For Men’ tag line that accompanied the Game Boy Advance SP campaign and the dominant construction of female games characters as ‘hypersexual’ all serve to underscore this coding.” (Jon and Kennedy 2006, 37)

Both studies point to the fact that the gaming industry and those responsible for its development are sexist, and games are developed to appeal more to the male preferences than it does for its female audiences. This sort of favouritism is done through how female characters are illustrated in video games or how video games’ consumers are generally thought to be male. This has caused, as mentioned by Jon and Kennedy that even marketing campaigns to target male audiences’ attraction. Nevertheless, these are not limited to how a game is advertised or how certain characters are made; But it could go deeper on the content of the game or how the game narrative is. Whether if it has been because of the male-dominant industry or because of market demand, sexual content and the whole notion of sex has found their way into video games as well.

Sex, sexual activities or any other part of sexual content has been part of many games as early as the 1980s. However, there is a distinction between games that the central theme is sex or other games that sex is only part of the game or even an optional part of the game. In

regards to games that only put sex as part of the game and not the main objective, there are studies done in regards to sexism and gender in games (Burgess, Stermer, and Burgess 2007; Usva 2015) or on sexual options provided to the player (Murray 2017; Sousa 2014; Wysocki and Lauteria 2015). Nevertheless, the main focus of this research is on the other type of games that center around sex and its other aspects. These games, which are often referred to as porn games or adult games, are mainly created to stimulate the excitement of sexual encounters.

As video games are part of mass media, it is a tool to communicate to people and convey messages. Furthermore, video games are an interactive form of media, which means consumers are part of the data communicated through this medium. That is done either by changing a particular part of video games (modding⁵) or by simply playing the games (inputs and decisions that the player makes in the game narrative) (Jon and Kennedy 2006, 131–39). This level of involvement could cause complex issues when it comes to porn games. Exposure to certain information, in this case, acts done in these games, could have long-lasting effects on both the individual but also on the social and cultural norms. This is the main area of research on Albert Bandura's *Social Cognitive Theory of Mass Communication*. Although his work is mainly directed toward television and its influence on social behaviours, considering the growth of video games, its interactivity and ease of access could play a more prominent role than television. This is how he describes the messages that are conveyed through mass media to its audience and the influence that media can have on social patterns:

“By exemplification one can get people to behave altruistically, to volunteer their services, to delay or seek gratification, to show affection, to select certain foods and drinks, to choose certain kinds of apparel, to converse on particular topics, to be inquisitive or passive, to think creatively or conventionally, or to engage in other permissible courses of action. Thus, the types of models who predominate within a social milieu partly determine which human qualities, from among many alternatives, are selectively activated. The actions of models acquire the power to activate and

⁵ **Modding** in video games means creating a modification for games and changing them in certain ways. Mods are created by people other than the games' original developers and sometimes may not be sanctioned by the developers.

channel behavior when they are good predictors for observers that positive results can be gained by similar conduct.” (Bandura 2002, 282)

With such significant influence that mass media and, in this case, video games can have, it is surprising to see the lack of research done in areas such as sexual violence and rape in video games. It would be unfair not to mention the studies done in this regards (V. Beck and Rose 2021; V. S. Beck et al. 2012; deWinter 2015; Diamond and Uchiyama 1999). However, considering that games with such themes have been around since the 1980s, there is a lack of studies. This shortage is more apparent in Japanese researchers compared to the westerns. Japanese developers also created their first *eroge* game in the 1980s and since then has been on one side of the game industry and porn games. Especially with Japanese games such as *rapelay*, which are still legal in Japan through online retailers, the lack of studies regarding sexual violence in the media is apparent. Nevertheless, there are a few studies that revolve around these games.

3.4 Adult games in Japan

Since the creation of the first generation of video games, Japan has always been one side of this industry. Developers and companies from Japan always had a significant role in the evolution of the video game industry. Even though the trend of progress was different in Japan and the west (Primarily the United States), but Japan has influenced not only its local market, but they have made plenty of changes on the global development of this industry. A great example of their influence on the global market is how Nintendo saved the US video game crash; in 1985, after a market crash due to poor quality games, *Nintendo Entertainment System*, a home entertainment system, entered the US market after success in the Japanese market. This action revived the Video game industry in the west by introducing a new model for a new generation of gaming. (Ernkvist 2008, 184–85; Wolf 2012, 4–5).

