

Different Themes in American and Japanese Video Game Box Arts

Part 2

When it comes to human relations, as much as culture can be something that brings people together, sometimes cultural differences can lead to misunderstandings that drive us farther apart. That is why in order to create harmony amongst people, cultural psychologists, sociologists and many other people look to better understand the things that make us different. Once we obtain that information, than we can accept cultural differences, avoid misunderstandings and create better relationships across borders. The ways in which we look to understand our cultural differences are vast. It can span from studying geographical circumstances to looking at how history affects the relationships between two kinds of people. One way that cultural psychologists look to understand cultural differences is by looking at advertisement.

Advertisement is a domain where culture implications are abundant. Advertisement companies look to appeal to their consumer base by creating an advertisement that they know the consumer will interpret correctly and identify with, and the only way to do this is to understand the cultural context in which the consumers were raised in (Grier & Brumbaugh 1999). They must also be sure not to include any information that will push the consumer away from wanting to consume the product being advertised or even away from reading the entire advertisement. Therefore, these companies are sure to include imagery and ideas that the consumers will find appealing, and as a result, we can learn about a culture by looking at the advertising the people of that culture find most appealing.

However, more research is necessary to understand actually what implications can be drawn from these advertisements. In a study by Hong et al, the experimenters hypothesized that American advertisements would include more informative cues (information about the product) and tend to compare products more, while Japanese advertisements would tend to appeal to the consumers' emotional state (1987). They believed that Japanese consumers thought having too many informative cues and comparisons would feel too argumentative, something more appealing to American consumers. Despite their initial predictions, they found that neither American nor Japanese advertisements utilized comparisons very often. In addition, they found that Japanese advertisements used more emotional appeal and informative cues more often than American advertisements. This shows that despite our initial thoughts having seemingly sound logic, the truth can be the opposite of what we believe (as we are prone to being blinded by our own biases).

In a previous experiment, a couple of hypotheses were tested (see *Different Themes in American and Japanese Video Game Box Arts*). After creating a criteria for rating video game box arts on individualism, intensity, violence, anger and color, it was hypothesized that American box arts would have images that were more individualistic, intense, violent, angry and less colorful. By using the best-selling video game list from Amazon and Amazon Japan as a sample, it was concluded that the American box arts were significantly more individualistic, and intense, while Japanese box arts were more colorful. It could also be noted that a much larger percentage of Japanese box arts represented games that were made in Japan than any other country, while American box arts represented much more of a variety of games in terms of the country they were made.

However, the sample that was taken was viewed as too narrow. There is no way to generalize best sellers to all games that each country has to offer. In response to that problem, the current experiment was created. The first step was to update the criteria that was used in the previous experiment. There were times in the initial experiment when the criteria could not account for the imagery that appeared in a sample, so an update was necessary (see *Updated Criteria for Archival Study*). A few items were also added: genre, console, and year released. Though nothing specific was planned for these variables, collecting them was a matter of fact, not measurement, and therefore was included for possible future use.

In order to gather a sample that would be more generalizable, the sample had to be one that was collected in the respective countries. This is because stores that sell video games have a much larger variety of games that can be randomized without having to bias or narrow the sample with a specific search criteria (like when searching the internet). This meant that instead of only having best-selling games as a sample, the sample would be games that are still sold in stores that sell video games. While this is not a perfect population to choose from (games still in stores are likely to be relatively new or used games that customers sold back to the stores), it covers a much larger variety of games than using a search criteria on the internet ever could. This was made clear when the experimenter encountered games and video game genres that he had never encountered before, something that did not happen as often when collecting samples off of Amazon.

Before going to the store to collect the samples, a criteria for what stores would be included was created and randomly sampled from. In Japan, the stores that would be included would be stores that were not specialized (e.g. retro video game stores), sold video games and were within a 25 minute walking distance from Akihabara Station according to Google Maps.

There was an attempt to include all stores that fit this criteria, though it may be the case that some stores that fit this criteria did not show up on Google Maps and were difficult to find for people unfamiliar with the area. In the end, five stores were included in the analysis (one being eliminated due to faulty randomization). In each store, 20 box arts were collected, totaling in 100 box arts from Japan. These stores included: Sofmap, Book Off, Trader, and Yodobashi Camera. Each store had its own layout, so the experimenter was required to randomize while in the store, but in general, the stores were able to be broken down into sections, columns and rows. The collection at each store spanned from about an hour to an hour and a half.

In New York City, a similar method was implemented for finding stores. Stores that were not specialized, sold video games and were within a 25 minute walking distance from the 42nd street train station (connecting the 2 and 3 train) according to Google Maps were included in the randomization. In the end, the stores that were included were Best Buy, Gamestop and P.C. Richard & Son. Similar to Japan, 20 box arts in each store were collected, totaling in 100 box arts. The layout of each store was different, but in general, the stores sold less games than the Japanese stores, so the collection for each store spanned from about 45 minutes to an hour.

