

A COMPARISON OF AD ATTITUDE RECEPTION BETWEEN IN-GAME ADVERTISEMENTS IN WESTERN AND JAPANESE GAMES

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1 INTRODUCTION

The videogame industry has been one of the leading forms of media in terms of revenue, having had almost constant growth since 1997, being worth around 34 billion dollars at the time, when adjusted for 2023's inflation rate (Rao, 2023). By comparison, the USA Federal Trade Commission found the industry to capable of reaching \$170 billion by the end of 2022, 5 times bigger than what the movie sector made (Parreno, 2022). This value ended up being higher, around \$184b (Wijman, 2022). It is the highest grossing entertainment industry (Divers, 2023) and the only media type that surpasses it being television (Guttmann, 2022), mainly due to advertisement profits, as Pay-Tv itself only yielded about \$151 billion in 2022, a number that is expected to fall in the coming years (Butts, 2023; see also Mamerow, 2023).

Using 2022's global revenue as a base and rounding percentages to one decimal, the USA is the biggest market, with 25.1% of global revenue originating from it, with China and Japan coming in 2nd and 3rd, with 23.9% and 10.4% respectively. However, when calculating the dollars per capita, the market that spends the most is Japan, with each person spending \$260.22 dollars on average, in comparison to the USA's \$221.16 and China's \$63.19 (Newzoo, 2024). It also possesses a large amount of successful game developers and publishers, such as Sony and Nintendo, who are also the creators of the majority of the most sold gaming consoles of all time (Yaden, 2023), as well as the recent leads when taking into account consoles currently in the market as of the time of writing (Kain, 2023). Originating from a Japanese game by Nintendo, Pokémon is the highest grossing media franchise of all time (Latto and Rauti, 2021), with some considering many of the most recognizable game characters ever created to have their origins in Japan (Weber, 2021).

Being such a profitable sector, advertisers have long since entered the market. The first ever recorded case of product placement was in the text-based game *Adventureland*, the first external advertisement – that is, a game that advertised a product unrelated to the developer, like a sequel – in a videogame was the 1983 release “*Tapper*”, in which players served Budweiser beers to bar patrons in order to achieve a high score (Lal, 2021). This was an example of an “*Advergame*”, designed entirely around the promotion of a product or brand. In comparison, external In-Game Advertisement (IGA), which better resembles the forms of advertisement inserted in other forms of modern entertainment media, can be traced back to the 90s, with sports games like *Fifa International Soccer*, with its pitch-side billboards imitating those in real life (Duenas, 2017). Japanese games are no exception, such as the 1999's *advergame* for Pepsi, *Pepsiman*, or IGA inclusion of Mercedes Benz cars in a free downloadable content (DLC) pack for Nintendo's *Mario Kart 8* (Elauria, 2022). While there is an abundance of research exploring the effectiveness of product placement in games, and researchers like Terlutter and Capella (2013) have brought attention to the potential behind studying how people of different cultures react to the same IGA, there is also an open opportunity to compare the reaction of players to advertisements of similar styles originating from games of different cultures.

Taking into account the growing worship through glorification and exoticization of Japanese culture, especially originating from forms of entertainment media (Koniček, 2019), alongside the potential in backlash from IGA resulting in a drop of the attitude towards the brand or game, maybe as a result of a break in their immersion or identifying the advertisement as invasive (Malhotra et al., 2021), a question is raised: Do gamers tend to be more accepting of IGA in Japanese games in comparison to western ones? The aim of this qualitative research is to identify similar forms of IGA in games from both cultures, further seeking disparities in

the degree of acceptance and incongruence of the ads, as to see whether or not they disturb their immersion or enjoyment of the game. If there is a difference, this article also seeks its causes. This is justified due to these factors also affecting the effectiveness of the advertisement (Malhotra et al., 2021).

