

Global Otaku

Labels and Japanese Pop-Culture in Translation

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What is Otaku?

- In Japanese, オタク (Otaku), often derogatorily, means one who is obsessed with something to the point of social isolation
 - Can be seen as synonymous with English words such as geek, nerd, and freak
- In a Western context, Otaku is used to refer to fans of anime, manga, and Japanese popular culture

What is "Global Otaku"?

- The term "Global Otaku" is being used to represent the bridging between Japanese and Western interpretations of "otaku," braiding together diverse phenomena such as fandom, connection, fixation, and passion found within both sides of the otaku sphere.

Scan Here For References!



Research Questions

- How are Otaku seen at a local level in Japan and how are they received by the general public?
- What role do digital devices and communities play in Otaku culture?
 - Are all these mediums healthy?

Akihiko Kondo

- Was bullied and harassed by peers endlessly and was only able to find comfort through listening to Hatsune Miku's music
- Married Hatsune Miku in 2018
- Used the Gatebox to socialize and interact with Miku until it was discontinued in 2020
 - While he is no longer able to interact with her, he is still happy with his life

Akihiko Kondo with Hatsune Miku (New York Post)



Tsutomu Miyazaki

- Tsutomu Miyazaki, a Japanese serial killer between August 1988 and June 1989
 - Upon finding an extensive collection of anime, manga, pornography, and horror videotapes, Miyazaki was given the title "Otaku Murderer"
- This led to widespread moral panic against otaku, seeing the culture as being filled with people like Miyazaki

Gatebox and CES 2020

- The Gatebox is a hologram projection tube used to project fictional anime characters
 - They can be used to talk to, text, and control your home
- Consumer Electronics Show 2020
 - When being converted to Western markets, the devices were simplified down to tablets and drained of its "Japanese-ness"

Key Findings

- There is an assumption that otaku culture is the inability to discern fiction from reality
 - While this can be true in rare cases, it doesn't represent the majority
 - Most acknowledge the fictional nature of the medium, and are able to live normal lives outside of it
- Digital communication devices such as the Gatebox and online communities are able to provide spaces of shared connection between "otaku's" on a potentially global scale
 - But in the case of the Gatebox, the west sees it as a utility rather than a home device, leading to a further disconnect in this form of communication
- The shared label of "otaku" leads to people becoming misunderstood and stereotyped by the national community of Japan
 - However, the label also leads to the development of digital communities to grow under a shared interest, and allows it the potential to grow outside it's national bubble and into the "Global otaku"



Tsutomu Miyazaki and his room (All That Is Interesting)



Westernized Gatebox Shown at CES 2020 (Engadget)

