

Consumer Cosmopolitanism through Japanese products: The case of the Yakuza-series

Author: Hampus Kilåker
Supervisor: Astrid Norén-Nilsson



Abstract

Mukokuseki or borderless marketing has long been a topic within the marketing of Japanese cultural products. On the opposite end, there is the concept of ultra-cultural products and the Yakuza-series by Sega is one of the examples that takes advantage of both. The overarching question posed throughout this paper is: “How has SEGA employed a particular vision of Japan to successfully promote its Yakuza-series in the Western gaming-hubs?”. In order to answer this question, a constructivist and a Consumer Cosmopolitan point of reference is apt. The games themselves were analyzed as part of the Consumer Cosmopolitan trend within gaming, as a medium for virtual tourism. This series is mainly aimed towards an adult male domestic audience and it taps into many borderless concepts, but it places them in a domestic setting. Not many other products have managed this combination and it is interesting how the series illustrates how the promotion of highly cultural products has been changed from low-availability to high-availability products. While many other products possess the same traits, not many have moved away from a relatively niche audience in the Western gaming-hubs makes for an interesting case-study regarding how Consumer Cosmopolitanism has changed within Japanese gaming-products.

Keywords: Borderless marketing, Yakuza, Japan, Culture, Cosmopolitanism, Representation

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Conventions

For this thesis, the modified Hepburn system will be used to transcribe Japanese words.

Japanese words will be written in italics, except for words that can be transcribed into English such as Tokyo or Osaka. Japanese names will follow the Japanese standard, last name followed by first name. All translations are my own, with the exception being the official promotions made for a UK audience, including the Western versions of each entry.

Abbreviations

J-RPG – Japanese Role-Playing Game

RPG – Role-Playing Game

1. Introduction

“Game cultures are neither totally national nor global, retaining some qualities from both classifications. This can be observed in nationally appropriated game cultures of a certain game.” (Elmezemy&Wimmer,2018:80-1). This sentence summarizes the dilemma of communicating culture through gaming-products and unintentional effects of straying away from or focusing too closely on cultural factors within personalized products presented to a large global audience. The product must be balanced between mass-market appeal and a niche factor that makes the product distinct.

Table 1 – Various Levels of defining game cultures

Table 1. Various levels of defining game cultures.

Level of game culture definition	Description	Example cultures
Micro	Cultures of a specific game or community	World of Warcraft culture, EVE online culture. Or game cultures of a specific locale, e.g. California Smash Brothers culture, German FIFA culture.
Meso	Cultures of multiple games or communities with a common, unifying characteristic	PS4 gamers, Nintendo gamers, Retro gamers, Modders, Hackers, Speed Runners
Macro	The overall culture of games, gamers and gameplay	Game culture worldwide, or whole game culture of specific countries, e.g. South Korean, American or European Game Culture.

. The Yakuza-series is a perfect example of this tricky balance, as it blends borderless concepts in a cultural setting. It details a former yakuza-member, Kiryu Kazuma that saves a little girl, Haruka and proceeds to protect her from the harsh *Kamurocho*-district, a more condensed version of its real-life equivalent Kabukicho in Shinjuku, Tokyo (Nagoshi,2010:72-4). In real life, this is known as a district with some of the highest crime-rates in all of Japan, and it has heavy ties to yakuza organizations, especially when considering nighttime activities in the area (Tokyo Reporter Staff,2008). These entries generally present Japan through the night-life districts in various major cities, with a focus on masculinity and absurdity. Simultaneously, these entries aim to promote domestic tourism within Japan, and it makes for an interesting transition to the global-market as it promotes virtual-tourism in a concentrated form.

1.1. Background

Yakuza is often referenced as the spiritual successor to Shenmue, a game that essentially created the open-world game genre and the idea of virtual tourism (Glagowski,2018). It also draws from plenty of Japanese cultural elements such as the various shrines, architectural

design of houses and martial arts. Shenmue had the highest production-cost of any game up until that point in 1999, with an estimated 70 million \$ (112 million when factoring in inflation) being used to fund the project (CPI inflation calculator,2021). It was declared a commercial failure due to its sales being lower than expected, despite 1.2 million units sold, placing it as the fourth best-selling game on Sega's last console (List-all,2009). One issue could be the preference of realism over entertainment. After Shenmue was declared a commercial failure, Sega became a third-party company, which gave them access to a broader audience since they were producing products for other companies like Nintendo instead of having their own platform (Gamespot staff,2001). This might have been the catalyst for the constant reliance on *Mukokuseki* or borderless marketing for many Japanese products. However, as Hutchinson (2019:25-7) elaborates, *Mukokuseki* has a general misconception that while it works for mass-appeal, it is still a method of specialization (Suder et al,2015:406). Inherently, that makes even the most successful borderless product culturally influenced. This is likely why the Yakuza-series have been so successful as of late especially. It is an *ultra-kokuseki* product made by a third-party developer, so they have the ability to produce a product that is both steeped in culture and available for a borderless audience (Gamespot staff,2001). This allowed them to keep the setting while making it applicable for a larger global audience. At the time of the first entry's release however, the marketing team had at three concerns: It would not sell overseas, it would not sell to the younger audience, and it would not sell because of the violence and sex (Nagoshi,2010:32-5,76-9). The first concern was valid, but in accordance with them having the option to appeal to a larger audience of global consumers, it became a rather successful if niche product. The second concern is quite valid and it was a consequence of how the team chose to portray Japan. However, this was targeted towards a specific group, namely young Japanese men, so while it is far from borderless, any product needs a clear focus. The third concern was valid, but due to the series' intended audience, this would prove to be to its benefit.

Since the 1980s, Japanese popular culture has been portrayed in many forms. The most common was in low-culturized matter, designed to be impersonal and available to a larger audience, such as cars (Mitsubishi), computers (Toshiba), and portable cassette-players (the Walkman) et cetera (Iwabuchi,2002:447,45).

Table 2 – Extent of Availability versus Level of Meaningfulness

		Culturization →		
		Level of Meaningfulness		
		<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>	
Extent of Availability	<i>High</i>	Mass traditional product (e.g., consumer products, home appliance, etc.)	Mass cultural product (e.g., movie, music, books, TV programs, etc.)	From Class to Mass ↑
	<i>Low</i>	Niche traditional product (e.g., private jet, yacht, etc.)	Niche cultural product (e.g., painting, opera, etc.)	

In order to appeal to the West, *Mukokuseki* or borderless marketing was deemed necessary (Hutchinson,2019:25-6). This choice would serve for mass-appeal, but at the same time, Japan become synonymous with these IPs, such as Super Mario, Pokémon, The Legend of Zelda et cetera (Ibid,26-8). Essentially, they tried to mask their cultural influence and that very tactic became their specialization (Krugman,1988:7-8). Since more personalized products tend to be influenced by cultural sentiments, it led to an attempt of placing culture-based ideas in a borderless-setting. It led to many of the well-known IPs of the era to become famous, while most people not realizing that their favorite games were Japanese properties (Consalvo,2016:19-20). This indicates that there is no way to truly extract culture from a product, especially when you consider the underlying Japanese influences on a macro-scale within the gaming-industry (Elmezemy&Wimmer,2018:80-2). That theme persists even today within many culture-specialized personal products.

1.2.Research questions

To determine how these products illuminate themes of presenting the local culture on a global scale through Consumer Cosmopolitanism, these questions were asked:

- How has Sega employed a particular vision of Japan to successfully promote its Yakuza-series in the Western gaming-hubs?
- How did the product represent itself in the first iteration and how has that changed, given the series' popularity in the Western gaming-hubs?
- What are the differences between the domestic and global promotional material, and how does the series itself function as cross-cultural promotion for Japan?

1.3. Academic contribution

While there is a lengthy history of various games that have defined the vision of Japan to the UK region, this thesis will be used to fill a gap of personalized borderless products set in a cultural setting, using the Yakuza-series as a contributor to this debate. It captures Japanese modern and past culture through all aspects of its design, illustrating a form of virtual tourism for both domestic and overseas players. You could theoretically extract the ‘Japaneseness’ from the products, but this would only disserve the product itself and as covered previously, it is theoretically possible to extract but it will always have cultural residues (2019:254-5). As such, it serves as an unintentional promoter of Consumer Cosmopolitanism in an effort to promote virtual tourism to/within Japan. Hutchison emphasized how games can communicate much under the surface, mainly how the player is allowed to interact with the world presented and I plan to follow in that vein. My focus is on the differences in the domestic and global marketing respectively, adding another layer to the discussion regarding the undercurrent of Japanese gaming products. This, along with the comparisons between them will likely provide much needed insight into just how these culturally layered products are presented in either region, and how much that has been lessened over time. To accomplish this, the Yakuza-series is used as a case-study on how globalization and Consumer Cosmopolitanism has changed the global market’s need and want for immersion in their products, as to how Japan is presented. Using Hutchinson’s concluding thoughts, I plan to use the Yakuza-series to demonstrate which form of Japan they want the overseas audience to witness. The variety of literature mentioned ultra-cultural products as one possible consequence of the *Mukokuseki*-mindset, but nothing regarding how it is imbedded into the experience itself, such as the boundaries set by the creators and the variety of content available. None of them ever mentioned how it functions as a virtual tourism tool, so that is the research-gap that this thesis plans on contributing to.

1.4. Chapter overview

Chapter two covers the literary basis on which the analysis-portion draws from. Chapter three covers the theoretical framework of Consumer Cosmopolitanism to be found in the analysis section. Chapter four is limited to the methodological compounds that make up the thesis. Chapter five contains the first round of analysis, covering the various themes that the entries mean to present. A thematic analysis is integral for determining just how the creative team aims to portray their product, as well as their version of Japan. Chapter six consists of the second round of analysis, where individual entries are presented in more detail. This is meant to relate to the passage of time and how their vision has changed and been strengthened by

the lessening of hardware-limitations over time. Chapter seven details how the first thing that the consumers are likely to see, namely trailers and game-descriptions has changed. This helps to ascertain which audience they are aiming for and how the gap between domestic and global audience has been lessened showing a connection between the penetration of macro-movement of Consumer Cosmopolitanism gaming products within the gaming sphere. Chapter eight will conclude the thesis project. Chapter nine will provide a list of the literary sources used. Chapter ten contains the transcriptions of the PlayStation Network UK descriptions for each entry chosen, revealing much on what focus each entry had and how they differ.

2. Literature review

In order to substantiate my claim regarding gaming-products being used as indirect forms of promotion for countries, their culture, containing a certain view of or lesson about life, various works need to be addressed and the theories that surround them. Combined with the introductory chapter, it will help to illustrate patterns within the series to paint a picture of how it functions as an unintentional promotion for Japan.