In order to accomplish this, the study has chosen six examples of IGA. Two advertising a product linked to gameplay elements, two advertising products through the use of camera focus with no gameplay interaction, and the last two advertising products with the goal of creating a realistic environment similar to real life, further dividing each category between games developed by western and Japanese studios. The games chosen are all from successful franchises, with the lowest sold amount coming from *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory*, which, according to a financial report by its developer, sold 2.5 million units by the end of March 2005 (Ubisoft, 2005). In order to gauge opinions, the study was performed through interviews with multiple individuals that self-identified as members of the gaming community, the purpose being to see whether their answers regarding the examples given resulted in any perceived difference between their attitude towards the type of product placement are influenced by the culture the media originated in.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Product Placement and In-Game Advertisements

Ad space is a precious commodity that every company deeply covets. The idea that money spent on ads transforms into money gained on sales is a well-established concept (Comanor and Wilson, 1967) that many marketing professionals agree on as a core of the discipline. From printed ads in ancient China (Eckhardt and Bengtsson, 2010) to modern day product placement, advertising has always been present in economic society. As such, a popular avenue of marketing that hasn't been left untouched is the realm of entertainment media. While commercial breaks in television, pre-beginning trailers in movies and full page ads in magazines and newspapers are separate from the media they're in, the one the consumer paid to experience, product placement can be described as the insertion of a brand inside the main content of the media, whose inclusion was sponsored by a firm, normally unrelated to the creators of the "show".

Product placement in media has been around since the late 19th century, with our modern understanding of the activity being identified by Eckert (1978) as taking place even in the 1930s. The first documented case of advertising in film can be traced back to the film "Washing Day in Switzerland" by director Promio, a short picture less than a minute in length where two women wash clothes with brands of soap clearly seen by the camera (Newell et al., 2006). Much like how the American military lends vehicles, materials and personnel to movies that portray the organization positively in an effort to raise recruitment rates (Shain, 1972; Löffmann, 2013), different brands offered their products as props without cost as long as they were shown in the movies, logos clearly visible (Kline, 1931). The practice was finally put under the limelight when the 1982 Steven Spielberg film *E.T.* aired, in which the title character was lured multiple times using "Reese's Pieces" brand candy, which ended up being a massive marketing success for the brand's owners (Newell et al., 2006; Walton, 2010).

There's no denying it's a growing industry, being valued at billions in both paid and unpaid product placements, with its value raising year by year (BusinessWire, 2006). Since most people skip ads when given the choice, brands are even more attracted of putting their products inside the entertainment media itself, and it's an effort that demonstrated good results, with a high number of watchers feeling positive about remembering a brand they saw earlier in their watched shows (Williams et al., 2011). That doesn't mean, however, the reception is

always positive. Some filmmakers saw it as a moral failing to sully the screen with products that served no narrative purpose (Newell et al., 2006), but most backlash came from the spectators who were meant to watch the media. Some viewers became irritated after witnessing brand placement in shows, and saturation would result in even worse feelings (Williams et al., 2011). If a viewer just so happens to watch multiple movies in a row that possess non-subtle product placement, they may start associating these brands, and even the show itself, as sellouts.

That said, an incongruent brand may end up sticking in consumers' minds for longer than brands that meld with the setting. This is depicted in Lee and Faber's (2007) research about video-games specifically, where they also find that the more involved a player is with a game, the less likely they are to notice product placement. This may be why, in recent games, advertisers appear to prefer to place sponsors in low-gameplay, low-intensity sections, like cutscenes where the player is only watching the story play out or characters are talking without the tension of a threat, as shown in 2019's *Death Stranding*, where the protagonist drinks a can of Monster Energy while resting in his base, in comparison to 2010's *Alan Wake*, where Energizer batteries were a key mechanic, serving as a way to recharge the main character's flashlight needed for combat, often being a moment of tension.

Of course, this only applies to In-Game Advertisements, a practice that closely resembles traditional movie and TV forms of product placement. When it comes to games made specifically in order to advertise a product – more commonly called *advergames* (Kretchmer, 2005) – subtlety essentially becomes a non-factor, the product being placed front and center.

