Pokémon Immersed in Japan Culture

Nicole Saldaña

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Table of Contents

MAJOR ANALYSIS

Many people who do not study Japanese don't realize how powerful an influence a series like Pokémon is. It is not just about the cartoon or game that has come out of this series, but about how it has impacted societies and lifestyles. One example is how Pokémon has helped increase the literacy level of children. In order to play the game, you need to be able to comprehend a certain reading level, thus becoming a rich teaching environment. Another analysis that people miss is how Pokémon contributes to society interacting with each other more. People who can feel a closer connection with a big topic such as Pokémon can interact with more confidence than before. As its popularity has reached a global scale, it has enabled interaction between countries who have this similar interest. An example is from the game series where world-wide trading is able to be done. These findings are telling me that Pokémon is a really big legacy that tends to be glossed over. It maybe that I love the series too much myself, or that it is a really big thing that people fail to see. I grew up with it my entire life, but new generations can easily jump in and understand the mechanics of this game.

My overall thesis

I will analyze the popular phenomenon of Pokémon, which is a big part of Japanese pop culture. I feel that the importance of Pokémon is often overlooked just as a child's game. My analysis will consist of the three major sections. First, I will discuss Pokémon's influence in everyday lives. Second, I will discuss how Pokémon has grown globally and influenced other countries. Third, I will discuss how this interaction is essential to continue this growing pop culture and connections throughout the world. These will include examples and further discussions from my point of view supporting my analytical views. I will then proceed with a conclusion to summarize my findings.

POKEMON OVERVIEW

In this essay, I thought it would be important to look at an overview of what exactly I am discussing. When using the world Pokémon, many people might just think of its cute mascot, Pikachu, in an anime series that has continued to run for 8 years or the games that Nintendo is able to produce every year. And when hearing Pokémon, most people also see it just for kids. My analysis in this essay is going much deeper than seeing it as these certain things. Pokémon has been used in not only the two things mentioned, but has gone into many different medias as well to adapt to its surroundings.

Pokémon has been a big influence in my entire life. People knew well enough this was something I would talk about in a long essay if I was allowed to, which I am today. My view on Pokémon has ranged from being a big media, to entertainment for kids, to making millions in revenue for their business, and also continuing leaving its mark in everyday lives. Since it is also continuing and growing to adapt to the times, it is hard to not shy away from seeing in anyone's lifetime. Pokémon has its own complex system and yet at the same time, is not hard to learn at all. Only on rare occasions due adults not understand but tens of millions kids do understand. This is how powerful Pokémon is.

This media franchise has grown to have a lot of positive influences towards the audiences it is aimed to, which is children who can relate to the 10 year old protagonist of the story. However, it also draws the attention of older fans who still want to collect many collectables that you can from the series. These include but are not limited to: anime, manga, toys, clothing, trading cards, games, and so much more. These all have different impacts with target market differentiating. One of the brilliant ways Pokémon has had a big impact with its younger and older audience alike is by becoming one of the world's best learning tutor.

Pokémon as a learning tool

It is true, that even in today's earning environment, something as simple as Pokémon can be used as an effective teaching tool. I never realized that each Pokémon cartridge contains 200,000 lines of text per game, with no voice or video to aid the player in reading. This requires a high level of literacy understanding to be able to proceed through the game correctly and not be frustrated when you don't know what to do. Within the game I have found myself being able to find clues by reading the text of what the characters or the story says. According to Neilburger, (Neiburger, "ETC Press", 2011), he mentions that Pokémon is an outstanding literacy tutor. I see this as part of my analysis as well with my experience in the game as well.

I also noted how much of an influence this game has been to teach kids something that cannot be taught in a classroom. This is sportsmanship. I realized that Pokémon teaches children who play this to be able to take risks and not be afraid to experiment. Since their games are unaffected by whether they win or lose, they can keep trying again until they can move on. By having this awards and balance system, it can be used to teach kids how things can be fair and unfair at times in reality as well. By allowing kids to try challenging tasks repeatedly until they find success encourages them to not give up as a goal can be reached eventually.

INFLUENCES

As mentioned, Pokémon is a great learning tutor. However, reading and teaching sportsmanship are not the only influences Pokémon has had on its audience. As all pop culture media hits a popular point, there are other people who try to bring it down. It might seem silly at first that people try to talk negative of an attractive huge media franchise, but it is done to everything. So while have good influences, Pokémon has also hit negative influences due to bad

rumors and hitting sensitive topics that other media have pushed out to make them seem worse than they need to.

