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Programme of Study: Graphic design

Module: ADAD5003 Research in Context

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The internet is an amalgamation of diverse cultures and trends from around the world if there is a connection. But as someone who experienced that culture in early childhood through the late 2000s and early 2010s, a certain aspect was more personally fascinating than the rest, fandoms. The word fandom means a group of fans for a particular piece of media, celebrity or sports team, according to Google's definition. To be more specific, Otaku culture, which will be explained later in more detail. With the growing popularity of the internet, there has been a noticeable rise in sexual content, that influences outside the realm of the internet like how current businesses advertise to consumers, the sudden spike of erotica interests me and the psychological reasonings behind that I hope to discover more. Finally, the last topic I wish to investigate is the concept of consumerism. Social media as of recent years, there have been more cases of people showing off their purchases that are considered unnecessary to most, such as over-stocking certain items like fizzy drinks, and I wish to delve deeper into the psychology of the phenomenon and how it links to graphic design.

The origin of Otaku has a long history and background, but the first usage of it is unclear, though the earliest counts of the word being used were during the 60s and 70s (Galbraith and Androniki Christodoulou, 2012, p. 21). The word '*Otaku*' comes from the phrase 'お宅' which means "*Your house*", stated by Japanese social critic, Otsuka Eiji,

Was a way of saying "you" in Japanese that allowed people who were meeting for the first time (for example, at a convention) to interact from a comfortable distance. (Galbraith and Androniki Christodoulou, 2012)

But, Japanese sci-fi critic, Kotani Mari, argues that the meaning could be to describe those who stay at home with their interests (e.g. toys and TV shows), as written in the same book. In modern times, it's now used to describe someone who is obsessed with a particular culture such as trains, the military aesthetic/lifestyle, or the common and popular, anime and manga (Japanese animated shows and graphic novels.), to the point it affects their life, specifically social skills, as stated in Google's definition of Otaku. The reasons why such people find themselves getting so obsessed can be directly quoted from the book *Japanese Visual Culture Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime* "aesthetic of excess, conflict, imbalance, and over sensuality." (MacWilliams, 2014, p.5).



Fig. 1. KYODO. *Fervent fans: Comic Market Visitors Carry Bags Bearing Images of Characters in Animated Films and Games at Tokyo Big Sight in August 2009.* [Photograph].

Source: japantimes.co.jp

In summary, the unique aesthetic, stories and sometimes the erotica. A key point to mention is that the word has negative connotations, as it's usually associated with people who are unhygienic, anti-social and in general, a social outcast in Japan. There are two factors that have

been concluded through research, one of them is due to the work culture in Japan, with statistics stating that 22% Japanese people work about above 49 hours a week (McCurry, 2015), a reasonable conclusion as to why Otaku culture is growing rapidly, as naturally one would want an escape from work. But, to take a break from work is frowned upon in Japanese work forces, it is seen as slacking off and is the opposite of their view of fitting with the other employees working hard and “*repay their employers*” (Schulte, 2025, p. 88). The second factor as to why Otakus are seen as negative, was an infamous incident during 80s Japan and some would say is the main reason behind the stigma.

Tsumotu Miyazaki, between 1988 and 1989, had kidnapped and killed four girls between the ages of 4-7 years old, Mari Konno, Masami Yoshizawa, Erika Namba and Ayako Nomoto (Diego, 2021). After Miyazaki had been caught and arrested on the 23rd of July 1989, the police searched for his home and discovered a massive collection of anime and horror films alongside photos that he took of his crime as shown in the same source previously.



Fig. 2. Kyōdō News. *Tsutomu Miyazaki's Room*. 1989. [Photograph]

Source: reddit.com

Once the media had a hold of such information, they gave him the title of *The Otaku Killer*, the public started to have a moral panic, thinking that those who are Otaku, were “violent and deviant” (Nelson, 2021, p. 8).