This clearly outlined intent to persuade the player to purchase the brand often results in a lower favorable attitude towards the brand by adults, while children, who don't notice the pushiness of the *advergame*, actually prefer it to IGAs, both due to not noticing the subtler placement and due to *advergames* often being easier, allowing them to become more involved with the experience (Ghosh and Dwivedi, 2022). These authors have also found that children responded positively to brands they recognized while playing *advergames*, while not caring about their familiarity with the noticed brands when playing IGAs, while the opposite was true for adults. Older players didn't enjoy playing *advergames*, so they did not care whether or not the brand was familiar, and suffered a loss in immersion when faced with recognizable brands in IGAs, ending up responding better to unfamiliar products.

Japanese games are no strangers to both IGA and *advergames*. The aforementioned *Death Stranding* was produced by Kojima Productions, headquartered in Shinagawa, Tokyo (Kojima Productions, n.d.), but also historical *advergames* were created in the country, such as *Pepsiman*, developed by KID, a now bankrupt Tokyo-based developer (KID, 1999). The *Like a Dragon* series of games, formerly known in the west by the name *Yakuza*, often features dozens, if not hundreds of real Japanese brands, from stores to food items, all aiming to replicate the streets of where the game takes place as realistically as they possibly can (Scariati, 2022). However, if one was to do a cursory search online, you'd barely find any complaints about this. Would that be because most of the brands are local to Japan, and since *Like a Dragon* is a series that caters to adults, it would tie back into Ghosh and Dwivedi's (2022) findings of non-familiar brands receiving better responses? That is likely a factor, but is it the only one?

It's not a question of size at least. *Like a Dragon* has sold 21.3 million copies since the series' inception (Sega, 2023), and the Japanese gaming market is one of the hugest in the world, both in terms of sales (Newzoo, 2024) and influence (Yaden, 2023; Weber, 2021), so we cannot say it's a lack of public interest that caused the lack in discussion. It may also be that the fact those brands were used to enhance realism is the reason why consumers react in a more accepting manner. Products congruent to the setting are less likely to be noticed (Ghosh and Dwivedi, 2022), but that also means they are less likely to result in a break in immersion, actually enhancing the perceived reality of the scenario they're in. Der Waldt, La Rey, Du Toit and Redelinghuys (2007) elaborated on how familiar brands can achieve that in a film setting,

but there exists little to no research applying that to games, not to mention that shouldn't apply to the Like a Dragon games, since most of the brands in it are unrecognizable to the average western player.

One theory is that the perceived uniqueness of Japanese culture lends itself well to marketing in western contexts. Japan is often seen by westerners as this exotic culture full of quirks, rife with both coolness and weirdness (Sabre, 2012), to the point where some idolize the country's culture as better than their own country of origin, desiring to be Japanese and taking the cultural exaggerations as matters of fact (Lacuesta, Fallon, 2020). On account of this, blatant product placement focused on realism may enhance the perceptions of players by making them better interface with the idealized culture of Japan, seeing the products not under the same lenses of the brands around them, but rather as "alien", amazing items not seen anywhere else in the world. At the same time, incongruent product placement, even of a western product, by a Japanese developer and/or publisher, may result in less backlash and a smaller disconnection from the game's world, due to it being attributed to another quirk of Japan's marketing culture. The weird Japanese TV ads that make it over to the west in the form of internet media and propagate are also weird in the Japanese cultural context (Japan Today, 2014), but because the normal stuff does not spread as farther, westerners end up thinking that "quirkiness" (in their view) is a staple part of that world.

2.2 Reception Theory

The core assumption that led to the development of this study is the idea that some spectators reject the intended meaning of the advertisement, repudiating instead of accepting its inclusion in the game world, based on the cultural background of the text. Hall's (2007) theory of encoding and decoding affirmed that the meaning of a text is not constructed solely by its creator or the reader, but rather meeting halfway, media being seen under the lenses of "common-sense", which is built from the repetition and presentation of an idea in a culturally specific context.