2.1. Japanese products as influencers

The progress of the portrayal of Japanese products as cultural influencers overseas has been established ever since the 1980s if not before. Iwabuchi (2002:447,452) covers how Japanese culture was usually conveyed through hardware and technological development, speaking to the mass-market with little cultural influence being made through products such as the Walkman. He then proceeds to argue for why Soft-nationalism has become an undercurrent of many Japanese software products, pertaining to fictional and character-driven brands (Iwabuchi,2002:451-3). Afterwards, he covers the theory of *Mukokuseki* and how many borderless constructs was contained within the brands themselves, essentially removing the ‘Japaneseness’ of the product (Ibid:455-6). Hutchinson (2019) followed this up with the unintentional consequences of this mindset, evolving it by describing how many people has been affected by these borderless products without even realizing their country of origin. In this vein, borderless products became Japan’s specialization (Suder et al,2015:406-7). On the opposite spectrum, she also details several examples that rely on Japanese sensibilities such as Shintoism with Final Fantasy X, woodblock-prints with *Okami*, and collection culture in Japan with *Katamari Damacy* (Hutchinson,2019:27-9).

2.2. Japanese Videogames as a medium for Cosmopolitanism

Videogames has the potential of providing an immersion-based experience and Consalvo (2016) illustrates this in full. This thesis builds upon Consalvo’s conceptualization of gaming as a stage for ”Consumer Cosmopolitanism” to suggest how gaming functions as a Japanese Cosmopolitan cultural product. She describes Cosmopolitanism as “being associated with a conscious openness to the world and to cultural differences” and how media that various consumers are exposed to can facilitate this process (Consalvo,2016:20-2,38-40,213-7). This process seems to encourage the formation of global villages, which are communities that engage with each other despite never interacting on the physical plane, so it can be expedited through mass-market oriented high-availability media (Ibid:21,38-40,213-5.,Elmezemy&Wimmer,2018:82). Goto-Jones (2012) also provides much insight into why these products become popular, due to the fantasy that it provides its audience. She highlights

how the player is primed to feel a certain way due to the player's avatar reacting in a certain manner at any given point and these avatars can be used to promote ideas to a player using this very immersion-driven fantasy (Hutchinson, 2019:109-11). These products are also prone to controversy, such as Grand Theft Auto III and its several court-cases trying to prove how it links to real-life vice and crime (Markey&Ferguson,2017.,Rowlands:2016). This is the environment that the first Yakuza-series entry was released in, with hardware-limitations when it came to presentation. Compiling this with the *Mukokuseki*-mindset resulted in products that had to acclimate to their global audience rather than using the cultural setting to its fullest and this hindered the series somewhat.

2.3.The 'Japaneseness' of the gaming industry

Thanks to the establishment of the prominent 'Japaneseness' of the global gaming-market, this series draws from all three level of community within gaming culture; the macro, meso and micro communities (Yin&Phillips,2020:170-2). The micro community refers to the individual experience of each individual player, meso community relates to the intended audience that the product is marketed towards, in this case the domestic adult audience of Japan and the macro community will demonstrate how the underlying Japanese gaming culture has been spread around in the larger community's consciousness (Ibid:82-3,85-6). According to Elmezemy & Wimmer, the early Yakuza-series should be placed right in-between the niche and the mass-cultural products and that highly dependent on how much availability there was in the Western region. The larger influence of macro influenced titles like Super Mario and Sonic has pushed Japanese game-design into the front of the industry ever since the 1980s, if not before. The meso culture has been prominent especially in the latest entry, given its Japanese Role-playing game (J-RPG) roots in Dragon Quest and due to its nature as a single-player RPG, this also ventures into the micro-culture surrounding each player's distinct choices and experiences. The mistake of the adverts promoting the initial entry in 2006 is that they tried to conform to Western gaming-hub norms. In order to conform to that mentality, some sacrifices had to made, especially regarding the translation of Japanese culture within the product. The availability of the product was also in limbo, after the commercial failure of Yakuza: Dead Souls, as Sega likely labeled this as a non-profitable franchise in the Western hubs. However, as projects like #buildingthelist indicated that fans were anticipating the fifth main entry greatly, and so the marketing shifted, revitalizing interest using a very culturally significant era of Japan's history, namely the 1980s with Yakuza 0 (Aki-at,2014.,Sega,2016.,Wawro,2014). It went from relatively low-availability to

high-availability, arguably beginning with #buildingthelist and solidifying with Yakuza 0 (Aki-at,2014.,Elmezemy&Wimmer,2018:82.,Yin&Phillips,2020:171). Now with the latest entry, there are mostly no differences between the presentation in the West and the domestic audience. This whole process is indicative of how much globalization of Japanese culture has taken place during this time. In the end, it seems that these games have at least partially contributed to or at least benefitted from this globalization process. Even now, many consumers familiar with the existence of videogames, did not tends to realize that properties like Super Mario and Pokémon were Japanese in origin, as indicated by many of Consalvo's questionees (2016:22-3). It was only after the wider impact of the internet and the gaming industry matured that it was begun to be understood that these gaming-products originated in Japan, right around the same time that the Yakuza-series was first developed (Consalvo,2016:4-5). Despite this, with the release of Yakuza: Like a Dragon, it is clear that the series leans into its Japanese roots, choosing to model the entire main gameplay-style after the success of Square Enix's classic J-RPG, Dragon Quest (Ibid:99-100). This also exemplifies that cross-cultural products showcase a certain vision or message within them for the intended audience (Ibid:100-1). As for the globalization of the products themselves, this cannot be read through sales-numbers alone, as Consalvo argues (Ibid:101). However, judging by Norris (2014)' article about Yakuza 3's cut content and projects like #buildingthelist, the audience does speak up when asked directly and this also contributes to showing just how using these types of products can facilitate cross-cultural knowledge and interaction (Aki-at,2014.,Sega,2019a). In several of the earlier entries, there have been plenty of cut or mistranslated content that has put people off the series as a whole. That is to be expected however, considering that these products were made primarily made for an adult domestic audience. In Yakuza 3 for example, the whole hostess mini game was removed likely to its nicheness to Western audiences (Norris,2012:76-7). Yakuza 5 was brought to the Western gaming-hubs, as a result of the #buildingthelist project and even then, it did not reach a large audience due to its three year-long delay, as well as the fact that it was a digital-only release (Aki-at,2014). Entire spin-offs such as *Ryū ga Gotoku Ishin!*, indicated just how popular the series were to the domestic audience as they never spread overseas (Sega,2014). That said, these particular entries are understandable, since they rely so heavily on Japanese cultural cornerstones that they even created an in-game dictionary to explain events and older terminology to the domestic audience (Ibid).

2.4.The consequences of borderless marketing

Regarding the marketing aspect, Iwabuchi (2002) will be drawn upon for a reference regarding how Japan conducted their overseas marketing before and after 1980s when Japanese products became more personalized. This will be contrasted against Hutchinson's *Ultra-kokuseki* concept (2019:25-6). As an example of this type of product, Hutchinson refers to *Katamari Damacy*, a game that is widely considered the most 'Japanese' ever made and thus it is impossible to generalize into any other environment due to its innate nicheness (Hutchinson,2019:21-2,25-6.,Elmezemy&Wimmer,2018:82). After the 1980s, Japan's marketing changed quite drastically, as to appeal to the West and other foreign revenue-streams in the area. The reason for the inclusion of Iwabuchi is that he has studied this principle among popular cultural brands from Japan that were established during this era. This helps to establish a baseline for how international marketing used to function, in an effort to make their products less Japanese and therefore make them directly available to a larger audience as per Iwabuchi (2002), while Hutchinson's *Ultra-kokuseki* concept will be used as a baseline for the Yakuza-series. The first entry of Yakuza was released not long after, in the mid-2000s, when Sega was financially struggling, and yet it went the opposite way of how the marketing of gaming products was commonly conducted, at least for titles that saw a Western release (Aki-at,2014.,Nagoshi,2010:1-4). In an effort to establish a clear connection between the games' heavy cultural influence and its' marketing over in the primary Western gaming-hubs, such as Europe, comparisons between the two is necessary. The difference in marketing and how that gap closed over time also helps to illustrate how the globalization of Japanese culture in gaming products has progressed, as can be seen through the presentation of the Yakuza-series (Consalvo, 2016: 213-4., Sega, 2016., Sega, 2020a., Sega, 2020b).

2.5.Intent and execution of virtual tourism

As stated by the creator of Yakuza, Toshihiro Nagoshi (2010), he wishes to present three values for the native audience: entertainment, drama and most of all immersion. This can be argued to be reflected in the entries themselves as Gonzalo Frasca argued "the attitudes, values and ideas of the developer may be expressed through the medium." (Consalvo,2016:70-1). Nagoshi (2010) states in his book, he clearly desired to mimic real Japanese popular culture and the various quirks of a variety of cities. Using that as a baseline is appropriate to discover the key-audience as well as the representation of modern Japan. The games could act as a time-capsule of sorts, portraying Japan at that set point in time. The

games' reliance on the immersion-aspect promotes the idea of virtual tourism and it can be checked via real-world accounts provided by Adelstein (2009), and with real tradition and history, covered by Kaplan & Dubro (2003). The latter describe the history and relationship between the yakuza and the common people of Japan. The series tends to promote the realism of these cities and common elements of culture, such as *Karaoke*, masculinity, work-life pressure, idol-culture et cetera (Sega,2006.,2014.,2016.,2020a.,2020b). This will be obtained from a variety of sources that correspond to each theme. More than most games Hutchinson mentioned, the Yakuza-series is known for having a borderless-idea presented in a cultural setting.

These ideas are presented in an understandable way, such as running a corporation is explained using a meter instead of showing you the intricacies of actually running said corporation. An example of this is how interviews are not shown but implied, no tax-forms have to be sent in to the local municipal office et cetera. It also tries to explain deeper concepts such as the *Tatemae/Honne* relationship. *Tatemae* refers to the mask that everyone puts on when working, that is deemed acceptable by society and *Honne* refers to the inner feelings of every individual person. This relationship and the balance between them are emphasized within Japanese society (Bachnik,2007:1-2). Other concepts are universal in nature such as work-place pressure, various aspects of a gendered economy, local legends et cetera (Greszes,2020.,Koch,2020:172-4.,OTAQUEST,2019). They also construct a world around these cultural differences, expressing it in an engaging fashion in order to satisfy the consumer. It is presented in a borderless fashion as to keep the concepts as relatable and understandable as possible. They also inject a certain level of humor to most of these concepts in order to make them more appealing to the global audience while still making them decidedly set in Japan.

3. Theoretical framework

The framework is based in Cosmopolitan thinking, with a mixture of the creation of a world ala Goffman, the cultural changes during localization and the intentioned audience. The intentioned audience will be determined later on, largely building upon Nagoshi's statements regarding the series, as well as the range of availability and cultural nicheness for the series in the West. Movements within the various communities will also be used to decipher just how the series has taken advantage of their position to promote cultural concepts to a foreign audience. This will respectively give hints as to how the marketing is done, how much the gap of cultural ignorance is closing and how Sega unintentionally uses this vision of Japan to promote virtual tourism.

