Chapter II

Beauty and the Nerd: Ethnographical Analyses in the Japanese Digitalization

Gaby Anne Wildenbos, Utrecht University, The Netherlands
Yuichi Washida, Hakuhodo Inc. & The University of Tokyo, Japan

Abstract

This chapter focuses on the Japanese usage of digital products. Both the consumer and production side are addressed, whereby emphasizing the mobile phone industry on the basis of two consumer groups otakus and kogals. First, key characteristics of each consumer group are described. Second, social and cultural aspects related to consumption behavior of the otakus and kogals are examined—that is, collectivism, individualism and kawaiiness (cuteness or coolness). This is followed by the production side of digital products in Japan, highlighting two major companies involved in mobile telephony: NTT DoCoMo and Label Mobile, which in their turn, are linked to the consumption cultures of otaku and kogals.
Japan in Relation to the West

Japan plays a key role throughout the world, especially regarding technological innovation. Barclay (2004) surveys the state of contemporary Japanese technology in his report *The Technology of Japan*. In this survey it is apparent that Japanese technological capabilities are on the same level as those of the U.S. Moreover, Japan and the U.S. have a long-lasting relationship regarding this matter, which dates from the postwar period. Together with Russia, the U.S. has been in charge of Japan after World War II until the beginning of the 1950s. With regard to technology it wanted to make sure that Japan would lose its military nature. Evidently, it can be said Japan owes its strong economic position to this occupation period: “They chose to forge a new path, a path that led to postwar Japan being a military-political dwarf but an economic giant.” (Nakayama, 2001, p. 2). Japan cannot afford to withdraw from the technological relationship with the U.S., since its technological dependence on America is essential. Another way of saying it would be that the technological alliance between both countries is a matter of strategic interest for the U.S., whereas it is one of economic and technological necessity for Japan (Barclay, 2004).

Where does this place other Western countries, like Europe? Although some countries in Europe import technologies from Japan, their relationship on this matter is less strong than the Japanese-American alliance. Nevertheless, Europe’s influence on Japan is noticeable in a more general sense, namely Japan’s movement towards Westernization. Westernization was first offered to Japan in the 16th century through southern European countries. Not only did the Europeans transport an interesting cuisine, more importantly, they brought medical and scientific knowledge. However, at that time the European or Western influence was limited, since the practical needs for their science and technology was small. The second period when Japan came into contact with Westernization was at the beginning of the 20th century. Then they did experience an internal need to adapt to some of the Western modernization (Kasulis, 1995). The Japanese saw Westernization as an import item; they could use modern European and American ideas or products for practical needs related to political, military, and economic necessities. Nowadays, it is even said that “seeing the skyscrapers of Tokyo’s downtown districts, hearing Western rock or classical music even in village coffee shops, or tasting the French cuisine of its fine restaurants, it is easy for one to think of Japan as part of the Western-based family of cultures” (Kasulis, 1995, p. 1).
Related Content

Citizen Lifetime Value in E-Government
[www.igi-global.com/article/citizen-lifetime-value-government/56122?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/citizen-lifetime-value-government/56122?camid=4v1a)

Impacts of COSER Strength on Service Loyalty: Case of Automobile Repair Service in Tunisia
[www.igi-global.com/article/impacts-of-coser-strength-on-service-loyalty/218917?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/impacts-of-coser-strength-on-service-loyalty/218917?camid=4v1a)
Web Experience Effects in a Virtual Shopping Interaction Environment
www.igi-global.com/chapter/web-experience-effects-virtual-shopping/77467?camid=4v1a

The Influence of Customers Social Media Brand Community Engagement on Restaurants Visit Intentions
Muhammed Alnsour and Hadeel Rakan Al Faour (2019). International Journal of Customer Relationship Marketing and Management (pp. 1-14).
www.igi-global.com/article/the-influence-of-customers-social-media-brand-community-engagement-on-restaurants-visit-intentions/236055?camid=4v1a