

Online Game and the *Hikikomori* Phenomenon in Japan

Lina Rosliana*, Arsi Widiandari

Japanese Department, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University, Indonesia

Abstract. The internet, online games, smartphones are things that are very familiar with the lives of millennials today, including the millennial generation in Japan. Everything that comes with it is a necessity, including the negative effects it causes. In Japan, the society has highlighted many problems arising from the internet, online games, and smartphones, one of which is the addiction problem in using these devices. This brings us to the classic problem of Japanese society, namely, *hikikomori*, where a person stays at home for long periods, does not socialize and work, and only does what he/she likes. This research will further explore the relationship between online games and the *hikikomori* phenomenon that developed in Japan.

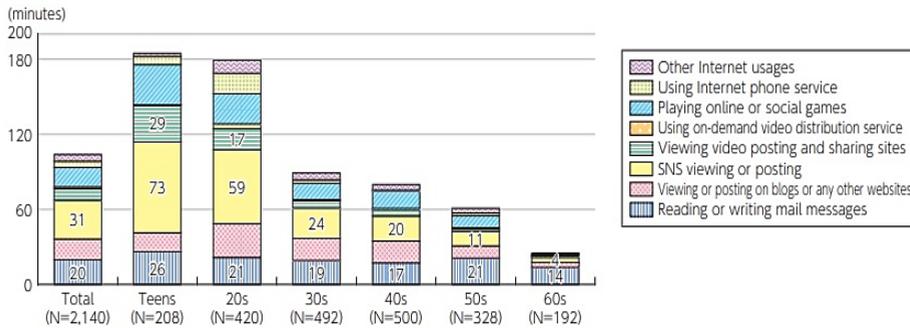
1 Introduction

Talking about online games, cannot be separated from Japan. This relates to the rapid gaming industry in Japan, so, we are very familiar with names like Sony Playstation, Nintendo, SEGA, and others. The development of the game has transformed from traditional to the electronic game. Electronic games are types of games that require electronic devices such as computers, consoles & TVs (screens) or smartphones. In this current era, electronic games are generally connected to the internet network so that the players can interact with other players in various places, thus, known as online games.

In addition to the devices used, the internet is very much needed to make a game online. In a survey conducted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication in 2015 regarding internet use related to online games, it was found that 26.4% of respondents used the internet for online games, while another 27.1% used the internet to support activities in online games [1].

* Corresponding author: linarosliana@lecturer.undip.ac.id

1.1 Smartphone and Online Game



(Source) "Survey on Time Spent for Information and Communication Media and Information Behaviors," MIC

Fig 1. Graph of Number of Smartphone Usage in Japan

Based on the graph above, it is known that the highest smartphone users are those in their teens to their 20s. It can be seen that the highest usage is for social media. Whereas in adolescence, the use of online games looks quite high. Although the number continues to decline with age, however, until the age of 50 years, smartphone usage for online games is still visible.

Furthermore, based on static data in 2014 regarding time spent playing games on smartphones in Japan, men who play games via smartphones are known to play within 0-30 minutes at 33%, 30-60 minutes at 28%, and more than 1 hour is 39%. Whereas for women, who spend 0-30 minutes is 46%, 30-60 minutes is 30%, and more than 1 hour is 24%. Thus, it is known that male smartphone users have a tendency to play online games via smartphones longer than women.

At present, many online games provide "online community" features, making this game a social activity. This type of game is called Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOG), which allows hundreds or even thousands of players to play at the same time.

According to Yee [2], there are several motivations for someone to play MMOG, namely (i) desire of interaction with other users; (ii) tendency to objectify and manipulate other gamers for personal interest or just enjoyment; (iii) enjoyment of substituting real life and real identity with imaginary ones; (iv) tendency to game to escape from real life distress and (v) desire of in-game achievement and establishment.

2 Method

This research is a descriptive qualitative research. Researchers tried to describe about online game and hikikomori phenomenon in Japan. This research model is to raise specific things, which only focuses on online game and hikikomori phenomenon by describing the data to represent the phenomenon in depth. The research stages include data collection, classification, and analysis.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Online Game and Millennials

The term millennial generation was born from William Straus and Neil Howe in his book titled *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*, this term emerged in 1987 where children born in 1982 entered pre-school so that in 2000 reached the age already graduated high school. When referring to the Mannheim theory in Generation Theory, what is called the millennial generation are those born in the ratio of 1980 to 2000. The millennial generation is also called the Y generation.

Millennials have the characteristics of being close to information and communication technology in everyday life. According to Howe and Straus, as a group, Millennials are not like other young people. They have better education and are more ethnically diverse. Moreover, they have positive social habits not shared by other generations such as a new focus on teamwork, achievement, and good behavior [3]. Children born at this time in Japan are economically mature, they do not feel the difficulties experienced by their parents' generation.