Even with all its influence over the global market over the years, Japan’s local market is still very dependent on games developed by Japanese developers. Looking at the sale figures for the first half of 2020, revenue from both software and hardware combined were 174.8 billion Yen (equivalent to 1.6 billion US Dollars). Nevertheless, among the top 10 most sold games, only one is non-Japanese, *Minecraft* (Batchelor 2020). For comparison, the European and US most sold games in 2020 are a mixture of western and Japanese games (Dealessandri 2020; Grubb 2021). This difference between the two markets could result from

how different the industries in these regions formed explained by the large influence that Nintendo had in the 1980s US video game crash. Nevertheless, Japan has a very complex hybrid video game industry with a heavy influence over the global market. In the following research, *The foundation of Geemu: A brief history of early Japanese video games*, this is how Picard a researcher on Japanese media and video games describes this industry:

“Japanese video games, or geemu, are not linked to an ‘essence’ of any kinds (national, mediatic, etc.), but to a market, or rather to -- admittedly unstable and fluctuating -- markets. [...] Thus, geemu is both global (with its transnational arrangements), local (since it is a market partially isolated), and “glocal” (sometimes playing on the two fronts at once, and including both the “globallocal” and “localization” concepts) phenomenon, as well as a concept influenced by various discourses (from the industry, the fans, the academia) and practices which evolve according to social, cultural, economic and (trans)national contexts.” (Picard 2013, chap. Geemu in context)

What Picard is describing is an industry with its local market isolation, still has a global influence over video game development. However, this feature of the Japanese market is what separates it from the other markets. Japanese follow markets and other social and cultural trends in order to develop and market their games. This characteristic is even more fascinating when looking into adult games.

Although the adult game genre is not exclusive to Japan or Japanese developers, the emergence of this genre was simultaneous with its western competitors. However, their developments took very different routes. Western developers mostly took sexual content as part of their games and not the main goal. At the same time, the Japanese still have big development studios dedicated to producing games with the specific theme of sexual activities. This aspect is particularly apparent in cases such as the controversial franchise *Grand Theft Auto*. Even though the central theme of the game is not exclusively sexual, however, there are parts that illustrate sexual content, such as sex and prostitution. Nevertheless, no direct reference or images is showing sexual behaviours or genitals in these instances. Even though players were sometimes rewarded for some of these actions with sexual behaviours, they were only an optional part of the game (DeVane and Squire 2008, 1–2; Dill et al. 2005, 126). When it comes to games with exclusive sexual content, there are games developed by western studios with more focus on sexual activities. Games such as

Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude which the goal is to ultimately charm female characters in the game with the intention of sexual intercourse, but as the developers have mentioned, the game is a form of comical take on sexual behaviour: “Inspired by films like *American Pie*, and *There is Something About Mary*, the game is packed full of outrageous humour and raucous game-play” (Schott 2005, 3–4).

Furthermore, studios that developed these adult games do not only make adult games, but they have created games in a different genre, and these adult games could be considered their attempt to tap into a new market. In other words, there is no mainstream studio that creates adult games in the west. In the case of games with pornographic themes, they are mainly developed by indie developers⁶ and are funded through crowdfunding solutions (Lankoski and Dymek 2020). This solution further proves the point that adult games are not openly developed and published in the west.

Japan’s case is not very similar. Adult games in Japan have a considerable market and are developed by well-established studios which mainly focus their effort on making games with themes revolving around sexual activities.

Nonetheless, studying Japanese adult games could suffer challenges on its own. As Hibiki Ōkura puts it, adult games in Japanese discourse have two major dilemmas. One is that “adult games” do not have an unambiguous definition. When categorized, pornographic games are included in the definition; however, along with that are games such as *Grand Theft Auto*, which has indirect sexual content in no way close to pornographic games. The other issue he points out is the visual novels. A genre of game that follows a narrative through texts and choices which the player makes. These forms of games are also supplemented with still images to give a visual of the story. Ōkura state that most of the times, when adult games are being studied, these novel games are often neglected. That is considering that novel games make up most of the adult games. Furthermore, Ōkura adds that there has been a trend in recent years that adult games are being marketed as “dating sim” or “romance games”, which adds to the complexity of researches in this field (Ōkura 2015, 15–16).

The notion of referring to porn games as romance games creates a new dynamic between games and consumers as virtual romance seems to be a replacement for reality in

⁶ Independent developers

some cases. This is the case of Ōkura's other research in which "Otaku" and their consumption of virtual products are studied. In this research, six individuals in their mid to late 20s were interviewed regarding their consumption of adult games and their own sex lives. Although as the author mention, these individuals may not represent a good example for the target sample. One crucial factor in these interviews, which is related to this research as well, is that how these individuals relate virtual world "romance" to the actual world. Popular belief is that the virtual world and games are meant to be an extension of reality. In other words, they are supposed to be based on reality but interpreted in another way. However, Ōkura, through this research, shows that the reason many male adults in Japan prefer virtual romance to genuine relationships is not to experience reality in a virtual world but to escape reality into a different world. Although, it is still unclear if these individuals prefer to make these virtual activities a reality. Nevertheless, Ōkura believes that people who consume adult games or romance games find a clear distinction between the virtual world and the real world, and it is due to this that they prefer virtuality to reality. Furthermore, some of those interviewed in this study even made a further distinction between the "sexual activity" present in these games and its romantic aspect (Ōkura 2011).