3.1.Sympathetic performances

Goffman (1956) is important due to his work regarding the creation of a world that satisfies the audience and makes you sympathetic towards the character and the world that the world of showmanship requires to keep the illusion going. He also highlights an important connection between the front that the performers put on and the real backstage players, as well as the setting itself being integral to a good performance. This idea permeates both the medium of gaming itself and the version of Japan that the Yakuza-series wishes to portray, heavily focusing of the concept of the *Tatemaie/Honne* dynamic. This idea is heavily illustrated by Bachnik as a key component to the cultural consciousness of Japan, as you must sacrifice your *Honne* for the good of the collective *Tatemaie* (Bachnik,2007:1-3). Goffman (1956:152) argues that "Within the walls of a social establishment we find a team of performers who co-operate to present to an audience a given definition of the situation" which could be extended when trying to convince an audience of a certain point of view within any product or performance. This phrase could be referring to the game-design, the topic of *Tatemaie/Honne* relationship and the image of Japan that the production-team wanted to show their audience (Bachnik,2007:1-3). The main discussion will mainly be limited to observing how well the Japanese influences are translated through the marketing material in the West. Therefore, Goffman (1956:152-5) is important to the research itself, given that he uses a Constructivist point-of-view to determine how the world or performance is constructed to appease and gain sympathy from the audience (Bryman,2012:33-4). This is highly applicable to the gaming-industry, since the theater-medium relies heavily on reality and/or fantasy construction. Goto-Jones will be used to determine the illusion that you are being subjected to and the attractiveness of this particular fantasy and the reason behind why this would be attractive in the first place. Hutchinson and Iwabuchi will be used to differentiate

between Japanese product mindsets, *Ultra-kokuseki* and *Mukokuseki* respectively. More personalized products that work on both meso and micro communities that all enforce Cosmopolitan thinking are more prominent now than ever before, that are enabled by macro-community ripples, indicating Consumer Cosmopolitanism becoming more prominent in the global market. Thus, combining these theories with real-life equivalents of what is shown through the games and how that is presented to the West will make for interesting results. Yin & Phillips (2020) illustrate the sheer variety and inventiveness of personalized cultural products possess.

3.2.Fantasy fueled by immersion

Researchers like Goto-Jones (2012), Consalvo (2016) and Hutchinson (2019) all emphasize the power of immersion and fantasy-projection in various forms to convey messages to a large audience through the gaming-medium. These following levels of analysis will be employed to analyze how Japan is portrayed to the players and what message the creative team wanted to portray to the micro, meso and macro levels of the gaming-community. Micro-communities to analyze how it is attractive on the individual plane, the meso-community to determine how to appeal it to individual groups of people and the macro-community developments are the most influential, as they illustrate normative standards set by Japanese game-developers, as the whole industry has an undercurrent of ‘Japaneseness’ (Elmezeny&Wimmer,2018:82-85.,Iwabuchi,2002.,Hutchinson,2019:24-7). The representation of Japan within the games will be analyzed in two degrees of cultural influence, namely niche and mass-produced (Yin&Phillips,2020:171-2). These two categories were chosen due to the series’ cultural influence being extremely high and it also focuses on the availability-aspect. Each category will then be connected to the macro, meso and micro communities directly (Elmezemy&Wimmer,2018:82-3,85). The micro community refers to a more limited range of communities, often limited to countries and individual players. Meso community relates to the intended audience that the product is marketed towards, in this case the domestic adult audience of Japan, with several unique characteristics. Lastly, the macro community penetration will illustrate how wide the underlying Japanese gaming culture has been spread around in the larger community’s conscious (Ibid:82-3,85-6). Nagoshi’s intent will also be analyzed using his three cornerstones of what he wanted to show the audience; Entertainment, Drama, and Immersion (Nagoshi,2010:10-1., Chapter 10).

3.3. Cosmopolitanism and the increased globalization

Cosmopolitanism and the global village are important to understanding the macro community movements and the interest around the product's country of origin (Consalvo,2016:20-3). However, its country of origin is commonly not marketed or displayed in any notable fashion as if it were a part of the product leading to many consumers did not even realize that the products were Japanese in nature, unless they were intentionally searching for it (Ibid:21-2). Meanwhile Hutchinson (2019:152-4) goes through a variety of genres in much detail, she never reflects on how borderless ideas can be presented in a cultural setting and how that might contribute to its ability to balance mass-market appeal and nicheness (Elmezemy&Wimmer,2018:82). Even borderless entries such as Pokémon display areas like department-stores that are designed after their real-life equivalents in Japan as several players found it tedious that each floor had a specific line-up of items, but they failed to grasp the real-world influences of this kind of game-design (Consalvo,2016:24-30.,Iwabuchi,2002). This brings up a very constant through-line that even the smallest area-design can provoke cultural differences between the player and the place that they choose to immerse themselves within (Ibid:31). Concepts like these are brought to the fore-front using very immersion-filled game-locations like *Kamurocho*, which is based off the design of Kabukicho but it is still understandable enough for the average Western player to gather how influenced these games are by their setting (Sega, 2006.,2016.,2020a.,2020b). Many say that the city is its own character along with the main cast, given that it has changed so heavily throughout the various entries, which mimics how a district can change drastically over time. Furthermore, Consumer Cosmopolitanism is possible now due to the minimal distance between the cultural setting and the borderless presentation, thanks to the undercurrent of Japanese culture of the macro community surrounding the gaming industry (Consalvo,2016:19-20.,Elmezemy & Wimmer,2018:82-85). My main intent is to build upon these ideas using the literature and bring them to the apex to show just how these immersion-filled areas can serve as a form of virtual tourism in a real sense and that relates to real life events that this series aims to promote to their domestic and subsequently global audience.

Due to its status as a cultural product, the series has the potential to portray 'real' Japanese culture to a foreign audience and the way that it does that will be viewed through a Constructivist POV using Consumer Cosmopolitanism and the nature of the medium of gaming itself (Bryman,2012:32-3,35-6.,Consalvo,2016:20-3.,McLuhan,1994). This, along with the gaps in knowledge on how the series represents Japan overseas.

Hutchinson does touch on the series briefly, but she focuses on the complex representation of Korean nationals in Japan through the characters in the second entry (Hutchinson,2019:244-6). I will go in with a different approach building upon her findings and concentrating it to the representation of Japanese cultural elements instead. Norris (2014)'s article explained how cut content can take away from the global audience's enjoyment of a title, hinting at a subconscious want for the Cosmopolitan approach (Yin&Phillips,2020:170-2). This, combined with the marketing for the first entry will be used as an argument for how things tend to unfold when the intent of immersion is subverted and replaced with a misguided attempt at the assimilation of a cultural product into the mass-market. *Ryu ga Gotoku Ishin!* will be used to explain why the series has had a hard time to localize features and concepts that even needed to be explained to the domestic audience through the use of an in-game dictionary (Sega,2014). *Ryū ga Gotoku Ishin!* will therefore be used as bridge between the entries chosen and to provide a decent insight into why this series is notoriously difficult to localize (Ibid).

4. Methodology section

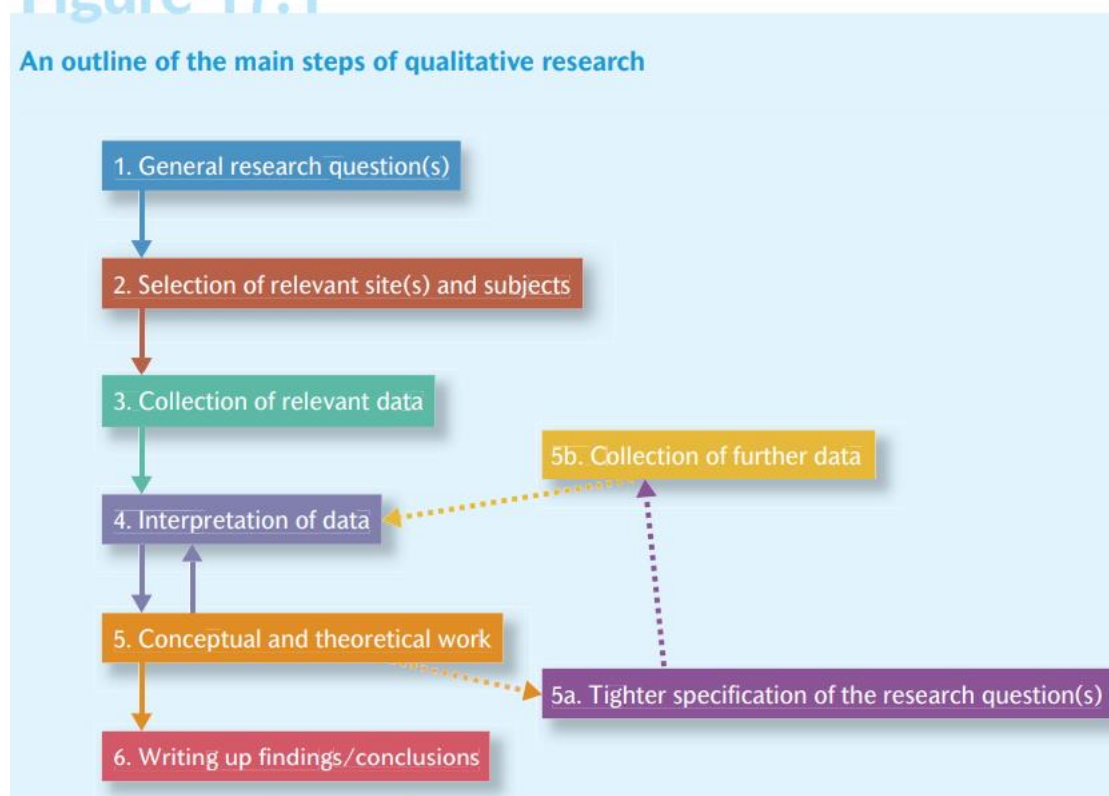
The methodology will consist of game-analysis combined with qualitative content analysis. These will be including the games as a primary source of information, how they allow the player to immerse into the world and which cultural residues they have left in. To accomplish this, a constructivist perspective will be used as the product itself essentially creates an entire world with cultural artefacts left in. The methodology is limited somewhat by the sole fact that videogames are an interactive medium and thus will be different on a micro-level for each consumer and their own personalized community.

4.1. Research design

The qualitative content analysis approach seemed to be the most applicable due to the project being almost entirely focused on the presentation of culture. Using general questions to guide the research according to the table provided by Foster was instrumental for the qualitative research analysis (Bryman,2012:385-6).

Table 3 – An outline of the main steps of qualitative research

Figure 17.1



After each gameplay-session performed, real-world equivalents were researched and taken into consideration, thus refocusing the research questions with each attempt made. For this refining process to function, the qualitative content-analysis approach was taken.

