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# Entering Post-Otaku

-Approaching the Internet Era in the Light of Otaku

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<p><b>Abstract</b></p> <p>This thesis raises a hypothesis that we have entered the post-Otaku era. In order to prove this hypothesis, a survey has been conducted in which 30 participants gave answers regarding their Internet habits.</p> <p>It is said that each time when science and technology make one step forward, it increases the capacity of our organs. Compared with the impact of the industrial revolution on human beings, the influence of Internet technology seems far more tremendous as the former extends the power of our limbs while the latter enhances the competence of our brain. The significance of the present study is trying to explore the unknown future in the light of the Otaku phenomenon which is something having existed previously. The results obtained from this study reveal the fact that the daily Internet habits of many people now tend to resemble a small number of people referred to as Otaku, whose life style was viewed negatively in early stage. This finding can show us how far have we strayed away from the social norms and conventions established in the past. So viewing the Internet-oriented society in the light of Otaku can help us to obtain profound understanding of the role the Internet technology has played on the evolution of human civilization. The findings of this research might be able to throw some light on the future studies of anthropology, sociology and psychology.</p>	
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<b>Tiivistelmä</b> <p>Tämä opinnäytetyö esittää hypoteesin, että olemme siirtyneet post-Otaku aikakauteen. Todistaakseni hypoteesia olen tehnyt tutkimuksen, jossa 30 osallistujaa vastasivat kysymyksiin Internet-tottumuksistaan. Sanotaan, että joka kerta kun tiede ja teknologia tekevät yhden askeleen eteenpäin, se lisää meidän elimemme kapasiteettia. Verrattuna teollisen vallankumouksen vaikutuksista ihmisiin, internet-teknologian vaikutus on suunnaton. Teollinen vallankumous vahvistaa raajojamme kun taas internet-teknologia parantaa aivojemme kykyjä. Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoitus on yrittää lähestyä tuntematonta tulevaisuutta Otaku-ilmion valossa, mikä on jotain jo ennestään olemassa. Tästä tutkimuksesta saadut tulokset paljastavat, että monien päivittäiset Internet-tottumukset muistuttavat Otaku nimellä tunnettua ryhmittymää, joiden elämäntavat pidettiin alkuvaiheessa negatiivisena. Tämä havainto voi näyttää meille, miten pitkälle olemme vieraantuneet aikaisemmista sosiaalisista normeista ja yleissopimuksista. Internet suuntautuneen yhteiskunnan tarkastelu Otakun valossa voi auttaa meitä saavuttamaan syvällistä ymmärrystä internet-teknologian roolista inhimillisen sivistyksen kehityksessä. Tutkimuksen tulokset voivat mahdollisesti valottaa tulevia tutkimuksia antropologian, sosiologian ja psykologian alalla.</p>	
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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Here is where everything started: “How much time do you spend online in your room every day?”

When this question was first presented to the author, she felt very puzzled not being able to answer it immediately. Although she often read news, wrote Emails, talked with friends, twitted, followed others’ tweets, or participated on social networking, she had never counted how much time she spent online every day. While trying to answer the question, she realized that the first thing she did when she got up was to switch on the computer unconsciously. Turning on the computer was also the first thing she did when she got back home. In fact, apart from the time she studied, slept, cooked, ate, went shopping or took part in some social activities she always sat in front of the computer. The author was really shocked when finding out she spent most time online when she was at home.

It might not be a good idea to start a thesis with a big question mark, however it is necessary to state what initiated this study.

### **1.1 Noticing a new phenomenon**

Facebook was what took the author’s attention at the beginning of the study in the Digital Culture Programme. Who needs mobile phones when everyone can talk to each other and keep track of each other’s life as long as one logs in on Facebook. It might be stupid for people to ask for phone numbers these days since the whole society has already entered the Facebook era. Using social networking, one can be as social as possible; however, not so many people have realized the paradox lies in the fact that they have to be first physically anti-social before being social since they need to stay indoor with the computer to chat with friends online.

Hanging out with friends used to be outdoor activities, such as watching movies, drinking coffee together, doing sports. Today, one can download huge amount of movies and watch them at home. Since the home video game console Wii entered the market, one can even do sports at home. With Facebook, people do not even need to call to find out what is happening to their friends anymore. They are posting regularly, sometimes even too often about their personal life online. Online shops bring the mall to people's own home, why bother to leave the room? The invention of Internet changes people's way of living. It enables people to explore the world when sitting in front of the computer inside their own room. While it widens our vision of the world, it makes our world shrink as well.

All technologies are invented to make life more convenient. One should be grateful about how much trouble Internet has saved us by bringing everything into our own home. With the help of Internet, people are able to do research at home; talk to friends and families who are thousands of miles away in their room; they can do shopping at home and even pay the bills at home using E-bank. According to McLuhan (1966), all technologies are the extension of human senses.

During the mechanical ages we had extended our bodies in space. Today, after more than a century of electric technology, we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned. Rapidly, we approach the final phase of the extensions of man - the technological simulation of consciousness, when the creative process will be collectively and corporately extended to the whole of human society, much as we have already extended our senses and our nerves by the various media. (McLuhan , 1966, p. 19)

In a way what exactly Internet is standing for? Is it the extension of human social relationship? Today people are like cyborgs who are attached to Internet. In China



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this phenomenon of people gradually spending more and more time at home is referred to as Otakulization. It started by people referring to themselves as Otaku using the concept of a Japanese word.