In other words, readers have preconceptions that will shape how they perceive a text, molding what would otherwise be an objective reading into a subjective one, shaped by their expectations (Jauss, 2022). It is very unlikely that someone reading a century old book, such as *Pride and Prejudice* or *Moby Dick*, will experience the exact same reading as our ancestors, who lived in a society with different norms, for example. Of course, each text has a purpose it's aiming to accomplish, and as such every writer will have an idea, either conscious or not, of a reader experiencing their text, whom the authors assume will understand the point they're trying to get across. These "implied readers", as explained by Iser (1979), are separate from the actual reader, as they represent a reader that experiences the work solely from the way the author intended or predicted, but they do serve to bridge the gap between text and spectator, when the latter understands what the author was trying to do through their work. These ideas fall under the umbrella of Reception Theory, where the meaning of a text is built by the audience based on their personal contexts, not from the strict reading of the text itself (Thompson, 1993). Iser's view can be associated with the symbolic interactionist approach of the theory, whose base involves the outlook that viewer and creator are negotiating and symbolically arguing with each other to reach a conclusion of meaning (White, 1993). Other predominant approaches, as highlighted by White (1993), are the critical cultural studies approach, favored by Hall, which centers on the idea that the popular, dominant reading of a work gains credibility and leads to other interpretations being shunned, even if they are also valid, and the consensual cultural studies approach, where Newcomb and Hirsch (1983) affirm media is seen as an exposition, in which something that has a commonly accepted meaning in a particular culture interacts and is analyzed – and consequently re-interpreted – by readers from other contexts, reaching other

meanings. This latter approach is the one this study built its ideas on, the question of if a game made by developers culturally aligned with Japan would have their advertisements perceived the same way by a western audience when compared to western games.

3 METHODOLOGY

Seeing the study's objective is to observe how a western audience engages with advertisements in games, and whether or not they welcome its sales attempts in a gaming environment, discourse analysis was the method applied. Gill (2000) defines discourse analysis as identifying the causes and effects of text in order to examine how language conveys meanings to people, identifying how the readers perceive the text through their eyes and that leads to the construction of norms and identities. Reception theory is, by its very nature, linked with discourse and narrative studies in a way they cannot be separated. It's impossible to affirm one has done research on a group's thoughts on a piece of media without having engaged in a conversation with that group and asked them questions (Livingstone, 2010), making this method a necessity rather than a choice.

Questions were divided into profiling ones, attempting to establish the background of the participants by asking for information such as age, cultural background and birthplace, and into ones attempting to gather as much of their personal opinions about the IGAs shown without directly influencing their statements with guiding questions. When needed, participants were asked to elaborate on why they had certain thoughts, such as explaining why they preferred one ad over the other, or whether the IGAs reminded them of anything about their past. The approach used was linked to Pêcheux's (1997), trying to analyze the subjective in the participants' dialog rather than solely power relations between ideologies.

The interviewees were selected through self-reports, the base requirements for participation being the demonstration of enough fluency in the English language to hold a conversation without complications, to consider themselves familiar with Japanese media, and to affirm their cultural point-of-view aligns with commonly held western values rather than eastern ones – the values themselves not being identified, as the focus was on their own belief in being aligned to western ideologies. The sample was selected in a non-probabilistic, purposive manner (Selltiz et al., 1987), participants being comprised of members from online videogame focused forums that showed interest in participating. The interviews were performed from June 27th to 29th through the voice chatting application Discord, all of them recorded with consent from the participants. Table 1 showcases their profiles.

Table 1

Profile of participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Country	Ethnicity	IGA Type Shown
P1	27	Cis Male	USA	Caucasian	Linked with gameplay
P2	21	Cis Female	Bulgaria	Unmentioned	Linked with gameplay
P3	29	Cis Male	USA	Caucasian	Linked with gameplay
P4	30	Cis Male	USA	Caucasian	Camera focus
P5	31	Cis Male	USA	Caucasian	Camera focus

P6	25	Cis Male	USA	Mixed	Camera focus
P7	23	Trans Male	USA	Caucasian	Realistic intent
P8	33	Cis Female	USA	Caucasian	Realistic intent
P9	30	Cis Male	USA	Asian American	Realistic intent

The examples of IGA picked were selected as a way to showcase different marketing approaches, some advertising a single product, others multiple, and the last group having its product placement in a manner analogous to the real world, such as in stores or in billboards, instead of depicting the characters directly interacting with them. Table 2 defines the games, the products and their characteristics. It's once again noted these are all games with IGA, not advergames, and as such the products advertised are not a central focus of their gameplay or story.