Based on previously mentioned researches, it can be said that media is one of the most considerable aspects of modern living. It has gone through many changes in its evolution to its digital form, which we are consuming today. While most of these changes are beneficial to the average person, with more information, more complexity has risen from it. The extensive amount of data that consumers of these media are exposed to can affect individuals' perception and social and cultural behaviours. With the accessibility of digital tools in the 21st century, media essentially has the mean to shape people's mind.

Video games are also part of media and recently have become a prevalent form of entertainment. This contemporary entertainment system is highly dependent on technologies in computer science. This could be one reason that many are more attracted to studying the technical part of video games than studying the psychological, cultural, or social impacts that it could have. The video game industry is not a very newly formed industry; after many years of development, new games are attracting the attention of researchers and scholars toward other aspects of video games. One such aspect is the representation of sex, sexual behaviours, and sexual activities. As a form of interactive entertainment media, video games are able to create virtual realities and fantasies for the consumers to play in. however whether these

realities are an extension to the real world or they are mere fantasies fabricated only for entertainment, it is unavoidable to include some characteristics of the real world into these virtual realities in order to make them more relatable. Sex is one of these characteristics that, over the years, have been used in media to appeal to their target consumers. Video games are not an exception. It is not a surprise that some video games producers now shift their interest into using sexual attraction to their advantage, hence creating adult games.

Considering that Japan has always been a significant influencer over the video game market and with Japan's pornographic industry having its characteristics and sub-genre (at least on local levels), studying Japanese adult video games can give an insight into how and what consumers of these media are exposed to. Notably, now that cases such as child pornography and violent sexual acts are becoming severe in Japan (Diamond and Uchiyama 1999, 5–9; Ikema 2018, 115–16). Nevertheless, games such as *Rapelay* is still available in Japan even though the subject of it directly revolves around child pornography and sexual assault.

4 Japanese games argument

Japanese media has always had a clear distinction compared to western media. Even in its primitive form of art and literature, the differences between east and west were noticeable. Japanese literature, inspired by Chinese philosophy and culture, had different characteristics than its western counterpart. Works such as *Genjimonogatari*, written by Murasaki Shikibu, a female author, in the 11th century was an unheard phenomenon in western culture. The content of these works of literature was also very different. *Genji*, the main character in the story of *Genjimonogatari*, is considered a rapist by scholars for his many sexual conquests (Childs 1999, 1061–62). These differences in cultural values and literature contents is nothing new to the academics studying in this field.

The significant differences in arts and literature were also carried over to the modern age and the digital media form. The Japanese cinema has had characteristics that have made it unique, Very different from western cinema. This uniqueness also is influenced heavily due to events that caused major cultural complexity to Japanese society such as the end of the World War II. (Amit 2019; Coates 2018). With advancement through time and more variants of entertainment media, this uniqueness is also apparent in the more recent variety of media such as TV shows, anime, and video games.

From westerners' point of view, Japanese TV shows are found silly and unrelatable. Most often, in the west Japanese TV shows are known for their bizarre themes. The contents are different and unique; even from a technical standpoint, the delivery of these TV shows is different. The one-of-a-kind perspective and interaction between the TV shows or hosts and the audience is unseen by the avid western TV consumer. However, Japanese daytime TV is notorious for its implications of too much Japaneseness as opposed to reality. It is considered a propaganda form to represent a unified nation and underline Japanese cultural norms (Painter 1993, 298–300). With these differences, TV shows and reality shows from Japan are gaining popularity in the west, whether for their bizarreness or dramas. This popularity is evident in titles such as *Most Extreme Elimination Challenge*, a comedy series released in 2003, a dubbed and repurposed version of 1986 *Takeshi's Castle*. This title and other new series based on Japanese TV shows show a trend in the popularity of Japanese TV shows.

Nonetheless, whenever there is a discussion of differences between Japanese entertainment media and its western counterpart, one area mainly discussed is anime. Anime,

alongside Video games, is one of the most imported forms of media from Japan to western audiences. Their contents are unique, and the other attributes are distinguishable even to unprofessional. Most often, anime's narrative follows a teenage boy's story in unrealistic and extravagant settings. The heavy emphasis on pure Japanese culture in anime is noticeable, and many of their fantasies are driven by traditional Japanese mythology and folklore. Even in anime's visuals, there is a clear distinction of illustration of the human form in anime. One noticeable and famous difference in anime is the depiction of the body and eyes in anime. Most commonly, the eyes are larger and, depending on the narrative, and unrealistic emphasis is on certain parts of the body (Figure 2). Regardless of anime's uniqueness to Japanese culture, In western society, there has been a significant trend in the popularity of anime. Even though anime is being translated and dubbed into the local language, some prefer the original Japanese version to keep the authenticity of its cultural content. This preference leads to new ways that westerners are familiarizing themselves with Japanese culture through anime. However, as is the case with entertainment media, most of the contents in anime are only directed toward entertainment and are exaggerated.