### **1.1.1 Introducing the general idea of Otaku**

“Otaku” is a term, originating from Japanese, which means “your home”. It was first used to refer to people with an obsessive interest in Anime, Manga, and video games. According to Grassmuck’s explanation

Otaku is polite way to address someone whose social position towards you you do not yet know, and it appears with a higher frequency in the women’s language. It keeps distance. Used between equals it can sound quite ironic or sarcastic, but is mostly meant in the sense of “Stay away from me”. (Grassmuck , 1990, p. 5)

Japan is a society where hierarchy matters not only in working environment but also in daily social life. The way people address each other is a good way to state class and distance. Usually by calling strangers from the same age or social status in the polite form could be offensive, especially to teenagers. However “Otaku” was developed into some secret code between Manga and anime fans. As Grassmuck further explains, actually “Otaku is used by people who work in TV and video anime companies at the very beginning. When they are sharing information with other animation-picture collectors, they usually use ‘please, show me your home (your collection)’”. From there, it spreads to the anime circle and the closely related society. In Grassmuck’s theory, “the distancing effect of using the word ‘otaku’ reflects the nature of the otaku as being emotionally distanced from the mainstream culture and even their own peer group”. (Grassmuck , 1990) However the distance is quite vague. As Frederick L Schodt (1996) mentions in his book, “Otaku” was

something the members of fan subcultures called themselves. (Schodt, 1996, p. 44) Like most of the relationships between people who categorize themselves as part of subculture, even though they are facing the same mainstream culture, that does not necessarily mean that they have to be attached to each other closely. Within their own world, their relation could be sharing or competitive. Toshio Okada discussed in his lecture in MIT<sup>1</sup> that “usually at science fiction conventions, fans from various places would refer to each other by using ‘Otaku’ as an extra polite form of address, out of respect to each other’s clubs. (Toshio, 2003)

There is no clear evidence why or when exactly certain young people started to refer to themselves as Otaku, however the proof of how the term is first introduced into Japanese culture discourse was more accessible. In 1983, the first report on the usage of "Otaku" amongst fans appeared publicly from Akio Nakamori. He first brought in the concept by characterizing Otaku as being anti-social, unkempt and unpopular. He wrote series of articles called "Otaku no Kenkyu" (Studies of Otaku). He categorized those hard-core fans, who called each other "Otaku" the "Otaku-zoku" (Otaku tribes). His report was perhaps the first article stereotyping Otaku as being isolated from society and unpopular. When the idea of Otaku first occurred at that time, it was not accepted by the mainstream society because Otaku were labelled of lacking the ability to communicate or of being socially isolated. Since people tend to be afraid of the things that are beyond their knowledge or are not included in their daily experience, Otaku were immediately categorized as the dangerous group.

With negative publicity spreading all over the mass media, Otaku soon received a negative connotation. However, thanks to Toshio Okada who is the key person to push forward the acknowledgement of Otaku culture, Otaku’s public image has been redefined. In his book *Introduction to Otakuology* (1996), he re-defined Otaku

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<sup>1</sup> Toshio Okada Luncheon Talk at MIT ,2003  
<http://www.mit.edu/~rei/manga-okadaluncheon.html>

as: “people who have strong ability to adapt to the information exploration age and to do relevant studies and researches by collecting huge amount of rapidly-updating information; who is very sensitive to the visual and textual information and has the ability to analyze and criticize what the author is trying to say in their work; and who posses perseverance, always ready to improve oneself and has the desire to show his collections and knowledge.” (Toshio, 2009, p. 21) His efforts on bringing the attention into the Otaku phenomenon aroused more and more attention and curiosities from the outsider. Gradually, after putting aside the presupposition, other scholars who got interested in this new phenomenon started to realize that Otaku phenomenon was such a complicated issue that involved many different factors, which could not be easily defined.

At the very beginning, Otaku was considered as a very dangerous young group who does not know how to communicate with others and is over-obsessed with computer or comics. With the change of culture and norms, Otaku became more acceptable by the public, both on the national and international level. Laurence Eng (2009) pointed out in his essay *The Politics of Otaku* that it is not fair to stereotype all Otaku as dangerous group. He redefined Otaku as “someone who is highly dedicated to something and uses information from anywhere and everywhere to further his or her understanding of that thing for fun and maybe even profit.” (Eng, 2009, p. 3) He mentioned that “this way of living may not be acceptable to everyone, however, it was a choice made by people themselves.” (Eng, 2002) As the result of the development of the digital technologies, younger generations are getting more and more dependent on the new technologies like Internet and are spending much more time at home. Such issues occur not only in Japan but also in other developed or developing countries. So it is necessary for people to learn more about Otaku community, instead of just being afraid of it.