Table 2

Games selected for this article

Game	Product Advertised	Type of Product Placement	Region of Origin
Uncharted 3	Subway	Gameplay	United States
Final Fantasy XV	Cup Noodles	Gameplay	Japan
Splinter Cell Chaos Theory	Nokia, Airwaves Gum, Axe Body Spray	Camera focus	Canada
Death Stranding	Monster Energy, AMC	Camera focus	Japan
Fifa 22	Nike, Trivago	Realistic intent	United States/Canada
Yakuza 0	Alcoholic drinks	Realistic intent	Japan

4 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In order to discover whether there is a difference in the degree of acceptance in the eyes of participants between western and Japanese games, one needs to identify the root causes of distaste for IGAs in the first place. After the interviewed participants presented their opinions on the examples of IGA, a few common elements across interviews appeared. As such, this section is separated into two halves: the first addresses the factors that influence ad approval and rejection, and the second with the comparison between western and Japanese examples.

4.1 Factors Influencing Ad Reception

The key points that participants repeated as to whether or not they liked, or at least tolerated, the presence of the advertisements can be described as to how they interpreted the presentation and implementation of the ads, and how that affected their sense of immersion, which matches with previous findings (Malhotra et al., 2021). Participants generally preferred ads that they perceived as not directly targeting them. Distaste was a common sentiment among

them whenever they felt an advertisement was too blatant, or attempting to sell something too directly. In the clip of IGA belonging to Final Fantasy XV, a friend of the main character pulls him aside upon seeing a Cup Noodle brand truck and starts a quest (which is a task given to a player in exchange for a reward) asking him to find ingredients for him to add to his noodles. In the process of doing so, the friend is continuously praising the product. This exchange was viewed as heavily artificial by some of the interviewed participants, such as P1 and P3.

P1: I mean, he is reading from a script, but it sounded like even the character was reading straight from a script for an advertisement, which just sounded goofy.

P3: I'll say Final Fantasy 15 made me feel kind of, like, uncomfortable, I guess? Like, it, it felt like it was kind of being shoved down my throat.

Some participants saw the Uncharted 3 IGA in much the same way. In that game, when customizing the player character, you are given the choice of diverse clothing items, most belonging to an outdoors' aesthetic, such as military and hiking gear, with the exception of diverse Subway branded items, such as hats, shirts and accessories.

P2: In the first one, I felt like I was directly spoken to about subway, like it was... They were trying to make it a point.

The idea of “the product being a center piece of what is happening” being a bad thing was repeated many times. This can be connected to the established idea that people don't like knowing they're being advertised to, the repeated intrusion of advertisements in spaces that are supposed to be for relaxation, information and entertainment leading to a desire to avoid ads (Wu, 2017). Most of the interviewees responded better to subtler approaches of IGA. P6, for example, mentions how he felt friendlier towards the clip whose product wasn't the focal point of the clip watched. In his words, having the product placement located in the background of the setting was a much better option than having a character interact with it. There was one exception to this. When comparing the two clips presented to him, P4 was the only person that preferred the one he saw as less subtle.

P4: I actually preferred two because it made me laugh. [...] It just seems so ridiculous that it's amusing to me. I know I'm being advertised to, but it's done in such a way that almost makes me want to laugh at it.

That said, this amusement in itself wasn't unique. While P1 claimed he thought the second clip he saw was better implemented, he also thought that he'd remember the first clip for longer, due to its comedic contrast. Generally, however, the participants valued a sense of immersion in their game world, believing the best IGAs were those that fit in with the environment the games took place in. The reason why P1 thought the Cup Noodles advertisement was better, was due to thinking that having the characters talk about the product, even if intrusive, made it feel more integrated than simply having the product logo inserted on the character's clothes with no mention. A belief that real life products and video games should not intersect also existed, demonstrated by P4 and P5.