At this time, there was a change in the orientation of society to be more individual. This can be seen with the rise of items used for individuals, not groups, one of which is a Walkman. The standard product that has exploded on the market is *kei-haku-tan-sho*, namely lighter, thinner, smaller, and shorter. The emergence of various problems related to the younger generation such as the emergence of the phenomenon of parasite singles, namely young people who have aged independently still live to rely on their parents to meet their daily needs. In 2000, the number of net cafes exploded where many young people took the time to surf in cyberspace and play games.

Internet cafes, or more familiarly called net cafes among young people in Japan, are now an inseparable part of Japanese society. Net cafes are present in many places where people do a lot of activities such as near a station or city center. Some net cafes in big cities even have 24-hour business hours and are also used by salarymen who return too late after work and are left behind by trains.

3.2 Internet Gaming Disorder

More and more young people addicted to online games, and Japan is one of the country who has dealing with this problems. Although the number of people who addicted to online games still minority, many teenagers has involved with these problems.

In May 2019, Mainichi Shinbun, a Japanese newspaper, published an article entitled "*Survey data, case studies suggest gaming addiction rampant among Japan's young*" in the article, it was discovered that addiction to games had become rampant among young people in Japan. Previously, the World Health Organization (WHO) issued an alarm regarding addiction to video games, especially in the productive age generation. In the same daily news, a psychometric health specialist named Akinori Masuda released the results of a survey conducted in 2016 and 2018 about the relationship between sex with addiction to online games in elementary school children in a school in Kagoshima, Japan. In the survey, it is known that boys have a higher tendency to be addicted to playing online games compared to girls.

Previously, in 2018, the Ministry of Health reported that at least 930,000 junior and senior high school students were addicted to the internet, and the number was expected to continue to increase. The experts then categorized Gaming Disorder as a mental illness / mental disorder.

WHO says that those affected by Gaming Disorder will experience behavioral disorders that are characterized by the following points:

1. Having a disability of control over gaming
2. Increasing priority is given to gaming. Gaming takes precedence over other life interest and daily activities.
3. Continuation of gaming despite the occurrence of negative consequences

Further, gaming disorder will leads some new problems, for example Changes in Behaviour. People who spend a long time to play online games, has a tendency to isolated from society and stay at home for a long time. Another problem is Health Decrease. Many of them, have some problem with low bone desnity and suffer from malnutrition.

3.3 Hikikomori Phenomenon

Santoso and Purnomo define online game addiction is a condition where a person is bound to very strong habits, cannot be separated from playing online games from time to time and there will be an increase in frequency, duration, or amount in doing so without regard to the negative consequences that happened to him/her [4]. Thus, someone who is addicted to online games will generally feel anxious when unable to play. Difficulty controlling your desire to play, eventually ignoring important things in his life, such as health, responsibilities in the family or community, and others.

Based on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), a person can be said to experience dependence on online games if he plays for 8-10 hours per day, or at least more than 30 hours per week. The researchers suggest that addiction to online games will lead to some further effects such as distorted behavior with difficulty in socializing with others, and also difficulties in communication even some who withdraw from the community (social disorder) such as *hikikomori*.

Hikikomori is a symptom where a person withdraws from the environment. Derived from the words *hiki*: interesting, and *komori*: introvert or shut themselves. *Hikikomori* principals generally avoid contact and communication with others for at least six consecutive months. In Japan, *hikikomori* is not a new phenomenon but has emerged in early 2000 and there are various factors that cause a person to shut himself up. A person's factors become a hikikomori include: *ijime*, depression, failure in the exam, playing video games, etc.

Advances in technology also have a negative effect on the development of one's behavior. It is a common sight where a child spends his time playing games at home or his room nowadays. The creation of more personal space makes them spend a long time playing online games. Playing online games is an activity that is mostly done by a hikikomori.

A *hikikomori* has a tendency to avoid reality, they choose to shut down and limit their relationships with others. Such behavior is also found in those who have been addicted to the game. Playing online games is done as a way to escape reality. Games provide endless fantasy that cannot be felt or happened in real life. Thus, there are two things that are equally well owned by a gamer with *hikikomori*, namely the desire to limit oneself and shut themselves from the environment.

As mentioned before, the habit of playing online games is easy to find in the *hikikomori* case. On April 17, 2010, a 30-year-old hikikomori killed his family and burned down his residence. Takayuki Iwase, who became a *hikikomori* has withdrawn from the environment for 14 years. The horrific event stems from the amount of debt that Takayuki incurred through online shopping which reached 3 million Yen. Because of this, Takayuki's father broke the internet connection. Takayuki who could not be separated from the internet then went berserk by injuring his family and burning his house.

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