When the concept of Otaku firstly appeared, Akio Nakamori described Otaku as “being obsessively interested in the detail of a single field of interest, most

commonly anime and manga, but anything else was generally considered useless from a professional perspective, such as computer games or television starts.” (Eng, 2006, p. 53) Nevertheless, as time passed by, the definition of this word has grown out of the pure negative image since its first introduction to cultural discourses. Currently it is used to refer to people who do not have many outdoor activities and who prefer to spend their spare time on their hobbies at home. Such people are not keen to physical social activities. Usually this group of people has tremendous knowledge about a particular field they are interested in. Some of them also start their own career by using their knowledge from Otaku such as designers, cartoonists, Manga producers, game producers and so on.

### **1.1.2 The characteristics of the new phenomenon**

As the term enters China, the definition changes as more and more people refer to themselves as Otaku. As a matter of fact, what they mean is not that they are hardcore anime fans but they are referring to the literal meaning of the word Otaku – home. They consider themselves as Otaku if they spend most of the spare time at home, chatting with friends, watching movies, surfing online, playing games etc. Home has become the place where they spend most of their time after school or work while Internet has become the main bridge, which enables them to stay in touch with the world outside in their room. The members of such group are mostly between age 15 to 30 with access of Internet at home. Eng (2006) mentioned in his thesis that “most of Otaku are from middle class family with computer access, either teenagers depending on parents or adults who don’t have families to support.” (Eng, 2006, p. 25) They usually have good knowledge about computer and Internet.

#### **1.1.2.1 Obsession**

Internet can provide people with another way of socializing, despite the way they behave in physical life. Even though Otaku existed before the explosion of Internet, Internet is now the main tool for them to communicate with each other. There is no

doubt that the development and growing number of the Internet users have brought the most profound changes to Otaku world. It allows an unprecedented number of people with shared interests to interact with each other. Lawrence Eng (2006) mentioned in his thesis that “Otaku of all stripes gravitated towards the internet even when it was very young, and they used it very heavily.” (Eng, 2006, p. 114) One of his interviewees admitted that she spent an average of 17 hours a day on the Internet, sleeping 4-8 hours a day. With the excessive demand of the Internet, many teenagers are starting to resemble as Otaku social behavior but not exactly the same as what was referred as Otaku before, which is why we refer to as post-Otaku phenomenon in this thesis. The quest for the unknown and curiosity is part of human nature; somehow the invention of Internet is like pouring fuel to the curiosity fire. The difference is that the role of Internet might slightly change since it used to be the tool and now it could also be the source of the obsession.

There are so many things that can be done on or with Internet. Recently a friend posted a picture on Facebook, which I thought is perfect to help me explain how far can “many things” go.

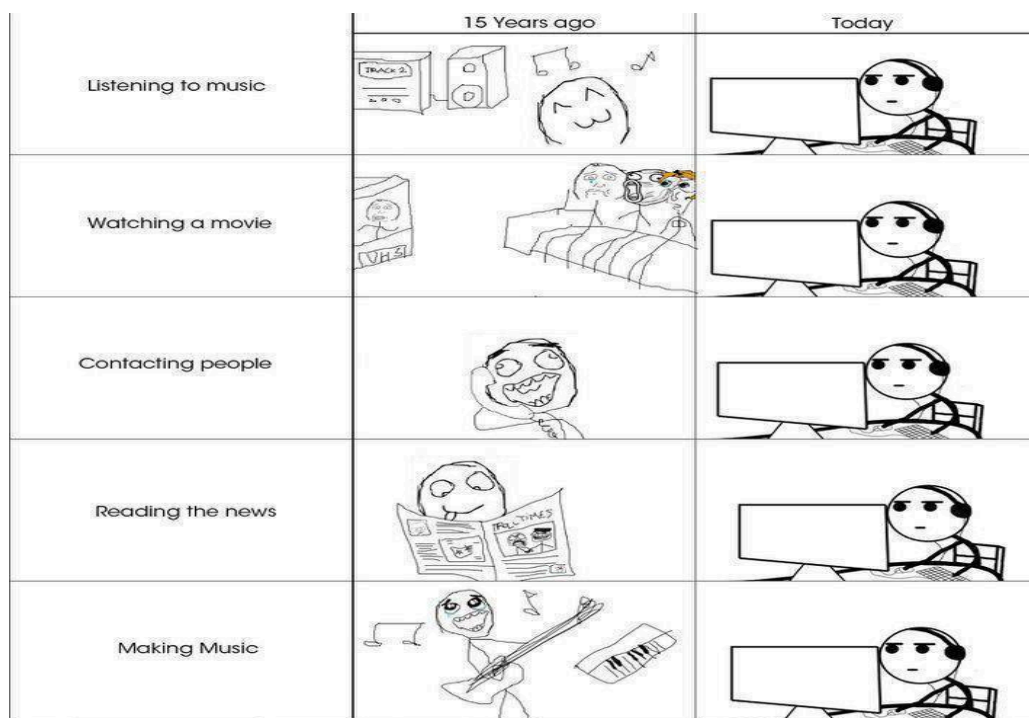


Figure 1:Internet Engagement of Today

Before Internet era, when music is needed, one would turn on the radio or go the music store to look for a CD. There were the days that children needed to save for quite a long time in order to have enough money to buy a CD of the band they like. Today there is streaming online with huge selections of different kinds of music. Many bands even start to distribute their music in digital format for fans to purchase through Internet. Fighting for remote control with parents might become the unique collective memory for the generation growing up with television. Since the Internet entered the family, the children immediately abandoned the battlefield, throwing themselves into the ocean of Bit.