Now in present times, the stigma has slowly died down and the growing production of anime and manga have greatly increased as time goes, as it is one of the sources of entertainment for Japanese people like cartoons and comics in the western world has impacted the west, especially with how accessible the internet is. In a survey, around 15 million people identify as an Otaku (Dentsu Inc., 2023), with how many people identify as an Otaku, it would be obvious

to assume that some aspire or are graphic designers. A graphic designer that has been stumbled upon while researching is an interview of a man by the name of Tsuyoshi Kusano who has designed for many popular anime series such as *Full Metal Alchemist* (Kenta Terunuma, 2021).



Fig. 3. Hironori Sakunaga. *Tsuyoshi Kusano's Graphic Design Work*, 2021. [Photograph]

Source: tokion.jp

In the article interviewing Kusano, he believes that giving an impression from your work is more important, stating that the main information, layout and how it looks in a printed format is more important than such things as a unique typography. Furthermore, he says that he prefers to simple approach, as instead of making the typography catch the eye of the consumer, it should instead help emphasis the illustration instead, viewing the type as just "*decoration*".

Sexuality and sex have been a staple of history, but the earliest cases of sexual acts being depicted through art or in literature to evoke arousal and to be "*titillating*", was the 18th century (B., 2025). In the 1870s, a tobacco company had advertised their product with a poster of a nude woman, this then in turn was the origin of the phrase "*sex sells*" (sh267616, 2022), meaning that using sexual imagery helps boost sales of products, most used in marketing.