Furthermore, unlike many other topics, qualitative analysis could be considered the antithesis of quantitative analysis, due to the depth of analysis made possible and the scope required for this thesis project (Bryman,2012:407-8). The thesis will be employing the ontological position of constructivism, given the subject of gaming products, their representation of culture and the marketing of them in their respective domestic and global setting (Bryant&Charmaz,2011:205-7.,Bryman,2012:33-4.,Rye,2009:160-3). Due to this consideration, employing Objectivism surrounding the cultural influences would indicate that they are independent from the actors and the audience and that does not seem probable in this particular case, judging from the gaming scene at large (Bryman,2012:32-3). Gaming is a solitarily unique experience for its enhanced immersion aspect, as it will be different for every researcher and consumer respectively, related to the already existing micro-cultures within the game-sphere (Elmezemy & Wimmer, 2018: 82-3). It can therefore provide insight as to how these kinds of products can funnel cultural concepts. Due to the enhanced immersion aspect and the games' marketing of providing a 'realistic', but inherently overexaggerated and skewed view on Japan, captured during the creative process at the time, would make it helpful to discern just how much influence Japanese culture has in the games themselves and by proxy, what is projected onto the player (Goto-Jones,2016:1-6).

4.2.Selection of case study

The reason behind the Yakuza-series being chosen as the case-study is that it has seemingly managed to mix borderless marketing ideas and concepts into a cultural setting. While a multitude of games take place in Japan with heavy pop-culture influences are interesting to explore in their own right such as *The World Ends with You* that also takes place in Shibuya, the Yakuza-series has a long history as a brand, making it easier to analyze traits and trends within the products themselves. It takes common concepts of identity, rejection of societal norms, fighting for family and coats them in a pop-culture centered vision of Japan (Iwabuchi,2002). The reasons that *Yakuza 5* remastered, *Yakuza 0*, and *Yakuza: Like a Dragon* were chosen was due to my hypothesis that each entry would correspond to each respective sentiment. One considerable limit on this approach however, is that each game has over 80 hours of content each and there are eight installments that will be observed and coded as primary sources. However, the main focus lies with three installments; *Yakuza 5*, *Yakuza 0* and *Yakuza: Like a Dragon* (Sega,2016.,2020a.,2020b). The reasoning behind this choice is that each of these entries exemplifies the time-period they aim to portray, and they were also large turning-points for the series in different ways (Aki-at,2014.,Gallagher,2020). The other entries will be mentioned as well, but the aforementioned three entries is the main focus of

this thesis. This thesis will mainly be using secondary information, since most of the desired data-points are already available (Bryman,2012:115).

4.3.Data collection and analysis

The collection-process was made using Foster's table and it consisted of a considerable number of gameplay-sessions, with the notetaking and analysis done in tandem with one another (Bryman,2012:385-6). The data collection will be contained to the games' framing of Japanese culture (Sega,2006). The three main coding categories will be entertainment, drama, and immersion (Nagoshi,2010:10-1). Other coding-processes will be regarding micro, meso and macro communities that have all been important to the marketing itself and correlating this with the level of cultural influence from macro, meso and micro perspective (Elmezemy&Wimmer,2018:82-3.,Yin&Phillips,2020:171-2). This will be used to determine how much globalization has taken part into the equation of the games' success (Consalvo,2016.,Hutchinson,2019). The cultural factor is high and yet shown off in its entirety to the Western audience, it can be extrapolated that the game has been specialized and targeted towards a specific audience (Ibid:82-85-6). Therefore, various instances of heavily culturally influenced content will be categorized in their respective section and analyzed for the main three point of interest, proposed by Nagoshi and expressed through the promotional material. Examples of these three datatypes are the side-quests and battle mechanics, conveying the entertainment factor of the series, the references to real laws and yakuza tradition for drama, and the world of the games to demonstrate the immersion-aspect (Sega,2006.,2020a.,2020b). That said, one shortcoming to mention here is that these categories are not mutually exclusive, and they all interweave to make the product cohesive, unlike what Bryman (2012:303) recommends. However, the reason for these coding categories to be chosen is that these three elements are constantly displayed in the marketing material, promoting each of these three coding categories in three respective sections (Sega,2006.,Chapter 10) These entailed the promotion set by Nagoshi and his team (Entertainment, Drama and Immersion), Elmezemy & Wimmers' cultural product significance, i.e. Mass-market vs Niche products and the variety of gaming-communities set by Yin & Phillips relating to the Micro, meso and macro communities. Relaying this through Goffman (1956), this would be the front that they want to project onto the audience, which in turn mirrors both the creators and Sega in a way. The marketing will also be viewed as data in this regard, since it tends to make the audience see what Sega wants them to pay attention to. This will then be used for comparative data-analysis using the real equivalents of these

cultural traditions. It will be coded using gameplay and various features will be compared against their respective real-life equivalents. This contrast will be important for discerning the product's intent and contrasting against the representation of each entry's vision of Japan as a monetary cultural product.

4.4. Ethical dilemmas and reflexivity

The thesis project will be observed from a critical point of view, with the focus on the framing of the game-scenarios for the domestic and global audience respectively. Real-life equivalents to what is portrayed within the games will be containing some controversial points, such as the view on the yakuza itself, social pressure, and other cultural aspects throughout Japan. This will also be viewed from a Western perspective, to determine what was successful with each targeted audience and how Japanese cultural constructs are portrayed to the West. The author's positionality is mainly tied to Western sensibilities, and thus deeper domestic ties and references might be overlooked. This study could potentially be used as a case study of various representations of Japan by gaming industry to domestic and global markets. Another issue was the need for material that is originally in Japanese, later translated into English, leaving potential room for errors to be made in the process (Ibid: 73-4, 135). The data will be viewed through critical constructivist lens using several established researchers' theories to explain the data without much interference from the researcher's own personal biases. Despite this, many forms of unintentional bias are bound to appear.

Regardless, the summary of these theories being questioned critically will help to support the research, especially with the consideration of how personal this kind of qualitative analysis can become if left unchecked. Because of these considerations, these Yakuza-entries will be viewed through the games' presentation of Japan using various cultural influences. In order to analyze the collected data properly, it was integral to observe the data from a marketing standpoint, as that would show what elements the production-team wished to project onto the audience. Using the back-cover of the first Yakuza entry and the various other PlayStation Network descriptions, three common elements found during the search was 'entertainment' that consists of gameplay-segments, 'immersion' in the world and its construction used for virtual tourism and lastly 'drama' is drawn from the portrayal of the yakuza throughout the series engaging in various stories of corruption and betrayal (Chapter 10). Of course, each entry has a mix of each established datatype and the analysis will be presentation-focused between the domestic and global markets. Arguably the most efficient way to grasp what they wish to portray is to play each of the entries as well as analyzing the trailers due to them

being made for the targeted audience, as well as new potential consumers. These also highlight a very important claim, that the games will project an authentic version of the cities that you visit throughout, so therefore it was decided to make sure to take that into consideration. Contrasting the portrayal of culture within the entries and comparing this to real-life equivalents seemed to be prudent. This analysis is established from a variety of angles, but it will have to be limited in order to contain all of the cultural data within the thesis. The amount of potential data discovered during this process shows just how cultural products can possess borderless ideas (Hutchinson,2019:25-6). Therefore, it was decided to focus on an underlying theme throughout each entry and that is the concept of *Tatema* and *Honne* that is critical to understanding Japanese culture (Bachnik,2007:1-3). They are even referenced as the front-facing powers and the back-facing powers respectively in the newest entry (Sega,2020b). The *Tatema* and *Honne* are both Japanese concepts so my own reflexivity prevents me from fully understanding their symbiotic relationship. However, my focus is not to fully understand it but rather grasp how these concepts are conveyed to the potential consumers.

5. Thematic analysis

This chapter will cover how the creative team employs a certain vision of Japan to promote the product and examples of how they do so. These examples will cover a wide variety of topics, and thus it was made into its own chapter. It will also cover how certain limitations on the player are placed there in order to limit their interactivity and this is either done for a narrative reason or a hardware-restriction, which is all of the chosen entries is likely the former, due to their console's power and performance.

5.1. The appealing fantasy

The first main character by the name of Kiryu is mentioned as being a pillar of the yakuza positioned in Tokyo, having the tattoo of the dragon on his back, therefore the series' Japanese name *Ryū ga Gotoku* roughly translates to Like a Dragon (Sega,2020a.,2020b). He is essentially a well-written fantasy, as he is a representation of the ideal yakuza member and you can use his avatar to get experiences that you likely cannot perform in real life. This is thanks to the medium that this story is portrayed through, namely gaming. It allows any consumer to see the world through Kiryu's eyes. However, you can manipulate the avatar to see different sides to the character. Nagoshi, the creator mentions about the different Kiryus that exist for every individual player which reflects on a micro-communal level (Nagoshi,2010:86-7.,Elmezemy&Wimmer,2018:80-2). For some players, the sub-stories and the minigames are not important, but as Nagoshi (2010:87) mentions, it is possible to ignore or miss entirely, contributing to his intention about each player having their own different version of Kiryu. Kiryu can righteous, violent, naïve, proud, humble, dorky, badass et cetera, depending on how you interact with the world presented to you. Either way, if the player immerses themselves as the main character, they will see Japan from their point-of-view, showing various problems around them. Kiryu is symbolic of the self-image of the yakuza, meaning that he is the kind, noble renegade that lives his life on his own terms, striving to protect his loved ones by any means necessary (Kaplan&Dubro,2003:3-8.,Kingston,2013:242). He also serves as a vessel to experience different sides of Japanese culture (Nagoshi,2010:86.,Sega,2006. Chapter 7). However, this is not how society views him, as it can be said that Kiryu himself is the yakuza's *Honne*, while the real image of the yakuza both overseas and domestically have a noticeably bad reputation. They tend to be very careful regarding their own perception, but they are still viewed on bad terms with the general public, despite working to establish their "righteous" image (Yakuza history,2021a). The world that he presents is so prominent due to the immersion factors labeled below.

5.2. Origin of the *Gokudō*

The concept of *Gokudō* or ‘extreme way’ alone provides an interesting cultural inspiration from Japanese and Chinese mythology. Johansson (2017:7-8) mentions this being critical to the structure of the yakuza. The *Irezumi* or back-tattoos carry symbolism for the ‘extreme way’ that the yakuza practice (Ibid:7-10., Yakuza history, 2021d). This has its origin in Shintoism and Samurai-culture, as they performed the *Sakazuki*-ritual and from that point on, they are similarly tied to their patriarch, which could be a reference to the *Daimyō* (land-owners) of old and their relationship to their Samurai troops, strengthening that connection further (Ibid:53-4., Kaplan&Dubro, 2003:8-10., Yakuza history, 2021c). Johansson is Swedish, so the yakuza-members he conversed with likened the art of *Irezumi* to that of old Viking-tradition, which bears a lot of significance since tattoos, weapons and armor was very indicative of their allegiance and beliefs (Ibid:64). In this way, relating the yakuza to the old ideals of the Samurai is integral as it was essentially the same; serve your lord/patriarch with undying fealty, acting as their *teppōdama* or bullets (Kaplan&Dubro, 2003:8-10). The contrast presents itself when you think about the romanticized view of the yakuza as heroes in the style of Robin Hood (Ibid:4-7). Hutchinson also emphasizes how gaming can be used as a gateway to observe different cultures as a fictional character, because the player likely experiences the same emotions as that character in many scenes due to the established projection onto that attractive fantasy that Goto-Jones (2012:110-1) touches upon briefly (Hutchinson, 2019:254-5).