P4: If you add things to a video game that just don't belong there, it ruins your experience, I think, because it breaks the immersion of the world.

P5: I think generally, at least for me, anytime there is a real world product placed within a game, I feel like it breaks the immersion of the game.

With that in mind, acceptance increased when participants viewed the product as congruent to the setting, as P7 exemplifies.

P7: I think do I do like having my games kind of in their own worlds... Well I guess I guess if it was a more modern game seeing advertisements wouldn't be out of the ordinary, like if you had a modern city and you saw like a coke product being advertised, I guess that wouldn't be, like I said, out of the ordinary.

Subtlety was then, in a sense, tied to the congruence of the product. While the clip they preferred varied, in all cases, the IGA the participants saw as subtler was also the IGA they saw

as fitting inside the game world better. Tying it back to P1's opinions, we could say that participant compared these two concepts as if they were direct opposites to each other, in the same answer given.

P1: Well, I think in the first game, the Subway t-shirt and the Subway hat was pretty out of place for where it was compared to everything else that was shown. You know, all the other shirts and pants the guy was wearing were like, almost like a hunter or like casual wear or something like that. And then there's just Subway plastered on things out of nowhere. [...] Um, the second one, the cup noodles... Since characters in the game are like, speaking about it, uh, it makes it seem a lot more integrated.

Interestingly, the third video, comparing examples of IGA focused on contributing to the realism of the game, showcased how product placement can be inserted in a way to contribute to this congruence. Not one of the participants that watched these types of advertisement thought they were poorly placed, and actually claimed they contributed to immersion. The first clip showcased Fifa 22, a soccer game which, in the same manner as reality, possesses electronic advertisement boards surrounding the playing field. Interviewees that saw this believed that its resemblance to real soccer stadiums added authenticity and didn't detract from their immersion. P9 went as far as to say that the game would be worse off without the ads, as it would lose its stadium-like atmosphere:

P9: [...] if the arena has ads, it would seem more out of place if it didn't have ads. And while you could do fake ads, it would be more realistic to try to get an actual sponsorship and a licensing agreement to put an actual ad in the game that is similar to what you would see at a football arena.

The other clip in the third video is the game Yakuza 0, in which the main character is a member of a criminal organization in Japan living in a small entertainment district in Tokyo, Japan. All stores and buyable items in this series are copies of real locations and items. The clip had the player enter a store and buy alcohol at a bar, while the bartender informed the reader of trivia about the selected drink. Participants didn't think this was intrusive, believing that it was implemented in such a way that it didn't feel like an advertisement. This can be seen in the comments of P7 and P8:

P7: In the Yakuza game it didn't feel like someone was setting up a photo moment for this alcohol, it felt very in-universe that I'm getting a drink, I'm being presented the bottle.

P8: [...] the other one almost makes it seem like it could be something made up and you would actually have to look into it to realize that it's an actual item that you could purchase.

Part of the reason they gave for these thoughts comes from their past experiences. Both P7 and P9 affirm they used to be soccer players in their youth, while P8 was reminded of her high school years. Additionally, P9, having lived in Japan during his youth due to his half-parentage, felt that the atmosphere of the bar in the second clip resembles those he frequented. Nostalgia is then seen as one of the reasons why they felt positively about the IGA examples, which is a feeling that has already been documented as being highly effective in growing favor in viewers (Muehling et al., 2004). Some participants brought up the times the games were published, noticing the difference in graphical quality between two entries. While no expressed a higher or lower opinion of the older entry based on this, P4 theorized that the products depicted in one game might have been more popular back when the entry was released. He associated the Axe brand advertisement, which he saw as obnoxious, with his teenage years, clearly recognizing the product as something popular in the time period. Likewise, familiarity influencing a person's thoughts on a product also surfaced in P1's dialog. He thought Cup Noodles felt less out-of-place than Subway due to his familiarity with the latter, being used to their ads. Curiously, this goes against the established consensus that familiar brands lead to positive feelings when recognized (Junior Ladeira et al., 2022). While there are many studies depicting how game immersion affects brand recognition in regards to IGAs (Lee and Faber,

2007; Dardis et al., 2012), research on how brand familiarity impacts game immersion, is still little. Mau (2015) finds, however, that familiarity with brands, specifically in regards to IGAs, receive better attitude from players than unknown brands, which matches the feedback from this study's participants.