There used to be many ways to spend the time after work or study. There were hobbies such as reading comic books or watching cartoons. One could also get a bit obsessed with the radio or television. But today what one needs is a computer plugged in with a cable for Internet to accomplish everything. With Internet one can find unlimited amount of music or movies, or any other cultural contents for that mater. News and gossips are readily available online. Friends are reachable just an Internet distant away. Internet offers everything that people are likely to be addicted to by the means of one computer.

#### **1.1.2.2 Isolation**

Humans as a species are not meant to live in the nature as an individual; they seek the company of other human beings so they could develop as a community. Yet, with the development of science, technology and economy, human beings do not need to live as a group any more. They can start to pursue a space of their own. This quest for the personal space changes the lives and systems of functioning of human beings. Today the rapid-development of Internet technology provides the means of such a phenomenon to spread. Since basically everything you are addicted to can be found at home, there are not that many reasons to leave your comfort zone. The modern technology is giving you less and less reason to leave home. Also the

modern society speaks so much of the individualism and personality, encouraging younger generations to develop their own opinion and thought. At the same time the society gives them the possibility to have their own space to develop their personal state of mind. As for teenagers, their sense of belonging is gained by socializing with the peer groups; therefore the communication within the peer group becomes the crucial social interaction throughout their whole teenager period. Back at that time, parents used to be worried about their children tangling with wrong crowd while meeting up with friends out on the street. So they thought that the better solution was to keep them at home, avoiding the trouble their children might get themselves into. However, today the new technology has changed the way teenagers communicate with others and even if they stay at home they are also likely to get involved with other people. Internet has in fact provided them a virtual society in which they can do almost anything they do in real society.

Birgit Kaare (2007), a Norwegian researcher, conducted 88 interviews with 130 Norwegian teenagers about how they use different communication technologies. Based on the survey, they studied and analyzed how the mediated communication influenced the teenagers' social relation between friends and families. Their research shows that children are being offered with new ways to communicate with others. It is easier for them to keep in touch after school than previously. They definitely have tighter social relation with friends and schoolmates now. Nevertheless, whether the occurrence of new communication technologies is destroying the old family-oriented relation is not clear. The results show how the young generation is depending on the new types of mediating communication such as SMS and Msn. The spread of Internet gives the younger generation a new way to build up relationships with friends and other people. Such technologies make it possible for them to get in contact with friends anytime, anywhere. New technologies are considered to have positive effects on younger people's social life. As it has been mentioned before, children growing up with Internet tend to depend more on Internet or on other communicating technologies. By isolating them from the real

society somehow simplified the supervision of their parents, yet such isolation is not equal to loneliness. Staying alone does not mean being lonely.

### **1.1.3 Proving the new phenomenon: post-Otaku**

The new phenomenon does bear resemblance to Otaku yet it also has its own unique signatures involving the participation of the Internet. It is not difficult to recognize the traces of Otaku from the new phenomenon, but under the influence of the present society, the concept of Otaku has evolved from how it was first presented to the spot light. The development and changes are not easy to ignore. Hence in order to avoid the misunderstandings, the new phenomenon will be referred to as the post-Otaku in the coming chapters. The previous study of Otaku culture will be borrowed as the references while conducting the research for the purpose of this thesis. However in the new phenomenon, the essential concept of staying at home and lacking physical contact with other people dose not change. As we have entered the postmodernity era, surrounded by all kinds of digital techniques, it might be helpful to understand it under the whole postmodern discourse when discussing this phenomenon.

According to Amber Case, a researcher in the field of cyber anthropology, the relationship between humans and Internet has entered into a completely new level. "Technology is evolving us," says Amber Case (2010), "as we become a screen-staring, button-clicking new version of homo sapiens. We now rely on "external brains" (cell phones and computers) to communicate, remember, even live out secondary lives."<sup>2</sup> But will these machines ultimately connect or conquer us? That is a question requires more thoughts.

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<sup>2</sup> TED talk,2010Cyborg Anthropologist  
[http://www.ted.com/talks/amber\\_case\\_we\\_are\\_all\\_cyborgs\\_now](http://www.ted.com/talks/amber_case_we_are_all_cyborgs_now)



## 1.2 Methodology

In this research, both qualitative and quantitative methods will be applied in order to present an in-depth view of the new phenomenon.

According to Creswell (1998), “qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct and methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or a human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants and conducts the study in a natural setting.” (Creswell , 1998, p. 15) Since different people absorb information in a different level while being exposed to the same environment, it is crucial for a researcher to be critical and sensitive towards the new phenomenon.