5.3. *Irezumi* and the mythological connection

The reason behind the title Like a Dragon is that Kiryu has the dragon on his back, symbolizing one of the four divine guardians that rules of the oceans and rivers (Johansson, 2017:53-4). The parallel between the *Koi* and the fully-fledged dragon all possess different meanings to each of the characters that has them engraved on their back. The *Koi* or carp on another family member’s back symbolizes the fact that he wants to catch up to Kiryu and become his equal, the strongest member in the *Tōjō*-clan. This story is a part of Chinese mythology, wherein a carp must pass through the *Longmen* river and if it climbs to the top of the waterfall and passes through the Dragon’s Gate, it can be transformed into a dragon. Kiryu’s choice of the dragon is never fully explained, but it mirrors his position as a pillar of the *Tōjō*-clan in the fifth entry, as a leader and one of the most powerful people in the yakuza (Sega, 2020a). For example, he single-handedly wipes out an entire family in Yakuza 4. In the fifth entry, Saejima is also mentioned as being another pillar having the Tiger on his back, considered an equal to the Dragon. Both characters are essentially idealized yakuza with

indomitable strength, and they have equal power, as can be seen during their first encounter (Sega,2019b.,2020a). Other tattoos also possess deeper meanings, such as Kuze's *Enma* and Watase's *Ashura* were all drawn by Horitomo, one of Japan's most prolific *Irezumi*-artists (Sega, 2016.,2020a). This is an important aspect to the games, as it references the games' original title, "Like a Dragon", meaning that Kiryu is supposed to take on the ideals and strength that the dragon represents within the Chinese legend. The Western localization only added this subtitle to the latest entry, showing how even the smallest cultural elements are being showcased in the later entries despite them being shown throughout the series as being important. This indicates a change in the presentation of the series itself.

5.4.Cultural products significance

In the first entry, availability was certainly present, but the accuracy of the translation of the product needed to be observed, which resulted in several strange expectations from the global audience where a character would expect Western players to know *Aniki* (applied after high-ranking yakuza within the same family that stand above you in the social ladder) and similar words by heart (Yin&Phillips,2020:170-2). On the other hand, *Ryū ga Gotoku Ishin!* was not brought over to the Western market due to its bond with Japan-specific concepts and the fact that the team created an in-game dictionary to explain foreign concepts even for the domestic audience. Yin & Phillips (2020) even indicates how much of a direct representation of reality the mass cultural products tend to be. In the case of the Yakuza-series this is integral to the products themselves as they are heavily intertwined with the representation of the modern Japan and individual period-dramas, such as *Yakuza 0* and *Ryū ga Gotoku Ishin!* (Sega,2014.,2016).

The imbedded culture shown in the newer entries are mostly intact, such as the bombast of the 1980s in *Yakuza 0* and the virtual tourism of *Yakuza 5* (Sega,2016.,2020a). However, due to the common misconception that the global market cannot fully grasp Japanese culture, some content has been removed or altered over the series' run. The most popular example is the 21 removed sub-stories in *Yakuza 3*, mainly pertaining to the Host-club minigame (Norris,2012:78-83.,Sega,2019a). As Norris (2012)' article explores, a lot of people felt that these cuts were unnecessary, especially considering the games' focus on immersion and accurate representation of Japan. This accurate representation of modern Japan is inherently important to the world that the team wished to portray. This focus likely led to the hiring of Horitomo, the prolific *Irezumi*-artist as well as the reliance of first-hand experience and accounts emphasized by Hase Seishu, a popular novelist during the games'

development (Nagoshi,2010:51-3). He would be harsh as they were trying to keep that vision of a realistic but overblown Japan as their focal point, resulting in the large amount of immersion in games like Yakuza 5 and 0 later on (Ibid:52-3).

5.5.Commonalities through the entries

One common element with the entire series is the portrayal of Kiryu and Ichiban and the options available to the player. For example, Karaoke is prevalent for all of the main characters as a clear form of release of tension (Yano,1996:6-9). This is exemplified by Kiryu's *Baka Mitai* and Ichiban's rapping segment of Like a Butterfly (Sega, 2016.,2020b). *Baka Mitai* is complementary of the drama happening in the main story and the release that Karaoke provides (Sega,2016.,Yano,1996:6-9). In contrast, Ichiban's rapping in Like a Butterfly is showcased as a normal night out with friends, as the Survive Bar is more reminiscent to the Western iteration of *Karaoke*, with Ichiban clearly struggling to rap (Sega,2020b.,Ibid:7-10). Again, the two highlight the *Tatemae/Honne* relationship in Japan in an accessible way for many in the global audience. Plenty of open-world games has a clear dissonance between what the player is allowed to do as their avatar, the main story and the world they are trying to portray (Dunn,2020). However, in the Yakuza-series this dissonance does not exist, since each main character's personality is on full display. For example, Kiryu is seen as a man who does not start his fights, so the option to blast civilians with rocket-launchers is not available, nor can you harass any random citizen or the police (Ibid.,Hutchinson,2019:70-1). You are just an average person, so you have to act the part and that is an example of how putting manipulation-rules, aka level of interaction can shape the experience (Frasca,2003:223-4.,Hutchinson,2019:70). Therefore, everything you can do in the games is something that the characters would do, which includes playing baseball, mahjong, managing a ramen-stand, fan-dancing, going to a share-holder meeting, the bowling alley et cetera. Another important aspect of the games is how they showcase famous people associated with Japan at the set point in time, such as Tatsuya the chef in Yakuza 5, Miracle Johnson (Michael Jackson), and *Il-Yu Jin* modeled after *Bae Yong-joon* from the Korean drama-series called Winter Sonata in Yakuza: Like a Dragon, demonstrating that the series does not just portray Japanese culture but several elements from the US and South Korea as well (Sega,2016.,2020a.,2020b). Michael Jackson had a fairly stable connection with Sega including at least two projects and his own game called "Moonwalker", combined with the fact that his Japan "Bad" tour took place in Tokyo 1987, one year before the game is set (Bad Era Haven,2013.,McWhertor,2009.,Roberts,2019.,Sega,2016). Other prevalent themes are the

iconic brands of produce, particularly regarding the various drinks and food that you can find, such as Boss Coffee and CC. Lemon in vending machines and notorious brands of Whiskey at the iconic Kabukicho district of Golden Gai or *Champion Gai* as it is referred to in *Kamurocho* (Kyodo,2016). Hase Seishu's feedback regarding the accuracy of the world such as the cramped nature of the bars in the area, the overpriced selection that is prevalent to actual location and the density of stores unlike any other area in the entries (Nagoshi,2010:51-3). The same can be said for the placement of some stores, like *Kani Doraku* in real-life Dotonbori, equivalent to *Sotenbori*, to the ramen-stalls next to the river in Nagoya. This observation extends even to the maps of each district, being virtually identical. One curious discrepancy, however, is the scale of the maps themselves. This is the prime-example of hardware-limitations of the current console. They have essentially scaled it down while trying to keep in the immediately recognizable landmarks. This is especially prevalent in *Yakuza 5*, due to the sheer size and the fact that on top of *Kamurocho* and *Sotenbori*, they recreated three other major city districts (Sega,2020a). The readings and promotional material point to a larger theme between the success of the games in the West, due to various shifts in the globalization of Japanese culture in the gaming scene.

5.6.Contrasts between the portrayal of ideals

The most substantial contrast is how the yakuza are portrayed in the games and its reflection in real life. For example, it is constantly shown through grand displays of masculinity how the main characters want a fair fight to not destroy their opponents but rather show them another way and/or to settle an idealistic argument. The series shows this, but just as the rest of the games' content, it has an undercurrent of demonstrating the *Tatemae/Honne* relationship (Bachnik,2007:1-3). This also leads to the most curious dualities, such as how the yakuza wants to be portrayed, and what their real-life actions point to. As an example of this, the yakuza offices have framed rules of conduct on their walls stating their own chivalrous rules (Sega,2016). Walking out of that office however, they have been known to engage in human-trafficking, false-loans, scams, open street warfare that has drawn innocent lives, drugs et cetera (Kaplan&Dubro,2003:240-1,325-7.,Kingston,2013:241-2). This is interesting as this extends past the portrayal of the yakuza however, as the idol-community, business environment, and even major-league baseball teams has the same kinds of contradictions and social pressures (Sega,2020a). Japan also has a notorious mixture of old and new architecture within the various districts as Kabukicho has a shrine placed in-between alleyways next to modern buildings (Consalvo,2016:39-40.,Sega,2016). Even the wiring

outside of the buildings are presented within the games, as they look remarkably like their real-life equivalents (Ibid,191-2). This is an example of area-design that is particularly culturally infused, as it feeds the player with an indirect display of cultural quirks.

5.7.Issues of exclusionism

The legal gray-zones in Japan are emblematic of each entry in some fashion and it is a major part of the story in *Yakuza: Like a Dragon*, as the main hub is considered one of these gray-zones (Koch,2020:32-3,77-8.,Sega,2020b). Bleach Japan, an organization set out to make every gray-zone of Japan disappear, symbolizes an antagonistic force rather than as a force for good. This is opposed to the somewhat prevalent theory that Japan's open sex-industry is needed to keep a variety of sex-crimes from occurring, according to Koch's discussion with Chie, a 33 year-old woman working at a *deriheru*-service (2020:24-5). She also added that this is not said as to justify the industry itself, but rather that it has some essential elements to it (Koch,2020:24). Whether this is true or not is largely irrelevant since this represents the Japan that the team perceived while doing fieldwork on different locations for each entry (Nagoshi,2010:51-3). Using Bleach Japan as a medium of sorts, the team is likely trying to invoke Japanese cleanliness and to what extremes people will venture to in order for the clean image of Japan to be maintained. If you stand out or misbehave in any way, people are quick to take note and make sure that you conform, especially when discussing the highly problematic work-culture that is still prevalent throughout Japan (Genda,2019:1-4). Bleach Japan abuses the various laws in place for the people to go after struggling people that have in one way or another been excluded from society. One way they do so is to attack the gray-zones, which are known for having connections to the sex-trade (Adelstein,2009:139-40).

6. Individual entry analysis

In the following section, I will discuss more cultural nuance in each of the chosen entries in relation to the main three coding-categories that the creator wanted to portray; Entertainment, Drama and Immersion. This seems to correlate with the three most common focus-points in the promotional material.