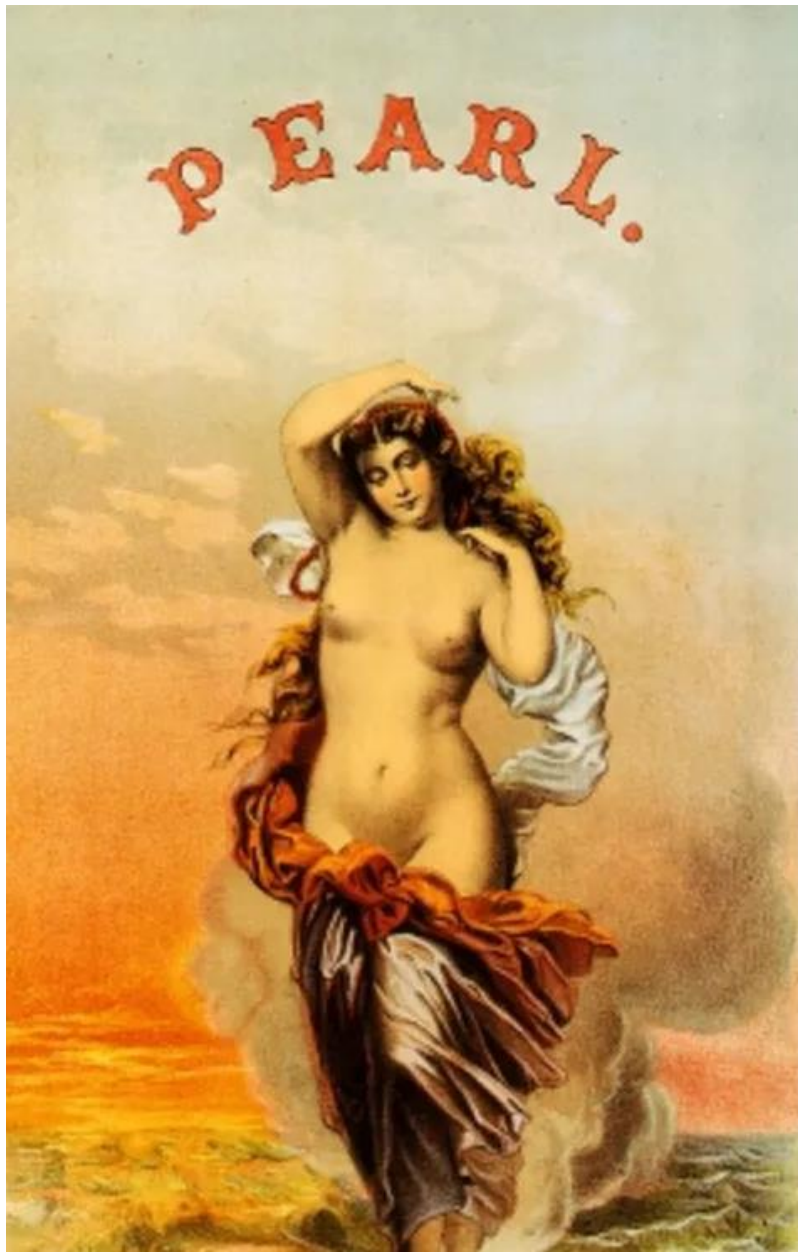


Fig. 4. Pearl Tobacco. *The First Ad to Use sex. Pearl Tobacco in 1871.*

Source: Medium.com

This strategy was proved effective for struggling writers during that era in the UK, as literature containing verses of sex and descriptions (fiction or not) were widely produced, having growing popularity amongst both men and women even in the lower class, with cases of women

searching for these types of books at a discounted price (J. Peakman, 2003, p. 37). However, that came to an end near the last quarter of the 18th century when moral panic erupted when the church started to crack down on erotic works and persecute those who write, publish and sell them. The reason for such censorship was because, and to quote, “*corrupt the morals of all the subjects*” and “infect the minds of all the youths” (p. 42). It was only until the 60s that the UK had its ban on erotica lifted, but even before that, New Zealand offered legal ways of buying them (Guardian staff reporter, 2013).

With the 1960s having brought back the use of sexual imagery and literature, companies using sex and seductive in their advertisements shifted their resources more of the appeal resulting in less resources for brand or product information, but it does lead to more people remembering promotion that’s connected to the brand. However, it sometimes is not the case, as it depends on the model, how provocative it is and the company that is associated (Reichert, 2014, p. 12). The model was a key factor in how effective this marketing strategy was, from body type, face, hair style, style of clothing and even to subtle touches like posing (p. 23), the consumer takes all these factors into account as to what they deem as attractiveness. Furthermore, on the same page, using beautiful women and men for promotional material could imply and convey that you could be as appealing as the people on the advertisements if they use the product or brand that is associated. Reichart’s book describes in later pages that it links to a “*sexual wish fulfillment*”, meaning that the goods the company produces will satisfy the promise of making the buyer attractive, will help gain or more sexual interactions and to boost self-confidence (p. 30).

In 2021, a study was done to show how effective the use of titillating imagery is as a marketing tool. Online participants from many ethnic backgrounds were shown 24 different sexual ads, that they had not seen before, of popular American and Australian brands from different categories such as foods and clothes. They were then quizzed to see if they recall the brands that appeared on what they've previously seen by showing a distorted version of the logo that would become clearer as it progresses. The results showed that sexually appealing ads had less chances of the brands that produced it of being remembered than non-sexual ones.