As C. R. Kothari (2009) explained in the book *Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques* that “the researcher has to use facts or information already available, and analyze these to make a critical evaluation of the material.” (Kothari, 2009, p. 3) This research is strongly based on previous studies. First, an extensive review of the literature is needed in order to obtain a broader and deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

Qualitative research is specially important in the behavioural sciences where the aim is to discover the underlying motives of human behaviour. Through such research we can analyse the various factors which motivate people to behave in a particular manner or which make people like or dislike a particular thing.  
(Kothari, 2009, p. 3)

After having a better understanding of what has been done regarding to Otaku study, a quantitative method will be brought into the research. The data will be collected from the distribution of the questionnaire on a small scale. Only 30 participants will

be included as the samples, so the overall number of participants is not the main concern in this study. Therefore the additional qualitative research will be assisting to have a better understanding of the research targets. By questioning about their usage of Internet in their daily life and their opinion of Otaku, the purpose is to find out whether they would consider themselves as Otaku or not to further understand how far the distance of admitting being an Otaku and behaving as an Otaku is. Kothari (2009) states that “ the main aim of research is to find out the truth which is hidden and which has not been discovered as yet.” (Kothari, 2009, p. 2) In this thesis, with the feedback of the questionnaire, the result will be compared between groups who consider themselves as Otaku and those who do not, to see if there will be huge differences between their uses of Internet. Growing up as part of the generation witnessing the prosperous development of the Internet allows the author to analyze and apply personal experiences and observations in this study. By analyzing the participants’ experiences, it is easier to get the accurate data of what is happening under the influence of Internet, explaining the state of mind and personal experience about Otakulization. Data from the other studies were used for the analysis of the teenage use of Internet. There has been a heightened concern regarding how youth should engage with technology, especially information technology such as online social networks. In order to showcase the change of the Internet behavior among different generations, the questionnaire will be also distributed among adults over 30s to present the sample as the comparison. Therefore the subjects from both the target group and the comparison group will be questioned.

### **1.3 Research targets, goal and questions**

In the thesis, the phenomenon of Otaku culture will be used as a bridge to study one of the new lifestyles of young people today. Otaku, who suffer serious psychological problems and live an extreme life of isolation, will not be discussed in the thesis. By analyzing the phenomenon from a closer view, this thesis will help

people to understand why post-Otaku occurs and what is the connection between post-Otaku and people living in postmodern society. The influence brought by the occurrence of Otaku culture on the society will also be discussed. Finally, some conclusions will be made about the influence of this phenomenon on contemporary life style and what role it plays in the evolution of digital technique.

In his PhD dissertation, Lawrence Eng (2006) noted that the target group of research will be the American middle class even though he categories Otaku as a group within subculture. It is mainly because as an Otaku, one must have money for the resources and equipment such as the computer and the access to Internet. In this research target group will only include the general group of people who are able to afford computer and have access to Internet in their daily life in China. So the target group of this research will consist of people ranging from 20 to 50 years old, who are living inside the region with Internet connection at home.

The objective of this thesis is neither to contradict those who criticize the Otaku life style nor to encourage excessive use of Internet. The thesis is trying to primarily explain when and how the post-Otaku phenomenon occurs and spreads within China. By introducing the history Otaku culture, the author tries to find out the connection between the post-Otaku phenomenon and Otaku phenomenon. By naming the new phenomenon as post-Otaku, the thesis will analyze the relationships between the new phenomenon and people's daily life in present society. Attention is focused especially to the impact of Internet on our social life today. Through conducting a survey, the goal is to make people realize how extensive Internet dependence is and how it has changed our social behavior, bringing our way of life closer to the lifestyle of post-Otaku without our noticing it. Even though Otaku existed before the Internet entered our social life, the new phenomenon may be caused by the booming of the digital technology. If the fact that the Internet is gradually taking control of our life were ignored, even more people would be on their way to join the post-Otaku world unconsciously.

Thanks to the development of the new technology, children who were born after 80s grew up as the witness of the prosperity of an information-exploding era. As the contemporary society experiencing the transitional period of entering the Facebook/Google era, it will be interesting to study how Internet will influenced the next generation which basically grew up with Internet using our own experience as the reference. Do the younger generations growing up with Internet even realize they are being Otakulized? What are the similarities and differences between the post-Otaku and non post-Otaku regarding their use of Internet? How far can Internet change social structure and human relationship? Hopefully such questions can be answered by the end of this thesis.

#### **1.4 Overall structure of the thesis**

The thesis examines how Internet has influenced the younger generation and in what way our social relations, social structure and family structure are changed by Internet, concerning the phenomenon of post-Otakulization.

After giving the historical review of Otaku, the development, transition and influence of Otaku will be analyzed in Chapter 2. The readers will get a clear idea about the background of Otaku and how Otaku has been studied as the subculture so it will be easier for the readers to understand the following research of post-Otaku.

In Chapter 3, Internet behavior of the present society will be approached through light of Otaku. A small-scale survey will be conducted through questionnaire with detailed questions about the participants' use of Internet and their opinion concerning Otaku. So in this chapter, there will be description of how the questionnaire is designed. The data obtained by the questionnaire will be collected and compared carefully in order to find out what are the habits of people when engaging with Internet activities. Through the feedbacks from the participants, the aim is to find out the connection between post-Otaku and non-Otaku people

concerning their online behavior. The obtained image of people living in postmodern society using Internet will be presented by the result of the questionnaire.