6.1. Yakuza 5 remastered (PlayStation 4 version, Sega 2020a)

Entertainment: This entry is full of different of side-stories relating to each character's arc and occupation. These are distinct from the usual sub-stories due to their relevancy to a chosen path of life. Kiryu has two side-stories regarding his taxi-driving, one that represents his *Tatema* of being a regular taxi-driver following every traffic regulation in the book. The other represents his *Honne*, where he gets into street races to citizen arrest a crew looking to cause mayhem in Fukuoka. On a smaller scale, this whole side-story shows how dissonant tones blend in the games. Even though these scenarios are not realistic, they showcase just how diverse and eccentric Japanese humor can be. They also demonstrate how heavily these jokes lean into cultural customs, namely *Manzai*-comedy and how these ridiculous situations portray Japan as a fun and entertaining place (Gavin,2016). These routines consist of a *Boke* or fool and a *Tsukkomi* or straight-man where the fool tells a weird story and the straight-man reacts to the madness in front of them, similarly to Kiryu's reactions during the sub-stories (Gaving,2016). Haruka and Akiyama both engage in Haruka's idol-career. Again, this is representative of Japanese collectivist society, the toxic workplace-environment of traditional companies, and the 'pureness' that idols are meant to project. This is crystalized in Haruka's farewell speech at the end of the game. By admitting that her adoptive father was a former yakuza-member, she is pushed out of the industry and has her products banned and discontinued in the following entry (Sega,2017,2020a). Akiyama acts as the manager for her career however, which is the least fleshed out detail in the game, since he mainly provides her the funds to operate and keep the idol-agency afloat. Shinada's side-story is a reflection on how baseball is seen in Japan, as it is more popular than even football. This also works to illustrate various techniques that actual baseball-players use, such as bunts. It is by far the most prevalent sport in Japan, even outranking football. Again, this is simple but a relatively accurate portrayal of Japan that is perhaps not well known in the Western gaming-hubs, but you can learn that from engaging with the game. It is often laced with a heavy dose of humor and ridiculousness, so it is not to be taken at face-value. Despite this fact, the games manage

to provide virtual tourism in a way that attracts the average consumer, so it can unintentionally function as a gateway to Consumer Cosmopolitanism.

Drama:

Most of the dramatic flair in this entry is how Kiryu and Saejima are pillars of the *Tōjō*, being essentially two ideal yakuza that keeps the *Tōjō*-clan from dying out. Another focus is the idol-community, where being pure and innocent is key. In the subsequent entry, Haruka gets thrown out of the industry due to her foster-father, Kiryu still having connections to the yakuza, a very morally gray organization. However, the most recent character Shinada gets involved in the main source of drama in this entry. His story revolves around finding and stopping the Nagoya-family. As it turns out, practically anyone important to his story, aka regular civilians are the Nagoya-family itself. They had hidden their allegiance and they keep both the *Tōjō*-clan and the Omi Alliance out of Nagoya. This is reflective of the beginning of the *Bakuto* and *Tekiya*, which eventually formed the yakuza many years later. *Bakuto* were gamblers that first engaged in *Yubi-Tsume* or ritualistic finger cutting, and they also used the word Yakuza to describe someone useless, as it was a losing hand in *Hanafuda* (Kaplan&Dubro,2003:12-4., Yakuza history,2021b). Meanwhile *Tekiya* were peddlers that embraced a hierarchical system to protect themselves and their affiliates from the class-system of the Tokugawa-regulations, thus they considered themselves a form of *Rōnin* since they followed a strict code (Ibid:10-2). That is likely where much of the seemingly public goodwill and their very own Robin Hood-esque image stems from (Ibid:5-6.,Yakuza history,2021). They were also called non-human and heavy polluted people due to their activities, which even then can surely be classified as uniquely cruel (Kaplan&Dubro,2003:12). This tradition of putting down people that disregard social custom has been prominent for at least 300 years and counting, which was all influenced from the cultural situation in Japan, showing outsiders as foreign and therefore dangerous to society, i.e. *Bakuto* and *Tekiya* (Ibid:5-14).

Immersion:

The immersion in this entry is rather high, due to the tourism-aspect of the game and the five major cities being available. The reason for the longer production-cycle of this game being two years instead of a single year was because the production-team actually went to Sapporo, Nagoya, Fukuoka, Osaka and Tokyo to get the places looking as close to the originals as possible. Personally, I have only spent a week in the Susukino-district in Sapporo, but

judging by what I saw, the game-area is eerily similar to the real district, if a bit reduced in size and there was also a limit as to how much of the district was capable to be shown off. For example, there are three places that I noticed while visiting Susukino myself; the location of the local *Don Quijote*, the *Nikka*-billboard on the main intersection and the enormous snow-sculptures at the snow festival including *Hatsune Miku* and the large castle-sculpture. All of the above were perfectly detailed and scaled accordingly, even extending to the shopping district, the local Hokkaido-magazines, the local delicacies such as Genghis Khan, and even the reference of the Bar Ambitious to the Boys Be Ambitious quotes, popular in the area. I cannot speak for the other locations but having analyzed map-layouts of the districts and famous landmarks, it is seemingly very close in detail. As for famous local people there is Tatsuya the chef, who is an important sub-story character in the game, as he was famous around the making of the entry. All this heightens the Japanese popular culture that most of the Western player-base had no concept of, showing off borderless ideas in a cultural setting. Therefore, I decided to analyze the credits-sequence of *Yakuza 5* and I found a multitude of direct references to Japan-specific produce and publishing companies. Most of the companies listed here are directly referenced in other entries as well.

Publishing companies

- KADOKAWA MAGAZINES
- Kodansha, Ltd.
- SHUEISHA, Inc.

Japan-specific produce-chains

- Kani Doraku, Inc.
- Sunrise Japan, Inc.
- Seicomart Company, Inc.
- Don Quijote Holdings Co., Ltd.
- Nikka Whiskey Co., Ltd.
- Matsuya Foods Company, Limited

All of these chains are prevalent locally in Japan, but they all mainly revolve around domestic sales. Most overseas players that are not familiar with or have ever travelled to Japan will likely never have heard of a majority of these establishments. This indicates that the *Yakuza*-series' main target-market is still Japan, despite appealing much to the Western gaming-hubs as well.

6.2. Yakuza 0 (PlayStation 4 version, Sega 2016)

Entertainment: The gameplay demonstrates how visceral the 80s was. It also has a secondary gameplay-use for money, to throw at your enemies to distract them and avoid a confrontation. This feature only exists in this one entry of the series, where money was prominently featured, making Japan known as the “economic miracle” overseas (Patrick&Rosovsky,1976:4-6). While Shinada’s story in the fifth entry showcased the difficulties of the inflationary status of Japan in 2012, this entry highlights just how affected the Japanese nightlife was influenced by the huge excess of money at the time (Johnston,2009). While your normal battle in the previous games would grant you an average of 5000 yen each, in this game it is raised to an average of 50000 yen. There is also a way to avoid battles in this game that is not present in the other entries, namely to throw money to distract the enemy for long enough to get away. Each time this tactic is employed however, it costs about 50000 yen.

Drama: Rituals like the *Sakazuki* where you bind yourself to your patriarch, *Yubi-Tsume* where chop off your own pinky if you acted outside of the set rules of the Yakuza and *Irezumi*, where you get a back-tattoo that symbolizes your own ‘extreme way’ and your belief-system (Yakuza history,2021b,2021c,2021d). All of these rituals are shown to the player directly with Majima and Kiryu as the focal point, devoting their lives to said patriarch, acting as *teppōdama* (Kaplan&Dubro,2003:8). This is interesting due to the situation that they both find themselves in and their judges so to speak especially Kuze. His back-tattoo of *Enma* symbolizes this angle, as he has yet to consider Kiryu a real yakuza until their last encounter. He is judging Kiryu just like *Enma* judges if one should go to heaven or hell within Buddhist-theology. Only once he proves his conviction to the *Gokudō* can he be considered a true yakuza as Kuze puts it. The story also shows the complicated relationship between the yakuza and the people of Japan, as they are seen as disturbances and simultaneously, they were generally respected (Ibid:6-9). Due to Kabukicho’s connection to criminal activity, it makes for an excellent stage to explore the innate drama that this type of narrative will inject. It was known as one of the most lawless districts in Tokyo, at least up until 2001 (Adelstein,2009:140).

Immersion: The immersion is quite unparalleled this time around as almost everything has a relationship to something that was prominent in 1980s Japan. For a few examples, you have a few sub-stories that highlight technological changes, taxation arguments, a dangerous cult

that likely serves as a parallel to the *Aum Shinrikyo* cult and the subsequent terror-attack using sarin-gas, disco-culture and famous figures, the sexual revolution et cetera (BBC,2018). The influx of currency was also rather prevalent as a gameplay feature, as you can use 50000 yen to throw at an opponent to make them distracted, a staggering amount when you consider that it would take longer to stock up that much in any of the other entries.

6.3. Yakuza: Like a Dragon (PlayStation 4 version, Sega 2020b)

Entertainment: The main character has an obsession with Japanese Role-playing games (J-RPG), viewing the whole world through the lens of a Dragon Quest entry, which along with Final Fantasy set the standard for the whole J-RPG genre (Hutchinson,2019:109-110). It is also directly contrasted against other well-known RPGs like Pokémon. The whole *Sujimon* quest is a reference to this series after all, with direct quotes such as “I’ll be the best there ever was”, “Gotta catch em all!”, and “I choose you!” to classic quotes from the Western adaptation of Pokémon. This whole quest confirms how this product has made use of Western-specific terms for the series, despite the series being set in Japan. It shows an aptitude for global concepts being placed into a cultural setting.

Drama: This entry portrays a lot of mixture of yakuza culture, including the themes introduced in the other entries. It also details the theme of survival and comradery, as many factions and businesses are trying to bond together despite being excluded from society. This permeates the yakuza, the homeless community, the *Liumang* and the *Geomijul* (the Chinese and South Korean equivalent of the Yakuza respectively), all crystalizing in the ending that enables Yokohama to be a safe haven for Japanese, Chinese and Korean people that were forced to flee or got rejected by society. The ending scene especially crystalizes how the yakuza were established in the first place, becoming a society of people that protected the innocent, that all went through their own exclusion and they needed a guiding hand. The game also demonstrates current issues by the enemies that you have to engage. Arguably the biggest issue that the game presents is the dissolving of the greatest yakuza family in Japan, which mirrors the situation of the *Yamaguchi-gumi* upheaval in 2015. The disbanding of this yakuza-faction created waves throughout Japan and the fallout is still present (THE ASAHI SHIMBUN,2020). The *Omi*-Alliance likely references the *Yamaguchi-gumi* is due to their size, 40% of all yakuza was thought to have a membership there. Another reason is that they are both based in *Kansai* (Western Japan) and they both wanted to expand into the Tokyo-area for a long time (Adelstein,2009:283). Additionally, in all likelihood, the *Sumiyoshi-kai* is the closest equivalent to the *Tōjō*-clan, since they are based in Tokyo (Ibid). Another interesting to discuss in the portrayal of the front-facing and back-facing powers in the game, resembling the *Tatemaie/Honne* relationship excellently. It can also be argued that the final mission of the game is to break down the *Tatemaie* that is Ryo Aoki, and bring his *Honne*-side back, represented by Masato Arakawa. In the very final fight, that is brought to life through gameplay as well, since the first fight has you fighting Ryo Aoki, the Governor of Tokyo.