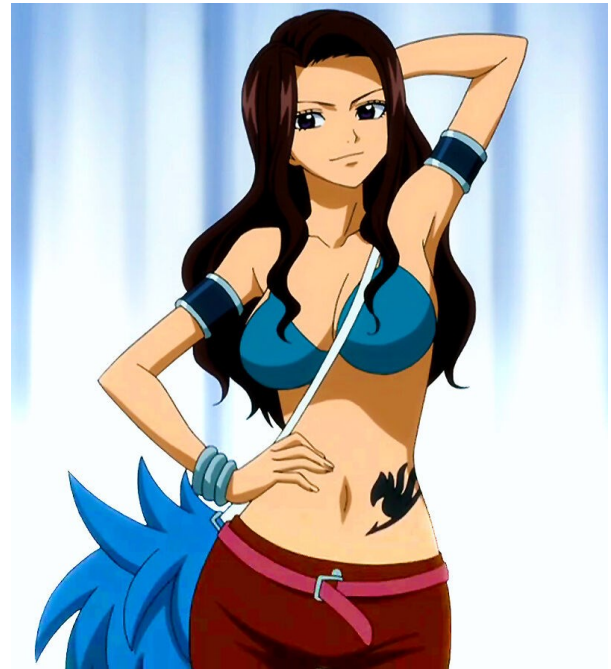


Figure 2 - An example of unrealistic emphasis on female body form and unnecessary revealing outfits (Source: aminoapps.com)

In the discourse of sexual content and pornographic Japanese anime and manga are somewhat unique. In their local market, legally and culturally, the sexual parts are added to more freely to the narrative of these media. Although sexual content in form of animated porn is not exclusive to Japan, their characteristics and approach is unique. The Japanese have a unconventional approach to rape and child pornography, but in a bizarre manner (Nixon and Dusterhöft 2017, 12–15). Nevertheless, the Japanese legal system has reacted to these contents and have adjusted their laws to better control child pornography in virtual reality, however, the difference between Japanese laws and the more restrictive western laws added by the difference in cultural views, Japanese anime are often found to reach various problems

when they are exported (intentionally or unintentionally) to western societies (McLelland 2016, 12–16).

Japanese video games, to some extent, follow similar characteristics of anime. Although, as discussed, video games, due to their interactivity, bring a new dynamic to their relationship with the audience. Even the type and degree of interactivity is different in video games. Like anime and other forms of media, Japanese video games are also distinguishable from their Western counterparts. However, the video game industry is also more transnational, and even the development often involves an international team.

4.1 Characteristics of Japanese video games

Japanese video games had always had an undeniable impact on the global video game industry. From the early *Nintendo Entertainment System*, which influenced the US video game industry heavily, to Sony's PlayStation gaming system, which still plays a role in today's market. Franchises like *Super Mario Bros* are so popular on the international market that during the closing ceremony of the 2016 Rio Olympic games, Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe appeared with the iconic Mario attire. It is undeniable that many gamers today have at least heard of Nintendo's popular franchises.

Japanese video game companies always had success in international markets. Nintendo, one of the leading companies in the Japanese video game industry, had continuously developed its games exclusively for its own hardware. Even though this may have limited their potential market, they are still among the most successful video game companies worldwide with iconic franchises like *Super Mario Bros*, *Legend of Zelda*, *Pokémon* and many others. However, Nintendo is not the only successful Japanese company in the international market. With the competitive and massive market of video games, Japan, with its technological edge and unique style, is still rising on the international markets. Companies like *Capcom*, *Sega*, *Square Enix*, *Namco Bandai*, and *Konami* have their franchises and audiences worldwide (Consalvo 2009).

When it comes to the characteristics of the game developed by Japanese companies, there are some differences between games and other media types. As mentioned, anime has a very distinct visual style. Although it could be argued that games developed in Japan also have certain visual aspects (primarily games developed by Nintendo), this may not be the case for every game. For instance, the *Metal Gear* Franchise is focused on a CIA operative,

and its visuals and themes are similar to franchises like *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell*, a game developed by *Ubisoft*, a western developer studio. The Japanese games differences and characteristics can be divided into four categories.