By analyzing the result, the thesis will try to present the connection between Otaku and non-Otaku in Chapter 4. After presenting the similarities and differences between non-Otaku and Otaku online behavior, the thesis will deal with the fact that people are in the stage of entering the post-Otaku state.

In chapter 5, the main focus will be on interpreting the post-Otaku phenomenon. Internet has started to take huge part into our life within the past 10 years. The social behavior of contemporary society has been changed because of Internet. This chapter will be presenting the way it has been changed and how far it will continue in the direction of deconstructing social structure and changing the relationship between people and information. The changes Otaku were undergoing will be discussed in order to emphasize impact Internet and postmodernity has caused. In order to figure out the connection between people living in postmodern society and post-Otaku, the development of Otaku throughout the different stages up till now within its own community should be brought into the introduced. The result of the questionnaire showed that whether being an Otaku or not, people participating the survey shared quite similar social behavior. Living in the same era with the Internet infiltrating into every part of their life, people may be stepping into a new culture phenomenon developing from the concept of Otaku.

The conclusion consists of the summary of the thesis and states significant results of this research. It summarizes the main findings of the analysis and attempts to briefly explain them. At the end the limitations and future possibilities of the study are laid out.

## Chapter 2. Literature Review of Otaku

It is crucial to discover more about the origin of Otaku in order to move on to the study of post-Otaku. However one cannot possibly understand the full meaning of Otaku without getting his feet wet in the big anime pond. When cartoon is mentioned, people will normally think of Disney in the America, yet when it is about anime, the first image appearing in people's mind is usually Japan. It is not uncommon to find out that one may consider Japan as the hometown of anime. It is in Japan where anime enters the prosperity age. Today it is impossible to discuss anime without considering Japan.

As a matter of fact, anime had its roots in the United States. It took Windsor McKay 3 years to finish his work "Gertie the Dinosaur" (1914), which became a highly influential early anime, leading to a greater popularity of anime. Later Europe and ex-Soviet union also followed the steps to contribute to anime development. However what really made anime rise up to another level among mainstream popular culture had to be the success of Max Fleischer's *Superman*. In 1942, together with *Paramount*, Fleischer released the first superman anime *Fleischer Superman Cartoons*. All together there were 17 episodes, which were showed to the public in theaters for 3 years. Even though each episode only lasted 8 minutes, it cost 30,000 dollars for the production at that time. According to Toshio Okada, who is known overseas as the King of Otaku, thus the "Otaking", the "pinnacle" of anime is actually "Superman". (2003, MIT) Under the historical context, it is surprising to hear that a famous Japanese scholar who brought forward Otakuology declared that the most popular anime in Japan at that time was "Superman". Superman was created during the Second World War time and that anime was frequently full of anti-Japanese propaganda. When being interviewed, Mr. Toshio explained that Japanese Otaku cared mostly about the anime quality while

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professionals were looking for usable scenes and images, technical presentation and so on. As a matter of fact, they often ignored the socio-political messages. Whether it was anti-Japanese or not, Superman did attract the attention of Japanese comic industry's interests. What made it even more challenging was that the Japanese wanted to watch such American cartoon on TV regularly. However, this was considered financially impossible, because making anime was actually more expensive than live action movies. Yet Tezuka Osamu, the father of modern manga, actually solved this problem in his production of the famous *Tetsuwan Atom* (*Astroboy*). Tezuka was a fan of Superman and was made honorable chairman of the *Superman Fan Club* in Japan back at that time. He is often credited as the "Godfather of Anime" and is often considered the Japanese equivalent to Walt Disney, who served as a major inspiration during his formative years.<sup>3</sup> His prolific output, pioneering techniques, and innovative redefinitions of genres earned him such titles as "the father of manga", "the god of comics"<sup>4</sup>.

Though inspired by Walt Disney, it was not practical to introduce Disney's method to produce anime back in Japan during the economic recession age. What Disney's production required huge amount of funds, time and labor work. After the WWII Japan was economically devastated, so in order to develop the anime industry, Tezuka Osamu invented a new technique, which focused less on the movement of the anime figure during the process of making anime. Instead, his anime paid more attention to the inner feelings of the characters, which empowered the story telling with limited movements. Such technique is still implored in Japanese anime industry up-to-date to reduce the financial cost. In 1965, he released the first black and white cartoon *Astroboy* on *Fuji Television*. Two elements were necessary in order to satisfy the needs of TV anime in Japan. On one hand, the TV companies had to develop regular animated series, despite the expense of anime. On the other hand, anime must be cheap and the series needed the toy-makers and other goods

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<sup>3</sup> Tezuka Osamu Monogatari, 1992, published by Tezuka Productions.

<sup>4</sup> Patten, Fred (2004). *Watching Anime, Reading Manga: 25 Years of Essays and Reviews*. Stone Bridge Press. p. 198.

related to the anime to help cover the costs. Tezuka Osamu happened to help solve both of the problems. Not only reducing the cost of making anime, he also invested most of the money he earned by making comic to educate the younger artists. At the same time, he also helped to build up the connections between anime and other related commercial business, which brought up a whole new aspect of Japanese anime industry. By the late 1960s, thanks to Tezuka's work, monochrome anime became a big phenomenon - in time for the post World War II baby-boom generation.