Good Influences

While staying positive with this topic, I'm happy that Pokémon has grown to a point where I can talk about it freely and connect with other people who know this franchise. To this day, it is nearly impossible to find someone who has not heard of its famous mascot, Pikachu. By having this knowledge, it is easy to have already a conversation starter, helping connect people. This is a topic that has a positive effect most of the time, and with the right people, can easily explain what Pokémon is.

Another good influence that Pokémon inspires to people is teaching responsibility. Responsibility comes from fans who care for their games, try to watch the shows while taking care of school and house work, since a majority of the audience is children, and what they do to get the latest news. Children have to be responsible in order to know what is happening in order to keep up with Pokémon. This responsibility is not through a book or by a lesson from school. This is learned from experience these children go through when they get their first game or trading card.

Through my research and readings, I have realized how much of an avid teacher Pokémon is, not only of reading comprehension, but also of culture. When playing the game, it shows its value of working together to achieve one goal. Being an interactive game, it reinforces cooperating with other people to produce interesting things. In real life culture, if people work together, it is easier to move towards completing a goal.

I didn't realize that what I also learned from Pokémon was another theme of Japanese culture hidden subtly. The elements in Pokémon reflect traditional East Asian cosmological beliefs about elements. ("Asian Topics on Asia for Educators", 2014) It is described in this article that

interact with each other in a way how the cosmological system symbols relate to one another in some ways, and that some triumph over others. For me, it was easy to figure out how some elements in the game had advantages over other, like water is strong against fire. However, I didn't realize that knowing this fact and learning the rest of them in Pokémon was me in fact learning Japanese culture as well. This is another good influence Pokémon has on its audience. If promoted greatly enough, media could publicize more of how Pokémon has been a great learning tool and a social icebreaker to be able to help children not only distinguish themselves but to fit in at the same time.

Bad Influences

However, as much as Pokémon has had positive influences in its audience, it also comes with a few negative topics as well. If it has anything to do with animal cruelty, then you know PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals). An article released last year (Michael, "PETA Member Traumatized by Pokémon, Sues Nintendo for Emotional Distress", 2013), states how a mother overreacts to watching a few clips of the anime series. She feels that her daughter is in danger of becoming a "serial killer or worse, an animal abuser". One main concept of Pokémon being a turn strategy game is that you have your Pokémon battle other Pokémon. This mother views that Nintendo has taken it one step too far and has spread a bad reputation for Pokémon without getting her facts straight.

Instances like this one are reasons why it is hard to have any pop culture be popular without any bad influences in them. By PETA distributing this message to people, it shows how ignorant some people really are. Even if I didn't like Pokémon, I would do my research correctly to find if what they are claiming is true is in fact true. The message that PETA is distributing is that Pokémon, in fact, shows children animal abuse and that Pokémon exist for their own reasons. In all media of

Pokémon, it has been shown how Pokémon are not abused, but taken care of through the adventure of a 10 year old child wanting to achieve his dream with his team of friends. In one generation, the evil bad guys that are the enemy also try to achieve this but in a wrong way. They want to free Pokémon from trainers, however, they do this by either asking or stealing the Pokémon away. Getting back on topic, I view that Pokémon shouldn't have any bad rumors to its name, but this is just one starting point. Another would include its controversy and religion. Pokémon is famous having their characters evolve to grow bigger and stronger. However, feuds have risen up for religious people to be against this as well, although Pokémon has not lost a battle for this.

Another bad influence Pokémon has had to children has just been its carelessness when they release their media. There has been on several occasions where Pokémon has just been careless of the content they have released. After doing research and even watching videos finding out these facts, I can see why Pokémon got in trouble for this. There has been anime episodes that should have aired but where delayed or never aired at all due to Pokémon not thinking through certain things. One famous incident is when one episode was banned because it had flashing lights that caused 685 viewers to go to the hospital to be treated for seizures ("Pokémon episodes removed from rotation", 2014). Pokémon spent 4 months in hiatus to reevaluate what they would have to do for future episodes. Release dates where changed to not offend people as well, such as episodes released near the 9/11 attack or during the earthquake in Chūetsu.