4.1.1 Narrative

In most cases, the Japanese game's narrative is revolved around the main protagonist of the game as opposed to events and settings. The narratives are presented to the player from the perspective of the main character(s). The game essentially is what the character goes through and the experiences in the storyline. As mentioned, even though games like *Metal Gear* follow a western-style narrative in which the characters and settings are non-Japanese and western, the entire narrative is revolving around the decisions and actions of the main character, *snake*. On the contrary, the similar title in the west focuses on the events rather than the characters and presents the narrative to players in the forms of events happening in the game world. Even in different instalments of franchises, such as *Super Mario Bros* and *Legend of Zelda*, the games' setting may vary. However, the characters have been the same throughout many instalments of these two franchises, with over ten games on each franchise. Meanwhile, popular western franchises in the same genre, such as *Assassin's Creed* or *Elder Scrolls*, have similar settings and themes in their different instalments; however, their characters change in each game.

Such character-driven narratives create a bond between the players and the characters in the game. As is the case of *Super Mario Bro*, the infamous character, *Mario*, is internationally recognized and even is integrated into other games due to his popularity. This dynamic makes the players have more personal connections to the character and its actions. Whereas in western developed games, characters in most cases have less impact on the narrative and are considered disposable or changeable. In this type of narrative, players have more connection to the setting and the theme of the storyline rather than to its characters. This connection also means that the actions and decisions done by the characters in-game are overlooked in most cases.

4.1.2 Freedom of Choices

As discussed, video games offer a new level of interactivity between the audience and the media; however, this interactivity is not the same in every game. In the early forms of video games, due to technological limitation at the time, having multiple choices in video

games was not possible. Nevertheless, with more computer power, this has changed over the recent years, allowing the developers to include multiple ending narratives to the players. These narratives are based on the decisions that players make throughout the game progression, which can cause them to experience the game and its narrative differently. This trend to include freedom of choice in the game narrative is becoming popular among western game developers. Franchises like *Mass Effect* have utilized this feature very well. A choice made in the first game in the trilogy can affect the final outcome in the last game in the trilogy, indicating high freedom of choices that can impact the game's outcome. Another example is *Detroit: Become Human*, a game heavily dependent on the player's choice to progress in narrative. In this case, the game's entire narrative is dependent on every choice that the players make during the game.

One thing that these games and other games with the choice have in common is that there are no right or wrong choices. The choices are presented to the player only to choose between a different narrative of the game. Even if one choice leads to the failure of a task or death of a character, that is still considered part of the narrative to be experienced by the players. This further implies that every choice has consequences that will affect the narrative and the game even if not experienced immediately.

Furthermore, the concept of freedom is not limited to the narrative. In recent times with more freedom that developers have, they have given the player the freedom to choose their gameplay style. In popular franchises like *Splinter Cell* or *Assassin's Creed*, the player has the choice to play the game violently or take a more non-violent path. The gameplay has no impact on the narrative whatsoever, making the player entirely free to choose whether to play the game violently or not; this further emphasizes the freedom of choices apparent in western video games.

When it comes to Japanese games, they do not even closely offer this level of freedom to the players. The Japanese games are offered in a linear form to the consumers, and the narrative can only progress in the way that the developers intended it. Games have more of a do or die concept where if the objective is not explicitly carried as instructed, it will result in a failure in the game. This limitation has resulted in structured gameplay in which the player can only control the speed of the narrative and has no other control over it. Players can only watch the storyline, similar to a movie, and interactivity is focused chiefly on its gameplay elements. Although both ways of approaching freedom of choice have their advantages and

disadvantages, the fact that there is a trend of including freedom in western games can establish a cultural background that is more based on freedom than a structured system.

4.1.3 Content

In this context, the content of video games is referring to their theme and settings. Most western games tend to have a realistic approach to their theme. The content of their video games is intended to be an extension of the real world and events. Similarly, the gameplay is in a way intended to be as realistic as possible. Titles such as *Call of Duty*, *Assassin's Creed* or *Grand Theft Auto* has taken inspiration from real-life events or settings for their themes. Western developed games rarely have a fantasy theme (although there are exceptions like *World of Warcraft*) and often are taking place in real places or an obvious iteration of a real place (for example, the city which *Grand Theft Auto 5* takes place in a city loosely based on Los Angeles although it is called Los Santos).

However, Japanese games are highly fantasized and are rarely based on real-world events or places. The inclusion of mythologies and magic is expected in the games. In Nintendo's game, all the characters have unrealistic or futuristic abilities. In a popular franchise like *Final Fantasy*, the entire world, theme and narrative is fantasy, as the name suggests. Furthermore, this unrealistic approach is apparent in the gameplay mechanics of the game as well. Characters can do humanly impossible actions and are not very realistically portrayed. This notion is very similar to how main characters in Japanese anime often have unrealistic features and abilities. Japanese game has a heavy focus on their characters, and these fantasy-like features are reflected on how players interpret the character, the narrative and the game.