4.2 Results

Now, with all that taken into consideration, were there any contrasting differences in the attitudes participants held between the western and Japanese IGAs? Before moving on into a direct comparison, let's analyze the interviewees own thoughts regarding the ads. Reception Theory tells us that readers' biases and past experiences will lead to subjective interpretations of text (Jauss, 2022), and a few participants acknowledged their presumptions, but rather than saying they were fonder of Japanese studios, which was the initial assumption of this research, they claimed it was rather a prejudice towards western game developers based on their prior encounters and perceptions. They associated the idea of intrusive advertising in inappropriate places to be a practice commonly performed by western entities, and as such, they were less surprised at seeing product placement in western videogames. Some participants saw western studios as greedy, which, when faced with a direct comparison with games from a different region, led to them have a higher starting opinion of the foreign entry. We can observe this thought in P5 and P6's comments.

P5: I would expect more of the reliance on advertisements in a Western game than I would for a Japanese game. Just because I kind of expect Western companies to try to grab for all the money that they possibly can.

P6: I tend to have a little more respect for Japanese studios than American studios because there's the big public perception that a lot of American studios are sellouts.

One participant directly addressed a possible double standard between perception of advertisement. The following comment by P4 elucidates his belief that a substantial amount of fans of Japanese media were more critical of western IGAs, even if the intrusiveness of the ad remained the same.

P4: As Americans, [...] there's just much less of a patience for that sort of thing. You'd be called a shill, but if you do it in Japan, it's like, when Japan does it, it's okay. I think it seems to be a sensibility a lot of people have, especially if they consume Japanese media.

Yet, this study did not find any evidence supporting that hypothesis, which matches Kishimoto's (2013) affirmation that, while there may exist a minority of Japanese media fans that stereotype Japan using orientalist views, the majority knows how to distinguish the media from reality. In fact, the participants did not have a hard time justifying their criticisms when their preference leaned towards the Japanese IGA's, clearly defining their reasoning. While we can say there was bias on the views of the participant's, it's hard to affirm this is specifically due to partisanship. Let us compare their views by observing table 3.

Table 3

Participant thoughts on IGAs watched

Participant	Video Preference	Reasoning	Opinion on Video 1	Opinion on Video 2
P1	Japanese	2 nd clip was less intrusive	Disliked	Liked
P2	Japanese	2 nd clip was less intrusive	Disliked	Liked
P3	Western	1 st clip was less intrusive	Neutral	Disliked
P4	Japanese	2 nd clip was humorous	Neutral	Liked

P5	Japanese	2 nd clip had a narrative	Disliked	Disliked
P6	Japanese	2 nd clip had better camera work	Neutral	Neutral
P7	Japanese	Informative nature of 2 nd clip	Liked	Liked
P8	Japanese	Does not like sports	Liked	Liked
P9	Japanese	Informative nature of 2 nd clip	Liked	Liked

If one was to analyze this through a purely statistical lenses, it'd be possible to affirm a preference towards Japanese media. However, that would ignore all the nuances presented in their discourse. The first video, of IGA linked to gameplay inputs, that participants P1 through P3 watched contained the biggest disparity in results. No one held the same opinion towards the clips when compared. P2 saw the insertion of product placement without mention from the characters as more immersion breaking than having the characters talk about it, while P3 held a directly opposite opinion. P1, on the other hand, agreed with P2, but added that at a certain point, the dialog in the second clip felt artificial, and that he enjoyed it because of its "goofiness". In the second and third videos, while the participants did show a preference towards the Japanese game, the opinion they held towards both IGAs varied little. With the exception of P4, who actively enjoyed the second clip he was shown, going against the established trend that subtle IGAs are better received, participants 5 through 9 held the contrasting clips to the same standards.