I think Pokémon has the right to make a fair amount of mistakes just like everyone else has. A trial and error test is one of the only sure ways to know if you are reaching your audience. Unfortunately, Nintendo can also do more research to not hurt anyone's feelings with sensitive topics either. By doing proper research and looking into what should go out to the audience, which for Pokémon is mostly a younger generation, it is best not to give them seizures.

GLOBAL EFFECTS

In our society today, it might take a risk to get into the newest or trending pop culture. For Japanese, there has been different viewpoints from around the world of how their culture is viewed. Examples of otaku, maid café, manga, all have a risk of being judged by a different country and not be accepted. Pokémon is one of the few mediums I have seen to be accepted on a massive scale. Each player can associate themselves with at least one Pokémon. With the vast majority to choose from, this has caused more children to feel as they belong. This is one of Pokémon's biggest selling points. While people choose to feel different relating themselves to a certain one Pokémon, they can still connect and collaborate on Pokémon as a whole.

Globally, Pokémon has made a major cultural impact, especially in the West. One prime example is during the American's thanksgiving parade, which features countless of popular icons. One of these icons featured is Pikachu from Pokémon. Pokémon is one of the first of its kind to penetrate the culture barrier that normally holds Japanese media back from reaching the Western world. Thanks to this, a shift has been made in the previous decade of more Japanese products and media being bought by American consumers. ("The Cultural Impact of the Pokémon Series from 1996 to 2012", 2012). All over the world, Pokémon finds new fans in children in each generation and yet still manages to keep older fans engaged and to continue enjoying this brand.

And it isn't the plain fact that it is available worldwide that makes it stand out. It is also because worldwide, people can connect from the comfort of their own house. Thanks to continually going technology, Pokémon fans can now interact their games with each other with other people around the world. In games, it is known as the GTS, global trading system, in which I can trade a Pokémon from my room to someone in Japan if I wanted to. This powerful

framework allows the interaction from around the world to happen and to break barriers from before.

This has completed enthralled me. Pokémon has gone to a point where it is grown into the largest media franchise and has reached a massive audience globally. The fact that Pikachu appears every year in an American celebrated holiday parade and featured in magazines in the "Best People of the Year list" is phenomenal. You can engage in battle with a player across the world and not have a common language with each other. I never thought in my dreams that this would occur one day. In this sense, Pokémon had grown globally and has had a big impact on other countries.

IMPORTANCE

As discussed, Pokémon has grown into a popular subject in growing pop culture. It has been able to grow not only in the games but in its other forms of media as well due to its translated media. This includes the popular anime series that arose two years after the games were released in 1996. This involves the manga spinoff series that it has had translations done in many languages.

Pokémon again has left its mark undoubtedly on pop culture. As mentioned earlier, Pokémon is featured in Thanksgiving Parade and on *Time* magazine, but in Japan, it is also imbedded in their culture. This includes having airplanes, theme parks, and specialized "Pokémon Center" stores in Japanese society. ("Wikipedia: Pokémon, 2014") There used to be one in New York as well, however, it was changed into the Nintendo World Store. Due to a release of a recent movie, a Pikachu café was opened, with Pikachu food related items only.

It is still relevant to this day how big Pokémon really is. Earlier this year an experiment was done to see if crowdsourcing playing an earlier version of one the games was possible. What

this entails that many people play one game together, all trying to control the character and move through the role playing game (RPG) in many different ways. It was an incredible feat when it was able to be passed and that another version of the next generation was made available to allow the madness to continue. I say madness as it was almost impossible to do anything but yet still very amusing. While you push the down key someone pressed A to talk to someone then you're stuck till the dialogue is over then another person pushes A again to have the dialogue repeat and so forth.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Pokémon is much bigger than what people perceive it to be. I feel that it doesn't get as much appreciation and knowledge as it deserves, yet at the same time has one of the biggest fan-bases a pop culture franchise could have. Pokémon has proven to be a rich, educational, environment. It has also shown its success around the world, both financially and popularity. And it has also left a big imprint in culture. As it originated in Japan, it is bigger there. However, the influence continues to grow stronger in Western countries. I found in my research that the famous Pokémon Centers around Japan may just happen to open a full store in America (and not just the website it has). This is definitely a big step for Pokémon. It has come a long way and it seems to have made its mark to stay for many more generations to enjoy.

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