4.1.4 Violence or Sexual

Another aspect that Japanese game is quite different in is their perspective toward sexual content and violence. As it has been a long controversy over violence in video games and their implication of killing, western video game developers tend to rely on a high level of violence and action for entertainment. Very apparent in games such as *Grand Theft Auto* or *Saints Row* which the player has the freedom to kill any non-playable character (NPC) at any point of the game.

However, the Japanese game tends to less focus on violence in their games. Japanese games often have a calmer approach and usually refrain from directly mentioning death, decapitation and similar subjects. None of the franchises developed by Nintendo has any direct reference to death, and other developers usually do not show blood or other references to violence in their games. On the other hand, Japanese developer shows more freedom regarding the amount of sexual content in their games.

To better understand the difference in regards to violence and sexuality, one can look at the localization⁷ efforts to publish games on different markets. When western games are localized for the Japanese market, the most common features removed from the game are decapitation and blood. When *Grand Theft Auto* was to be published in Japan, the developers had to remove the feature, enabling the players to decapitated NPCs. Furthermore, *Resident Evil*, originally a Japanese title, removed references to decapitation for its Japanese release as well. Similarly, when Japanese titles were to be released in western markets, publishers had to make changes in the visuals to titles such as *Devil May Cry* to hide nudity. Similar cover image of several Japanese titles was slightly changed to cover female body parts. Although releasing games with sexual content is not illegal in the west, these modifications were done so the games can be published for the intended age group.

As discussed, the characteristics of Japanese games compared to western developed games are apparent and fundamental. Even though there might be exceptions from both sides, these features are generally valid for titles coming from their respective region. Distinguishable by the consumers, these two regions have created a fan base for their franchises. Although when it comes to Nintendo, their approach to game design is unique; their visual style is distinct, and their content sometimes can differ from other Japanese titles. However, the other Japanese developers share the features discussed beforehand in their game designs and can be extended to the other genre.

4.2 Pornographic games in Japan

The development of pornographic games is not exclusive to Japan. The first titles of games with erotic themes were released in 1981, but it was in 1983 that both regions started

⁷ Localization is the process which games are translated and localized for different markets. Sometimes these process include changing visuals or specific references in games that can be considered offensive in the target market.

developing more titles. Similarly to other game design, in the case of pornographic games, the approach has been different. In the early days, due to limitation from hardware, the implication of complex visual games was similar in both countries. In both regions, the game had to be limited to a certain amount of data capacity, which resulted in simple-looking games with a straightforward narrative. Nevertheless, Japanese developers tend to create games with anime characteristics and visuals. These games were heavily text-based, with still images to accompany for more immersion (visual novels). At the time, Japanese games were exclusively developed for the local market, and due to language barriers and access restriction, very few westerners got their hands on these games.

Western developers, however, focused on games with more gameplay features. The erotic aspects were a narrative feature to supplement the game, either in ironic matters or just as a storyline. On the Contrary Japanese their focus was on creating a game that was developed to arouse and satisfy sexual desires.

The first pornographic game that raised heavy criticism and controversy was developed by *Mystique* called *Custer's Revenge*. This game puts the player in the shoes of the American Civil War commander, and the goal of the game is to dodge coming arrows and reach the tied native American woman on the other screen. Both characters in this game are naked, with Custer's visible full erection, which by reaching the other side of the screen, supposedly the female character is raped. Immediately after the release of this game, it was subjected to heavy criticism for simulating rape and sexual assault. The developers tried to prevent further issues by stating that the game is intended as a form of entertainment and not for sexual enjoyment. Further, they commented that the female character is a volunteer participant, and the game does not illustrate rape. Nevertheless, the game was withdrawn in 1983. Since there was no mean for the digital distribution of games when such games were withdrawn, it was possible to contain its further circulation. This is not the case with current accessibility through the world wide web.

At the same time in Japan, a new genre of video games was forming. *Eroge*, a combination of two English words erotic and game, refers to games with erotic and sexual content. The first of such games was *Danchi Tsuma no Yuwaku*⁸ (by some accounts,

⁸ Seduction of the Condominium Wife

Yakyūken was the first Japanese Porn game (Miyamoto 2017)), which explicitly was developed for stimulating sexual pleasures. During the 1980s, more games were developed with the intention of sexual pleasures. The most common genre was visual novels, as its development was simple and popular among the local population. The narratives and visuals were closely similar to anime but with a sexual twist added to them. Nevertheless, as these games were heavily Japanese text-based and access to them were not as easily, not many of them reached the western audience.

When 3D technology was introduced to video games, the entire industry changed. Now games were able to show a 3D environment to the players with more freedom and visual immersion. Although most Japanese developers continued to develop their games in the form of visual novels, some used the new technology to further the immersion of their adult games. The most notable Japanese company that develops 3D pornographic game is Illusion soft. As the company has stated on various occasions, their products are intended only for the local market and were never developed for release outside of Japan. However, with the emergence of the worldwide web and ease of accessibility, one of their games found its way to the western market.