During the lecture at MIT, Toshio Okada was asked if there's any overlapping between anime and Otaku, his answer was "Anime industry people are 100% otaku."(2003) However it's not necessary that all the Otaku are inside the anime business.

## **2.1 The historical background of Otaku**

No matter how far Otaku has grown apart from its first appearance, it is impossible to cut the connection between anime and Otaku. Being taught to reject Japanese history, the post WWII Japanese people were suffering from the sense of losing their history. After the war, the Japanese wanted to become American which has young history as a country, leaving their history of WWII behind and focusing more on children's future or current events. As a result of this, the post-war generation became obsessed with "Now Culture". They believe "there is only now. Whatever is now is what I like most." (Toshio, MIT Lecture, 2003) There were times when "now" was the most popular word, "it's now" basically is equal to "it's cool" at that period of time.

It might be exaggerating to say the whole post-war generation was suffering severe PTSD (Post-traumatic stress disorder), however the influence brought to Japanese society by the war was impossible to ignore. For the younger generation who



witnessed the war, “adulthood” became tainted. To some degree being an adult is denied. Not only a child's growth to adulthood was seen as acquiring responsibilities, but it was also seen as the person becoming more polluted or corrupted. While Hollywood coming-of-age movies showed characters growing up and becoming mature, Japanese culture preferred to create characters going back to the innocent age of a child. With the disappointment towards the adults who went through the war and failed everyone, the attention then was all switched to the next generation—children. The children carried the hope for better future and all the kindness within ones heart. Anime offered them a chance to look away from the reality and indulge themselves for a little moment in the fantasy. The pure and innocent qualities were what people needed to believe in at that time. Seeing this attitude in the TV series, the producers therefore invented many children characters in anime series, and likewise showed the issues and problems of adulthood. To some level, anime was like fable to Japanese people. While fables anthropomorphize animals, mythical creatures, plants, inanimate objects or forces of nature, the Japanese people “anthropomorphize” children. This resulted in the strange phenomenon that children's anime were flooded with cruel adult themes such as racism, rape, and poverty.

One has to keep in mind that anime also has to be profitable as well. With the combination of these heavy social issues, giant robots and superheroes, it created a very unique market and culture. The war did boom up the development of anime industry. It was no coincidence that people turned to anime when facing inner struggles. When facing great agony, people chose different ways to cling on to the inner strength. Children who were not prone to studying or interested enough in deeper philosophical meanings, grew out of anime series and continued to indulge in action TV shows as adults but many of the more mature children were so imprinted with the impact of the anime shows that they went on watching anime into adulthood. And these children grew into Otaku.

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## 2.2 The previous study of Otaku

What exactly takes to be qualified as an Otaku is a little more difficult to determine. We cannot describe what the Otaku are like until we have a clear view of who counts as Otaku. In article "I'm alone, not lonely" Grassmuck (1990) tried to reach out for the very source of the definition.

To find out something about the usage of a currently fashionable expression the first thing to do is to consult the "Basic Knowledge of Modern Terms" (Gendai Yogo Kiso-chishiki), an annual encyclopedia on all walks of life and a cornucopia of insights into the rapidly changing Japanese language. In the 1990 edition it says under "otaku": "Has been used as discriminatory word among manga and animation maniacs."

It also "indicates the type of person who cannot communicate with others, is highly concerned about details, and has one exclusive and maniac field of interest." (Grassmuck, 1990) When conducting his researching in Japan, Grassmuck was able to interview many influential people who gave their opinions about Otaku. Yamazaki (36), an authority on Otaku, said "Otaku are a product of hyper-capitalism and the hyper-consumption society". Yamazaki is a writer, editor, graphic designer, and most of all a pop critic for the *Asahi Shinbun* (*Morning News*) and magazines like *Asahi Journal*, *Popeye*, *Takarajima*, and *Weekly Bunshun*. "Today 'otaku' has taken on an extremely wide meaning. Originally it was connected with a precise, stereotyped image. It symbolized a human relationship for which the other forms of saying 'you' would be too intimate. Otaku referred to the space between them, they are far from each other, not familiar." (Grassmuck, 1990) Yamazaki explained that the origin of the social phenomenon appeared in the changes in Japanese culture in the 70's. "They are the children of media and technology. They grew up as only child with daddy always out at work, and

mummy very eager that her son studies hard so he can enter a good university so he can enter a good company. The cliché Japanese success story. And kiddy goes into hiding behind piles of toys, comics, and play machines.”(Ibid)

The Japanese relation towards technology is indeed something peculiar. Japanese kids are geniuses in operating technology, however, says Yamazaki, they cannot talk and express their opinions well. Compared with other people, they feel more comfortable and relaxed with machines and data. Grassmuck (1990) wrote "Japanese people are in a sense fetish people. They don't tell the animate from the inanimate. This fact is an important background of the otaku. The 'two-dimension complex' is a kind of animism. They treat humans as things and things as humans." Otaku mostly avoid face-to-face communication, but excessively exercise communication via different media. They use the digital networks simply as media that allow them to stay at home and meet people who have same hobbies or same viewpoints without any physical contact