Later, his title falls away and you have broken through his defense so now he is simply Masato Arakawa.

Immersion: There is much emphasis on immersion to be found among the yakuza aspects, the *Liumang*, a Chinese mafia faction made out of *Heihai*zi or paperless children, the *Geomijul*, and their predecessor, the *Jingweon* showing off more than just Japanese culture but also Chinese and Korean (Li et al,2010). Additionally, the amount of paperwork you have to sign to run for local office is portrayed rather well, as well as the campaign vans with a megaphone on it being accurate to many instances of actual candidacies, and they usually cause a disturbance (Murai,2015). The portrayal of *Hello Work* as a business as well as a job-class changing hub, is quite apt and this is communicated through J-RPG elements. The drinking culture of Japan is portrayed using the friendship-level mechanic, which increases the powers of your team through bonding. Potential love-stories for the characters you meet during the main characters' journey also highlight a reference to *Persona 5*, a recent J-RPG with roughly the same friendship mechanics (Sega,2020b). The story of meeting Eri and helping her business grow helps to illustrate just how intense small-business owners have it in Japan (Ibid). Only when you have helped her will she join your party, but if you fail, she will not join the party due to the workload. This is subconsciously telling the player to help out people by setting barriers of interaction and motivational rewards for acting in a certain way. This rewards the player just as much as Ichiban, rewarding you with additional tools for helping others, reinforcing this mindset into the player. Another issue that is touched upon is the Coin-Locker Babies as the main character and the main villain were both abandoned the same way. This was a rather common practice for neglecting children in the 1970s most likely due to the money-shortage and lack of knowledge regarding preventive-measures back in that period, even creating national paper-headlines (Kuono & Johnson, 1994: 26-8). The coin-operated lockers were placed in places where they could be commonly seen, but if they died, one of the common ways of death was asphyxiation, explaining why Masato Arakawa had breathing-problems for most of his life (Ibid). This changed when he got a lung-transplant in the US, but regardless this was a prevalent issue in Japan that is relatively exclusive to the country itself (Sega,2020b). This became a societal topic in Japan due to the spread of coin-operated lockers (Kuono & Johnson, 1994: 25-8). Again, this is another aspect of Japanese culture that is usually not spread through Western media, seeing how steeped in Japanese culture that the games are.

7. Trailer analysis

For the last section of analysis, trailers will be compared, since they tend to reveal what the marketing team want people to focus on at the time of release. Is there a notable difference in their approach for different markets and if so, what is the primary focus? To answer this, I have chosen eight trailers, all close to the entries' individual releases. The method I will be using to determine which audience this highly mass cultural product is meant for is cultural product significance discussed in Chapter 5.4. The audience is mainly aimed at younger Japanese men, due to the ratings of each game being around 16 to 18 and it is primarily targeted towards men because of the main character and their emphasis on masculinity throughout the series (OTAQUEST,2019). However, there are bound to be outliers and since present borderless concepts in a cultural setting, it is bound to be effective for affecting an overseas audience as well. Additionally, while women are not focused on as much, as it has been one criticism of the games, it does not preclude women from enjoying the content on display (Ibid.,Greszes,2020).

7.1.Domestic and global promotion

- 『龍が如く 5 夢、叶えし者』 ゲーム紹介編 ([*Ryū ga Gotoku 5 Yume, Haeshimono*] *ge-mu shōkaihen* lit. Like a Dragon 5: The Fulfillers of Dreams - Game showcase) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L2RZE4Rawb8> (20/9-2012)

The three focal points are the realism of the five great cities of Tokyo, Kyoto, Sapporo, Fukuoka, and Nagoya, Another Drama is the form of the Side-stories, and the intense combat. This is focused on the immersion of the virtual tourism, drama and the entertainment of the series, likely as a result of Nagoshi's vision, and it is accurate to how the series was portrayed in the West as well. As for length of the trailer itself and the compact information dispersal, it is far more condensed than the Western equivalent. It has much more time and expenses put into showing off the game's scale and angles.

- Yakuza 5 Launch Official Trailer (*IGN*)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RCtUY2Ask10> (9/12-2015)

It plays into the dramatic aspect rather than sticking to the three pillars of the domestic marketing. It solely focuses on the drama, rather than the eccentric view of Japan. It is still reminiscent of the Western marketing going back to the very first entry. It is very different from the domestic trailers as they are more virtual tourism focused, with various towns and their quirks and traditions presented in full view. It is also significantly shorter, bringing less

attention of the variety and virtual tourism aspects and it has minimal dialogue and presentation build-up for the product. The Western version downplays many of these aspects in exchange for only focusing on the dramatic aspects. When viewing them together one after the other, they become distinctly different in size and impression (PlayStation, 2020a).

- 『龍が如く 0 誓いの場所』 ゲームトレーラー ([*Ryū ga Gotoku 0 Chikai no Basho*] *Ge-mu Toreira*- lit. Like a Dragon 0: The Promised Land – Game Trailer) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QirwHAllyJU> (25/9-2014)

This trailer highlights the 1980s, where currency skyrocketed and three main vices were prevalent; Money, Women, and Violence. It also emblemizes who its target audience is, domestic Japanese adult men. The side-stories are highlighted as in Kiryu's real-estate business and Majima's Cabaret Club. It also highlights the 30 JAV stars and the sexual revolution of the era. The fighting styles are also emphasized, relating heavily to the time-period, such as the Dancer and Slugger, being emblematic of the disco culture and the fascination of baseball in Japan respectively.

- Yakuza 0 Launch Trailer <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1x0O-6PyjM> (24/1-2017)

Unlike most other trailers before it, there is a distinct dual focus. On one side, they demonstrate the dramatic story, but at the halfway point, it changes from dramatic focus to entertainment focus. The first part demonstrates the perception of the series in the West, while the later showcases its *Honne*, the fact that you can go to the disco, play mahjong, play old Sega arcades et cetera. It is the clearest about the changes in the marketing style and the cultural influences being showcased. Unlike the focus that Yakuza 5's trailer possessed, it focuses on all three aspects. This would seemingly become a trend from this point forward, indicating an audience and focus-shift as it went from a more niche product to a more widely available product likely due to multi-platform approach, as well as this entry sporting a physical and a digital release, sporting more confidence for the brand itself. It is also notoriously open to new players, suggesting that they took advantage of the borderless platform to present a culturally inspired world, to a distinctly more global audience. The Yakuza 5 trailer seemed to be made for the fans that requested its localization via the #buildingthelist project rather than the broader audience outside of Japan (PlayStation Network, 2017).

- PS4専用ソフト『龍が如く7 光と闇の行方』最新ゲームトレーラー (PS4 *Senyō sofuto [Ryū ga Gotoku 7 Hikari to Yami no Yukue] Saishin ge-mu toreira-* lit. Like a Dragon 7: The Destination of Light and Darkness - Latest game trailer) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=79sDRvm8yk8> (26/12-2019)

This trailer's main focus is on the RPG-system and the world of the game, being Tokyo, Kyoto and Yokohama respectively. There is next to no focus on the story and drama aspects, which is curious. This is more technical, showing what will be distinctly different, mainly focusing on the battle-system, which had moved away from a brawler where you respond to your opponents to a strictly J-RPG centered style of combat where you take turns commencing your attacks.

- Yakuza: Like a Dragon Launch Trailer <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hkygiqC7ulQ> (10/11-2020)

This trailer also showcases the qualities that has been prominent in the domestic promotional material, such as its rather overblown world. One thing that sticks out is an emphasis on its entertainment aspect and less on the dramatic world and the immersion. This a major shift as the Japanese trailer focused in-depth about the J-RPG elements while the Western trailer took the same route as previous Japanese promotions, showing that the gap of promotional differences growing closer with time. This indicates that Consumer Cosmopolitanism has occurred on macro-level, as the audience is seemingly more than focused, as it projects a level of certainty for the brand itself despite its status as an ultra-cultural product.

These trailers were chosen due to their release timing, as they are the closest to show off the final product before it enters the market, showcasing what the new consumers might expect. Differences between the domestic and the global audience are clear, as the Western market is most focused is mostly on the dramatic aspect and it leads into it more so than the domestic equivalent. It tried to assimilate into the Western market, trying to distract from its cultural influence, similar to borderless product. This backfired as it was presenting image of the product that the audience likely expected. Another difference is that the Japanese promotion tends to be longer than the Western equivalents, meaning that they need to digest it for the international audience more. This is likely due to the innate cultural difference between the markets and how the domestic likely has a clearer frame of reference for the cultural influence while the Western marketing has to establish that baseline. The change is priority has been clear in the Western market, indicating a change in focus as the

gap between the two promotional styles has been more closed than ever before. This is ever so emphasized with the first promotional material, where the trailers are essentially the same, but the presentation of Japan is still noticeably different (PlayStation Network,2020b).

7.2.The progression of promotional material

The very first entry of Yakuza makes the difference clear in from the start (Sega,2006). In the Japanese trailer, it portrays a gritty world steeped in blood and cruelty (Jolly Roger Bay Videogames,2012). It does portray the same landscape in the Western adaptation, and it is by far the game that was the least experimental with tone and the portrayal of Japanese popular culture (IGN, 2011). However, the insistence on an English dub hinders the authenticity quite a bit, along with clear inspiration from Rockstar's marketing. The dub generally hampers the product as in the game, as the availability and focus are not set properly. The Western gaming-hubs had essentially absorbed the product and made it more Westernized. The new products and promotional material clearly show a more nuanced and complex look into Japanese culture, demonstrating an underlying globalization and marketing change for the series itself. It portrays Japanese cultural concepts in a very sympathetic and approachable light, despite the intense specialization and niche created around the games' meso-community in the Western gaming-hubs (Elmezeny&Wimmer,2018:82-85).

As the latest entry's promotional material has indicated however, these differences are being much more translated, giving the global audience a better of the product, even including many Japanese references that are not as showcased within the Japanese-influenced macro community of the gaming sphere. This indicates that a certain level of globalization has been established, as many of these concepts and their conceptual undertones are not well-known within Western culture. It also heavily relies on each of the three factors working together, as it wishes to promote an enjoyable and fun time for the player, while leaning into the human-drama that is usually based off of some real event or symbolism. The two above is easy enough to manage but the third pillar makes everything more bizarre, as it leans into Japanese culture and actual tourism and/or showcasing real Japanese drinking-culture, the nightlife of the arguably most vicious places in all of Japan, and landmarks that demonstrate each cities personality and traditions, corresponding to real life locations intrinsic to Japan itself. This is showcased most heavily in *Ryū ga Gotoku Ishin!*, where the player joins the *Shinsengumi* during the *Bakumatsu*-period (1853-68) as Ryōma Sakamoto (Sega,2014).