Rapelay is a game developed by Illusion Soft and released in the Japanese market in 2006. Most games developed by this company had little to no narrative and were merely developed for sexual entertainment. However, in *rapelay*, they had added a narrative in the form of visual novels where the sexual acts happen in a 3D environment that the player controls. The narrative begins as the main protagonist, supposedly highly influential, is released from jail upon sexual harassment charges and decides to seek revenge on the underage girl that reported him. Like other Japanese games, the game is linear, and the player has no choice but to follow the storyline intended by the developers. The game's objective is to 'break' the aforementioned girl, her sister, and their mother, so they obey the order of the main character in satisfying his sexual desires. To reach this goal, players have to sexually harass and assault these characters until they succumb to the players' desires. As the story progresses, there are occasions that player can impregnate the characters, and if these characters are not forced into abortion, it could result in failure in the game. Such narratives are uncommon, especially among 3D games, as the development of such games requires more investment. Most erotic games with complex narratives are developed in the form of visual novels to simplify the development.

With the digital age and internet connectivity, contrary to the 1980s and 90s, access to Japanese erotic games was limited; now, these games could be downloaded over the internet. As one of the characteristics of video games compared to other forms of media was audience interaction and input, without the knowledge of the developers, rapelay was translated into English, and in 2009 was up for sale on Amazon.com. This development started many legal and social controversy over the subject of rape, sexual harassment, child pornography, and sexism, which are all apparent in one single game.

Although rapelay was found to be on Amazon.com through a third-party reseller and eventually it was banned in most countries, unlike *Custer's Revenge* which the game was removed and its circulation stopped, the digital distribution of *Rapelay* continuous. This inability to control the distribution of illegal material caused politicians to blame the source of these video games.

Initially, the developers of rapelay, Illusion Soft, stood by their game and announced that the game passed Japanese laws and was only meant to be released on the Japanese market. Nonetheless, with international pressure EOCS, restricted the game from being sold physically. Illusion Soft shortly after removed any reference of this game from their website as well.

The legal restrictions and legislation may have limited the future development of such games; however, this game is still accessible online. This access raised the question of the cultural implication of such games. Whether if it is what the westerners think of Japan or vice versa. Many of those who support the development of these games believe that these games are in virtual reality and do not happen to actual people. Also, they say that rape is considered less of a crime compared to murder and mass killing, which are illustrated in western games. To see the different perspective of the western audience compared to the Japanese audience regarding both violence and sexual assault, a survey was conducted.

4.3 Survey Analysis

The survey was conducted in 4 segments, with the first segment being about general questions regarding nationality, gender and age. The second segment is regarding violence, the third regarding sexual content and pornographic games, and the last segment regarding rape and rapelay. A Cronbach's analysis was conducted on each segment of this survey. On the violence segment, the subscale alpha level with six items was .65, which indicates the

inter-item reliability is just short of an adequate level. Further analysis showed that no significant increase in level could be achieved by deleting any item. On the sexual and pornographic games segment, Cronbach's subscale alpha with eight items was .72, indicating an adequate level of inter-item reliability. The last segment with seven items had a subscale alpha level of .86, indicating a high level of inter-item reliability.

When participants were questioned to see if they associate violent games with western developers or sexual games with Japanese developers, it was found that most Westerners (53.5% disagree, 9.3% somewhat disagree) disagree that violent games are primarily from western developers. However, they were more favourable toward Japanese developed games have more reference to sexual content (40.5% somewhat agree, 21.4% agree). However, the Japanese were inconsistent with their response regarding western games being more violent, but they had similar insight into sexual content appearance in Japanese video games (42.9% somewhat agree, 33.1% agree).

Further analysis proved that western audience believes that as violence in video games are happening in the virtual world, it does not affect reality (23.9% somewhat agree, 59.8 agree). Even though the Japanese do not firmly believe in this statement, the statistics are still close to western respondents (34.8% somewhat agree, 39.7% agree). When asked if they feel the same regarding pornographic games and similar results were found that both sides strongly believed that pornographic games are in the virtual world and do not affect reality (96.8% of the western audience, 90.2% of Japanese audience responded agree and somewhat agree). However, when asked if this is also true regarding rape in video games, the results came different. While the western audiences' responses were not solid, the majority responded against this statement (34.7% disagree, 17.3% somewhat disagree). The Japanese still believed that the virtual world is separated, even concerning rape (33.1% somewhat agree, 55.6% agree). Statistics prove that the Japanese have a clear distinction between reality and video games, but the western audience, the more sensitive subjects get, the more obscure this distinction gets (Table 1).