More importantly, the majority of participants did not identify any Japanese cultural elements in the Japanese game clips to begin with, and the few they did acknowledge did not reach a consensus. While both participants said that Japanese advertising practices tend to differ from ours, the first believed Japanese ads are more direct and less blatant, while the second believed the opposite, and was surprised at seeing an unsubtle example of Japanese ad. Take a look at what P4 and P6 said.

P4: Versus it's a bit inoffensive in the American way, just because it's not being thrust in your face. I mean, it's there, but they're not drawing exceptionally overbearing attention to it. [...] Comparing the two, the Japanese are much less subtle about it.

P6: At this point I'm kind of dull to it because a lot of Western media tends to shoehorn a lot of product placements in. I'm actually surprised that the second one, being a Japanese piece of media, actually shoehorned a direct... It's something I would recognize as more Western.

This way, albeit the results do not indicate the existence of favoritism towards Japanese IGAs, there is something that can be deduced from all the information acquired. Mainly that a person's opinion regarding an IGA will be partially shaped by their perception of the advertisement and the context that it appears in. Ads that were linked to gameplay elements were received more negatively than ads that the game showed the player in an unavoidable manner, which were also less favored than ads focused on recreating realistic experiences, inserted in the background of the game setting. A participant's perception of whether or not ads were intrusive and immersive ended up the main factor of ad reception, which matched previous research (Ghosh and Dwivedi, 2022), but what IGA was more immersive varied between individuals, their personal experiences and preconceptions playing a significant role in shaping their opinions. Although we can say a general tendency to favor Japanese IGAs likely does not exist, this idea of individual perception leads credence to the possibility someone with stronger biases than the participants interviewed could have a more pronounced preference.

5 CONCLUSION

In summary, this study identifies that there isn't any noticeable indication that the enjoyment of Japanese media and the preference towards their fictional works instead of

western, regional ones, would also lead to a bias towards interpretation of in-game advertisements. Discourse analysis does imply, however, that the main factors affecting the attitude reception of product placement inside a videogame remain how badly the advertisement affects participant immersion, with subtle, optional ads leading to a lesser tendency to reject them. With that in mind, the factors determining what an individual considers to be either subtler and more immersive will vary depending on subjective interpretation of the media. By adopting Reception Theory as an interpretative method and analyzing opinions regarding IGA's under this lenses, it is a reasonable assumption that perceptions of both video-games and advertisements is something highly personalized.

This research inserts itself into both marketing, IGA and Reception Theory literature, by providing insights into the complex relationship dynamics that affect their factors, seeing how gaming immersion impacts inclination towards product placement in a game and cross-cultural dynamics between USA and Japan.

There were, nonetheless, limitations that must be mentioned. First, due to time and resource constraints, a low-sample size was utilized, which may restrict the reproducibility of the research. Adding to that, even though participants were selected randomly, not screened for nationality or ethnicity, the majority of the respondents ended up being Caucasian Americans, which may have impacted data collected. Then, in order to account for the diverse possible implementations of product placement, the study chose to not utilize the same video for all participants, dividing into three types of IGA, each being shown to three interviewees. This does help generalize the results towards IGAs as a whole, but differing types of IGA may result in more extreme opinions. For example, most of the participants had similar responses towards the realism focused product placement, while the gameplay linked IGA had more contrasting answers. Lastly, due to their nature as real videogames instead of ones created solely for this research, it was not possible to present the examples of advertisement in exactly the same way. We attempted to minimize this variability, but it may have influenced their perceptions by introducing non-controlled factors.

Suggestions for future research include the replication of this attempt with larger samples, with stricter control over selection in order to guarantee a more diverse population, as well as the standardizing of the way the IGAs were presented. This could be done through the creation of short games with product placement inserted by the researchers or associated fellows. This would take considerable work, and has the issue of necessitating to lie about the origin of at least one of the presented games. Participants familiar with gaming would also recognize the fact it's not a published product depending on the game's level of quality.

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