7.3. The target audience

The name Yakuza also reveals quite a bit regarding the target audience, as you tend to battle various corrupt yakuza-members, but in total over the nine entries, you are a yakuza-member for around 3 hours total, with games that have at least 900 hours of content in them. The latest entry added the moniker Like a Dragon, similar to the Japanese title. This is important as that moniker has been instrumental to the games from the beginning, as the title refers to the *Irezumi* on each protagonists' back, symbolizing the strength to not run away from destiny. This was the main message that Nagoshi wanted to convey through Kiryu's story. As Kiryu states in Yakuza 6: Song of Life: "Tattoos aren't supposed to be threats. They represent the ideals of the life you've chosen to lead." And yet Someya counters that "The real world is a harsh mistress." (Sega,2017). These represent the *Tatemae* and *Honne* of the yakuza-creed in a sense. They want to be perceived as idealistic and protectors to the Japanese people but in reality, most are far from the romanticized ideal of Kiryu and Saejima. It is a quintessential power-fantasy, mixing reality with absurdity. However, when it leans into the entertainment-aspect too heavily, bizarre scenarios can occur, as you must protect Miracle Johnson (Michael Jackson) from his zombie-followers using a lightsaber while breakdancing as he moon-walks down the streets of Shibuya (Sega,2016). It was never intended to be a Consumer Cosmopolitan product, but due to its projection of Japan, it has made the product more accessible to global audiences while maintaining its own cultural artefacts. Many other products have attempted this and manage to imprint themselves into the macro community of gaming, but this an example of how much of Japan can be shown in a single entry and the point has been reached where the marketing aspects are relatively similar, despite the widely different cultures that the game-series is trying to appeal to.

8. Conclusions and further research

There have been considerable changes in the marketing and presentation of Japanese cultural products from more impersonal products to niche, personalized items and Yakuza 5 indicated how going from low-availability to high-availability in the Western macro gaming-community has enabled the series to improve. With this change, it has been able to present a new and more complex version of the pop-culture driven nightlife-side of Japan to a broader audience outside of Japan, enabling Consumer Cosmopolitanism and virtual tourism by presenting borderless ideas in a cultural setting, resulting in a higher number of sales and notoriety. As per the questions asked at the beginning of the thesis project, this has been broken down in each respective analysis chapter and summarized below:

- How has Sega employed a particular vision of Japan to successfully promote its Yakuza-series in the Western gaming-hubs?

It has employed a vision of Japan that encompasses many issues, problems and facets of the culture. Firstly, the creative team did not have faith that the series would sell outside of Japan and it was censored and altered in strange ways. The borderless marketing strategy was still prevalent, especially considering Sega's history. A broader market was open to them thanks to their third-party developer status (Gamespot staff,2001). However, now that changes towards previously niche, low-availability Japanese products have been made, it has grown quite extensively in fame and scale, partially due to the limits of hardware being lessened over time, allowing for a more expressive version of Japan to surface.

- How did the product represent itself in the first iteration and how has that changed, given the series' popularity in the Western gaming-hubs?

In the beginning, the series was quite infamous due to many disregarding it completely, so they tried to emulate the product in order for the Western fans to recognize something in it, while simultaneously hiding the cultural influence of the product. The main factor to its success is its high immersion-factor while still retaining elements of global concepts. It is able to express global concepts in a Japanese context, uniquely making it both niche and available for mass-market consumption. As established, when a cultural product is stripped of that cultural influence the product is hampered, as it was not playing to its strengths. Yakuza 3 was severely hurt by this process as some felt that they did not receive the product being advertised, as Norris' article indicated. As time went on, Yakuza 5 was brought over to the Western market due to the request of its fans, showing that it worked on multiple communal

levels, be it macro, meso or micro. This indicated that there was a connection between other people interested in Japanese culture. The product itself has developed from low-availability to high-availability in a span of 15 years, while barley changing its level of cultural influence. The latest trailer for *Yakuza: Like a Dragon* made clear that the gap in knowledge and image of Japan projected by the team has begun to slowly close, indicating a change in the audience's receptivity to other cultures. Most recently however, this theory seems to have been proven as the latest entry from *Ryū ga Gotoku studio*, *Lost Judgment* will be having a global release this fall, a first in the history of the company (IGN,2021).

- What are the differences between the domestic and global promotional material, and how does the series itself function as cross-cultural promotion for Japan?

The differences in marketing were plentiful, such as the Western modification of some phrases and concepts. The Western promotional material featured a plethora of drama and action aspects that were being promoted, but lately it has accommodated for a larger variety of aspects of the entries. Commonly, the cultural and the global tend to be juxtaposed, but it is integrated equally by the promotional material and the product itself, so they help to illustrate global concepts in a Japanese context quite well. This distinct feature helps promote the series overseas as there is nothing quite like it, and it consists of subtle traits specific to Japanese culture, as well as barriers of interaction to make the players assimilate to Japanese culture indirectly. This can include everything from driving on the left-side of the road when driving a car to engaging in Japanese drinking-culture, running a ramen-stand, singing *Karaoke*, driving a Cabaret Club et cetera. All of these cultural artefacts are present, but you can also engage with the story and perform virtual tourism as the areas in the entries are very accurate to their real-life equivalents. It functions well as a promoter of Consumer Cosmopolitanism because it presents borderless ideas into a cultural context.

All of the above indicates a change in the perception of Japan through the stage set by *Ryū ga Gotoku studio*. However, it is far from the only gaming product that possesses the aforementioned traits, and each one would make for its own interesting case-study, especially for the sake of comparison. Virtual tourism is much more prominent now due to the macro-community movements that has taken place, going back at least to the 1980s. However, at that time the market was filled with mainly impersonal and mass-produced items, such as various cars (e.g. Mitsubishi), computers (e.g. Toshiba) and cassette-players (e.g. The Walkman), while currently it has taken more of a niche personal approach. The

foundation for this change was built by the specialization of borderless products so well that most never realized many of their purchases originated from Japan to start with. This undercurrent of products laid the gateway for products that mix borderless concepts in a cultural setting like the Yakuza-series, products once considered unsellable to a foreign audience.

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10.PlayStation Network descriptions transcribed (UK)

This section has every transcription of UK version of the PlayStation Network, including the first entry of the Yakuza-series' back-cover. The first entry had no digital version released in the Western gaming-hubs. These were used to determine which audience the games were meant for and which parts of the games that were primarily featured. Entertainment in the form of the battle-system, drama in the form of the various plots within the yakuza-groups and the story in general. The last commonality found was the focus on immersion of the areas you were given to explore, and all of the aforementioned aspects can be found within all of the direct marketing, suggesting this is what the creative team sought to illustrate to the consumers.

10.1. Yakuza 5 Remastered

“As part of the Yakuza Remastered Collection, experience Yakuza 5 in 1080p and 60fps.

Kazuma Kiryu's newfound calm as an unassuming cab driver comes to a sudden end as the standing peace between the Tojo Clan and Omi Alliance disintegrates. Forced to reckon with his past once more, the Dragon of Dojima returns to the criminal underworld to protect those he holds dear. Their lives interwoven, follow Kiryu and his allies in their quest to navigate the corrupt underbelly and prevent an all-out turf war. Five playable protagonists across five major cities.

Complete The Dragon of Dojima's journey.” (PlayStation Network, 2020a)

10.2. Yakuza 0

“The glitz, glamour, and unbridled decadence of the 80s are back in Yakuza 0. Fight like hell through Tokyo and Osaka with protagonist Kazuma Kiryu and series regular Goro Majima. Play as Kazuma Kiryu and discover how he finds himself in a world of trouble when a simple debt collection goes wrong and his mark winds up murdered. Then, step into the silver-toed shoes of Goro Majima and explore his “normal” life as the proprietor of a cabaret club.

Switch between three different fighting styles instantaneously and beat up all manner of goons, thugs, hoodlums, and lowlifes. Take combat up a notch by using environmental objects such as bicycles, sign posts, and car doors for bone-crunching combos and savage take-downs.

Fighting is not the only way to kill time in 1988’s Japan: from discos and hostess clubs to classic SEGA arcades, there are tons of distractions to pursue in the richly detailed, neon-lit world.” (PlayStation Network, 2017).

10.3. Yakuza: Like a Dragon PS4 & PS5

“RISE LIKE A DRAGON

Ichiban Kasuga, a low-ranking grunt of a low-ranking yakuza family in Tokyo, faces an 18-year prison sentence after taking the fall for a crime he didn't commit. Never losing faith, he loyally serves his time and returns to society to discover that no one was waiting for him on the outside, and his clan has been destroyed by the man he respected most.

Confused and alone, he embarks on a mission to discover the truth behind his family's betrayal and take his life back, becoming an unlikely hero for the city's outcasts on his journey.

LEVEL UP FROM UNDERDOG TO DRAGON IN DYNAMIC RPG COMBAT

Experience dynamic RPG combat like none other. Switch between 19 unique Jobs ranging from Bodyguard to Musician, and use the battlefield your weapon. Take up bats, umbrellas, bikes, street signs, and everything else at your disposal to crack some skulls!

ENTER THE UNDERWORLD PLAYGROUND

When you're not busy bashing heads, relax by hitting up the local arcade for some classic SEGA games, compete with locals in a no holds barred go-kart race around Yokohama, complete 50 unique substories, or just take in the scenery of a modern-day Japanese city. There's always something new around the corner.

- Become Ichiban Kasuga, a yakuza grunt betrayed by the man he trusted most
- Crack skulls in dynamic RPG combat
- Recruit up to 7 party members from the outskirts of society
- Spend time with party members to develop their abilities and unlock powerful combo skills
- Find, forge, and upgrade equipment to take on the strongest foes
- 19 Unique Jobs (+2 DLC Jobs)
- 100+ Combat Skills
- Over 15 Hilarious Mini-Games

- 50 optional Substories breathe life into the city of Yokohama, Japan” (PlayStation Network, 2020b).

10.4. Yakuza: PS2 Back-cover (UK version)

**BLOOD. HONOUR. RESPECT.
LIVE THE YAKUZA LEGEND**

Having been paroled after ten years for a crime you didn't commit, you return to Tokyo to find that your childhood friend is missing, your closest ally has become your greatest enemy and the entire Japanese underworld is hunting you down in the search for 10 Billion yen which has mysteriously disappeared.

Fight on the Streets *Take on the Yakuza* *Step into a truly authentic Tokyo*

YAKUZA offers you the opportunity to fully experience the Japanese underworld's vast network of violence and mistrust...in all its glorious brutality.
Featuring the voices of Michael Madsen, Michael Rosenbaum, Eliza Dushku, Rachael Leigh Cook, and Mark Hamill.

18 Contains strong violence
Suitable only for persons of 18 years and over.
Not to be supplied to any person below that age.

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1 Player • Memory Card (8MB) (for PlayStation®2) : 135KB minimum • Analog Control Compatible: all buttons • Vibration Function Compatible

INL-PS4171-UK

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Published by SEGA. Developed by SEGA.

DVD ROM

5 060004 768080

This software is only compatible with the PlayStation®2 computer entertainment system displaying the PAL logo

<https://www.mobygames.com/game/ps2/yakuza/cover-art/gameCoverId,107601/>