Table 1 - Frequencies table of difference of opinion between video games and reality

		AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	DISAGREE
WESTERN AUDIENCE	Violence in video games is different	59.8%	23.9%	10.9%	5.4%
	Sex and porn in video games are different	50.8%	46.0%	1.6%	1.6%
	Rape in video games is different	28.0%	20.0%	17.3%	34.7%
JAPANESE AUDIENCE	Violence in video games is different	39.7%	34.8%	18.4%	7.1%
	Sex and porn in video games are different	63.4%	26.8%	8.5%	1.4%
	Rape in video games is different	55.6%	33.1%	6.5%	4.8%

The above hypothesis is further proved when a Spearmen correlation analysis was conducted on these variable. The western respondents had no significant correlation among the three variable. However, the Japanese showed a significant and moderately positive correlation between violence and rape distinction in video games and reality ($r = .32$, $p < .001$).

Furthermore, the analysis of the open-ended question resulted in similar responses from the Japanese audience emphasizing the fact that video games are different from reality. The most common theme among these opinions was that even though Japan is an open country regarding sexual content, the number of sexual violence is still low. However, the same type of question from the Western audience did not yield any significant result or correlation with other variables. The most common theme among respondents was that rape is a susceptible subject.

Lastly, at the end of the survey, respondents were asked that “if they were to ban one feature, what would that be” and were given six options: killing, Decapitation, Bloody violence, rape, sexual content, or others. In this field, the western audience showed a strong opinion toward baning rape, with 60.6% choosing rape. However, the Japanese were more modest in this category, and only 25.9% choose rape to ban (Table 2)

Table 2 - Which one to ban?

	KILLING	DECAPITATION	BLOODY VIOLENCE	RAPE	SEXUAL CONTENT	OTHERS
WESTERN	0%	5.3%	0%	60.6%	1.1%	33.0%
JAPANESE	2.5%	17.7%	12.7%	25.9%	3.2%	38.0%

This data further indicate that the Japanese tend to avoid banning anything from video games. As mentioned, this could be primarily due to the distinction between virtual games and reality. However, even though Western audiences were more open to violence, sexual content, and pornographic content, they still prefer to ban sexual violence from video games.

Further analysis of other variable did not result in any other significant correlation or findings.

5 Conclusion

The impact of media and video games in today's society is undeniable. Due to the interactivity of video games and the possibility of its audience to modify it and further due to the availability through digital means, the content of video games developed even for local markets can have a global effect. It may not be entirely the responsibility of developers, but it is unavoidable.

The result of this study shows that even if video games are developed for a particular local market, they can still find a way to the international market. Japan has always had a more secluded culture and market. As the developers of Rapelay mentioned, this game was only developed by Japanese law for the local market. Nevertheless, it initiated a global argument regarding the content of games developed by Japanese companies.

To answer this research's question, the different opinion of sexual content in western and Japanese audience, it was discovered that the Japanese audience has a more transparent distinction between games and the real world. Ōkura's study and interviews also confirm that the Japanese play sexual games as a mean to separate virtual reality from the actual world. On the other hands, the western audiences had no particular issues with violence or sexual content in video games; they still had lines that they believed should not be crossed. Part of this could be because of western games' reliability on realism and how they are perceived as an extension to the real world. To the western audience content of video games are an interpretation of actual events rather than fantasies. Furthermore, the separation of character in games to the events could indicate difficulty separating the act of character from the actual events for the western audience.

This research further indicates that even though video games, as part of digital media, could have substantial influence over the audience, their impact will be limited if said games contradict too many social and cultural norms. As it was observed, the Japanese had acceptance toward rape in video games; however, Westerners, as rape is a very sensitive subject, altered their perspective when the subject was rape in particular.

Nevertheless, this study does not take into account the cultural implication of the developers. As this game is merely developed as an entertainment and sexual pleasure game, their input on this issue needs more research.

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7 **Gameography**

Assassin's Creed series - Ubisoft

Blue Sky Software - Softporn Adventure (1981)

Call of Duty series - Activision

Custer's Revenge - Mystique (1982)

Danchi Tsuma no Yuwaku - Koei (1983)

Detroit: Become Human - Quantic Dream (2019)

Devil May Cry series - Capcom

Elder Scrolls series - Bethesda Softworks

Grand Theft Auto series - Rockstar Games

Legend of Zelda series - Nintendo

Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude - High Voltage Software (2004)

Mass Effect series - Electronic Arts

Metal Gear series - Konami

Minecraft - Mojang Studios (2011)

Pokémon series - Nintendo

Rapelay - Illusion Soft (2007)

Super Mario Bros. series - Nintendo

Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell series - Ubisoft

World of Warcraft - Blizzard Entertainment (2004)