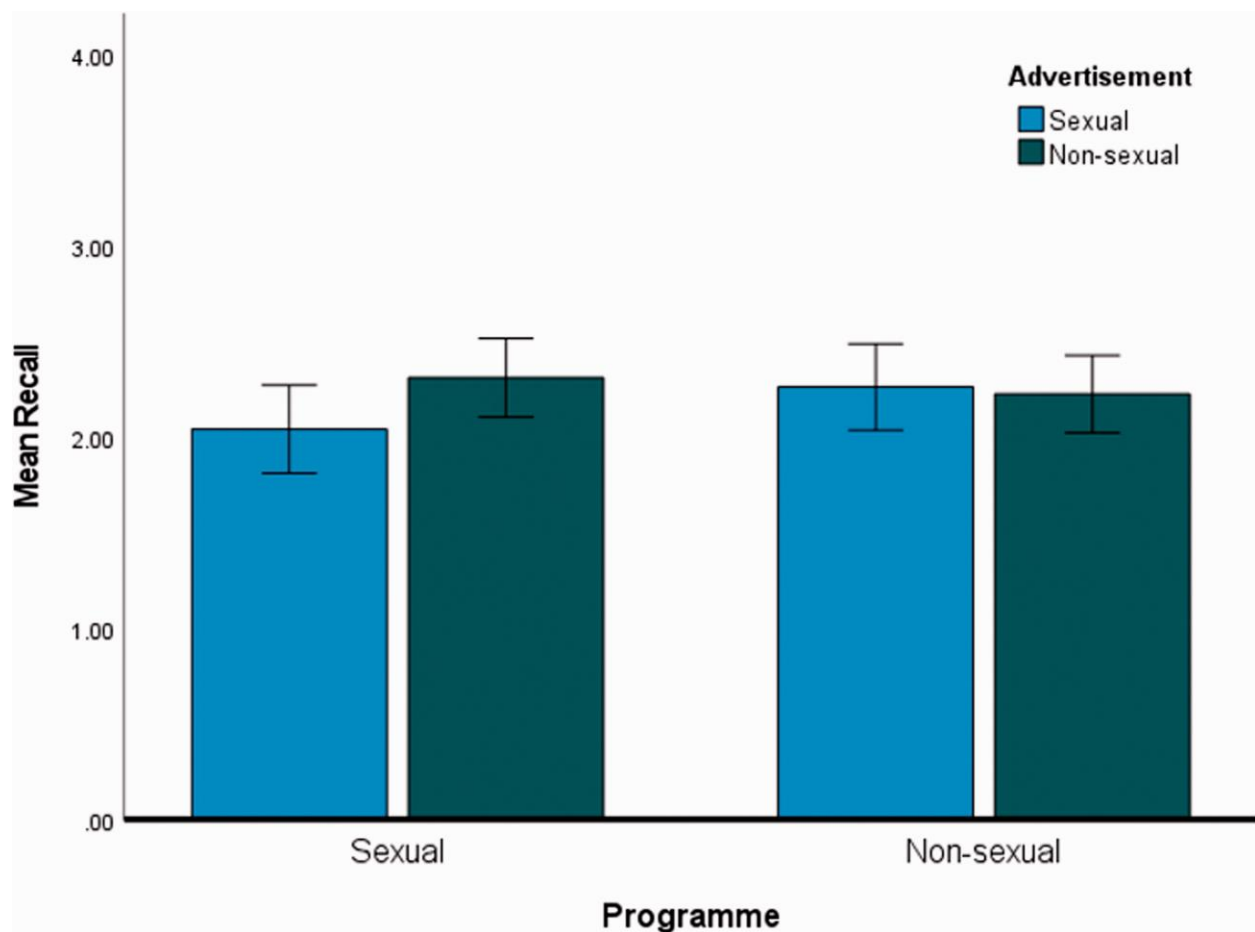


Fig. 5. Helena Lawrence, Adrian Furnham and Alastair McClelland. *Mean Brand Name Free Recall as a Function of Advertisement-Type and Program-Type.*

The conclusion to the experiment was that 'sexy' promotional material is "*not beneficial for improving brand memory*" and isn't as effective as one would think. One of the theories as to why it's ineffective is that the imagery is because the seductive nature "*lead to superior encoding of the stimulus*", meaning that because the viewer focuses on that aspect more, other information is then less retained and are considered unimportant (Lawrence *et al.*, 2021).

To conclude this paragraph, sex has always been a cheap, but effective way to grab the attention of consumers, as it taps into the sexual needs that feed the cognition, but also a way to hook on to the insecurities by convincing the viewer that they will be deemed more desirable by using the promoted product. Although, this could apply to beauty or fragrance, as other types of brands using the same tactic result in the opposing effects.

Consumerism is, according to Google's definition, "the protection or promotion of the interests of consumers". The history of consumerism had been set as originally a movement that would later establish the rights of customers (safety, information, choice and understanding) in the mid-1960s, to contain the activities of business and buyers with protection and better quality of life changes that are still set in today's world (Aaker and Day, 1982, p.2). Although, stated later in the book, it seems that these rights have made a decline over the years, as companies has developed ways to avoid these regulations, such as hidden fees or using marketing tactics despite the faults of product, the government has not addressed these problems as the consumerism movement is all about the customer, government inclusion is very rarely needed (p. 18).