Though the criteria included everything from the last experiment, the main hypotheses were based off of the significant results from the first time this experiment was performed. In other words, it was predicted that Japanese box arts would have more collectivistic and colorful imagery than American box arts, and that more Japanese box arts would represent games made in Japan than American box arts would represent games made in America. Unfortunately, after analyzing the data, only a significant difference for two of the three hypotheses was found. The following table shows the data for individualistic and collectivistic imagery.

(Data for Individualistic and Collectivistic Imagery)

				Total
		Individual	Group	
US	Count	49	51	100
	Expected Count	44.0	56.0	100.0
Japan	Count	39	61	100
	Expected Count	44.0	56.0	100.0
Total	Count	88	112	200
	Expected Count	88.0	112.0	200.0

The American box arts had 49 box arts with individualistic imagery and 51 box arts with collectivistic imagery, while the numbers for Japanese box arts were 39 and 61 respectively. With only a significance value of $p = 0.15$, no difference was shown. This is the most interesting finding, as one of the common differences talked about between American and Japan is the attitude about individualism and collectivism. It is also interesting because there was a significant difference the first time this study was performed. It is possible that it had to do with the samples that were collected. The more generalized sample does not show a significant difference, but a sample of the best-selling games on Amazon shows a significant difference. The implications that the games that sell best in America are those with box arts that have individualistic images and those that sell best in Japan are those with box arts that have collectivistic images are enticing. However, other variables cannot be ignored. The best-selling games are also likely to have bigger budgets, and games sold on Amazon use the internet while those sold in stores do not. Since there are so many different ways to interpret the implications, more research and data are needed in order to make stronger conclusions.

(Data for Colorful Imagery)

		Colorful		Total
		5+	>5	
US	Count	57	43	100
	Expected Count	65.0	35.0	100.0
Japan	Count	73	27	100
	Expected Count	65.0	35.0	100.0
Total	Count	130	70	200
	Expected Count	130.0	70.0	200.0

The criteria for color works in a very specific way. The first thing to note is that eye, skin and hair color of humans do not count. This is mostly to keep from biasing the results and Japanese box arts tend to have unusual hair and eye color for their characters. In addition, if two colors blend together in a way that makes them harder to distinguish from each other, the color is counted as one color. Colors that are very similar, like two close shades of blue are counted together, with the exception of red and pink because they carry much different implications. With this criteria, the data showed that 57 American box arts had five or more colors while 43 had less than five. In contrast, 73 Japanese box arts had five or more colors while only 27 had less than five colors. This led to a significance value of $p = 0.018$. Similar to the first time this experiment was done, Japanese box arts tended to be a lot more colorful than American box arts. This may be because as a collectivistic society, background and context have a lot more importance in imagery (Oyserman 2006).

(Data for where the game was made)

		Made In		Total
		Same	Different	
US	Count	64	36	100
	Expected Count	72.5	27.5	100.0
Japan	Count	81	19	100
	Expected Count	72.5	27.5	100.0
Total	Count	145	55	200
	Expected Count	145.0	55.0	200.0

This criteria was made after finding an article that claimed Japanese consumers were much more likely to buy Japanese products, as a form of respect (Shavitt 2006). Whether or not that assumption is true might require more research, but it cannot be denied that this data showed a lot more products from Japan being sold in Japan than American products being sold in America. This may have to do with Japan's impact in the creation of the video game business, but it is by no means impossible for Japanese video game stores to have a similar amount of foreign games as American video game stores have. With America having 64 out of 100 of the box arts representing American-made games, Japan had 81 out of 100 of the box arts representing Japanese-made games leaving only 19 to be foreign-made. With a significance value of $p = 0.007$, Japan had a lot more Japanese made games in their stores than America had American made games in their stores.

The categories of intensity, violence and anger resulted in insignificant data, consistent with the original experiment. Analysis regarding the genre, console and year the game was made have yet to be done, but are recorded and available for use when needed.

There are a couple of things that can be noted for improvement. Those things include increasing the knowledge of the experimenter in regards to places that can be sampled in Japan and in terms of the types of genres and games that can be encountered in Japan. The other important thing to note is the lack of inter-rater reliability. While Akihabara is known as a place where games are abundant, it is also known as a place for specialists. That being said, it is possible that other places in Japan can offer a more general sample of the types of games and box arts that are encountered during the everyday lives of Japanese people. This is important because it is the average video game player that is more likely to be persuaded by a box art and not a specialist who may already know what they need to know about a game before looking at the box art. In addition, it is possible to miss some stores that may be perfect for the sampling criteria without having much experience with the specific area of Japan that is being sampled. The reason it may be helpful for increasing experimenter knowledge in terms of game genres in Japan is because classifying games by genre ended up being a much more difficult process than initially thought. Games can sometimes be included in a number of different genres, and if the person collecting data is unfamiliar with a genre, the process can become even more confusing (and therefore useless). Lastly, inter-rater reliability is an issue that was present in the original experiment. Without having multiple raters, especially ones who are blind to the hypotheses, the data can end up being biased in favor of finding results. To try and combat this problem, when rating box arts that have more ambiguous imagery, the rater opted to rate the imagery in the direction opposite of the hypothesis. However, in the future, having multiple raters would make significant results a lot stronger.

References

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