In the current modern era, companies mass produce not just for the basic needs such as food and drinks, but also for long-term or at least the idea of long lasting to satisfy customers who wish for a sense of security, knowing that it does not need to be consumed as soon as possible and the security that brings in a societal view that makes perceive one of higher class or status. Such wants can be exploited by companies, who will create products that visually trick the buyer into thinking that it can fulfill this sense of security, but the actual production of the item is of poor quality than what is being presented and promoted to the viewer, such as cheap materials that can easily be damaged or corrode, shifting the from the original color (Bauman, 2013, p. 36). As trends come and go, the ever-changing market adapts to these new desires and needs, which will later become outdated in terms of popularity, thus thrown away and contributing to the increase of waste disposal and landfill (p.37). With the rise of social media, it is so much easier to be exposed or investigate the lifestyles of celebrities and influencers such as Kim Kardashian or Kanye West, who show off their homes, their purchases, and their work routines from photos that are posted daily. Many people of the lower classes yearn for a lifestyle like them, the “Unobtainable aesthetically pleasing life” (B., 2024) of those higher up.



Fig. 6. Jackie Nickerson. *The West Family with a Sculpture by Isabel Rower*. from left, Chicago, Kanye, North, Saint, Psalm, Kim.

Source: architecturaldigest.com

To compensate for this, it is where consumerism comes in, customers buying products to appear like those they follow on their social medias, whether it be furniture or lifestyle products, and then throwing away said products when a celebrity promotes another one, creating an endless cycle, “*pay more for less, so you can feel like you have more*” to quote from the video by Youtuber Funkyfrogbait or Kali B..

Corporations use this new learnt tactic in advertising, giving the idea that there is a “need” that interested on-lookers haven’t realized until said advertisement has convinced them they do and must fulfill it. This grew in the decrease of the need of thrift shopping, convincing that buying

the new commodity is better than reusing and buying old (second-hand) (Higgs, 2021). An endless cycle of implementing an unknown desire, satisfying that desire and then repeat, a capitalist version of drugs or gambling. Higgs makes points about how capitalism and consumerist culture go hand in hand, as she quotes Joseph Schumpeter "*capitalist engine in motion comes from the new consumers*", meaning that with the constant need for progress and improvement that capitalism builds upon, feeds into the new "needs" that was previously mentioned and the money profited can continue the motion of that "*capitalist engine*". The invention of electronics and the internet has made the propaganda of consumerism is unavoidable, the richest 1% such as people like businessman (Now currently senior advisor to US president, Donald Trump, as of 2025) Elon Musk or Amazon CEO, Jeff Bezos, have great control over the population as they are the ones that implemented these desires and greed, creating a "*herd instinct*" the article states that is still relied on for a sense of comfort, letting those higher up continue to advertise their propaganda and profiting people of lower status. An obvious solution of combating overconsumption is to regress into a minimalist lifestyle, but Chip Colwell discovers and writes that minimalism is classist, a mockery/imitation of those in poverty or have low-income as many products classed as minimalistic, such as furniture, are marketed with high prices, going back to the point earlier of how it's mainly people of wealth who live such simple homes (2023). Further on in the text, it writes that it itself is a form of consumption, buying only things that fit the overall look instead of the purpose, again, calling back how it relates to the desire to be seen as higher up on the social ladder.

In conclusion, with all the research and analysis I have done, my question in preparation for next year, is that “Has capitalism ruined graphic design?”, as this research has made me more fully aware about the control corporations and the social hierarchy has on the population, not just the economy or politics. Everything is the result of the never-ending greed and desire to live a peaceful life that is constantly being prevented by billionaires who want to keep their status as the following quote goes “When you're accustomed to privilege, equality feels like oppression.” (Leonard, 2020).

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