Within Otaku culture studies, Toshio Okada has always been the key figure. Born in 1958, Toshio Okada is an anime producer, author, and lecturer who is considered the leading authority on Otaku. In 1992, Okada's studio Gainax released a documentary of Otaku's daily life and style, which told the story of Otaku from a different perspective. After being kicked out from his own company, Okada focused more on the Otaku study. He wrote books about Otaku culture and started giving lecture at Tokyo University (the most prestigious university in Japan) and was parallelly working on the major on Otaku study. He created the term "Otakuology" which gained him status of "OtaKing" amongst his colleagues and fellow Otaku as a tribute to his own Otaku-ness. In Okada's opinion Otaku possess three main qualities such as:

- strong ability to adapt to the information exploration age and to do relevant studies and researches by collecting huge amount of

rapidly-updating information

- very sensitive to the visual and textual information and have the ability to analyze and criticize what the author is trying to say in their work.
- perseverant, always ready to improve themselves and have the desire to show their collections and knowledge.

Among all the attempts trying to define Otaku, Okada's definition is the most complete one, which illustrate the core value of Otaku. Otaku are always hungry for information. As Levy (1997) wrote in his book *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace*, within a knowledge community, "no one knows everything, everyone knows something, all knowledge resides in humanity." (Levy, 1997, p. 20) If there is a class distinction within Otaku world, then information must be what empowers the higher-ranking position. As Henry Jenkins (2006) mentioned in his book about fan culture "members may shifts from one community to another as their interests and needs change, and they may belong to more than one community at the same time." (Jenkins, 2006, p. 137) Such description also can be applied to Otaku community. In order to fit in, the information becomes the social leverage for Otaku. The flexibility lies in Otaku nature requires them to be always following the up-to-date information in order to circulate within the community.

William Gibson (2001) known for his close observation of Japan published an article in *Guardian Unlimited* named *Modern boys and mobile girls*, revealing the relationship between Otaku culture and British culture:

The otaku, the passionate obsessive, the information age's embodiment of the connoisseur, more concerned with the accumulation of data than of objects, seems a natural crossover figure in today's interface of British and Japanese cultures. I see it in the eyes of the Portobello dealers, and in the eyes of the Japanese collectors: perfectly calm train-spotter frenzy,

murderous and sublime. Understanding otaku-hood, I think, is one of the keys to understanding the culture of the web. There is something profoundly post-national about it, extra-geographic. We are all curators, in the postmodern world, whether we want to be or not.

Gibson's article to some degree made further efforts to showcase how important role information plays in the Otaku world. Gibson's portray of Otaku turned out to be a special kind of post-industrial trans-geographic cyber-citizen. When comparing the year that article was published and the time when this thesis is being written now, it can be assumed that the "passionate obsessive" seems to have grown stronger. Otaku are not the only ones who are addicted with Internet, the whole contemporary society is in the era of Internet. It seems that Internet is the new popular word after globalization. Yet what made Japanese's attitude towards information different from others could be traced back to their education system. Eng (2002) implied in his article that "otaku have become masters of handling and dealing with meaningless and valueless information." (Eng, 2002, p. 11)

The education system, in which the famous 'industrial warriors' are trained, is a generally acknowledged back-ground factor for the emergence of the otaku-generation. "In school", says Yamazaki, "children are taught to take in the world as data and information, in a fragmentary way, not systematically. The system is designed for cramming them with dates, names and multiple-choice answers for exams. The scraps of information are never combined into a total view of the world. They don't have a knowledge value, but the character of a fetish." (Grassmuck, 1990)

Growing up under such education system that knowledge was being stuffed, the children are trained to access vast fragmentary information that is all fragments. They gain the ability to eliminate the information that is useful for them at a very

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early age. Such ability becomes the key quality of becoming an Otaku. The term “information-fetishism” used by Yamazaki gives a clearer picture of Otaku. “The Otaku continue the same pattern of information acquisition and reproduction they have learned at school. Only the subject matter has changed: idols, cameras, or rock’n’roll.” (Grassmuck, 1990) Eng (2006) concluded that “ultimately portrays otaku as being very much interested in the ‘value’ of things and information, at least relative to their own social sphere.” (Eng, 2006, p. 56)

Otaku are never passive absorbers. Given the long-term exposure under the environment to comics and animations, the Otaku not only become very sensitive to visual information, but also improves their taste of their obsessions. As the major consumers, Otaku are not easy to be satisfied. In a conversation with Kaichiro Morikawa, Toshio once mentioned that:

I feel otaku are tough customers who demand high standards. As a producer of videos and manga magazines, I was keenly aware of their standards and thought (Takashi )

From the perspective of producer, Toshio realized that otaku have good taste on their collections and they are not shy to expressive their preferences. Since they spent enormous time and money on their interests, they also become very critical towards it. In the abundance of the information, they can always distinguish the useful from the useless ones. Okada even admitted that it is Otaku that makes him work really hard because “they won’t fall for cheap tricks.” (Ibid)

In July 2001, an article entitled “*Otaku: Japan’s gadget geeks dictate tech future*”<sup>5</sup> appeared in the business section of CNN.com Asia. The author Kristie Lu Stout (2001) wrote:

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<sup>5</sup> <http://asia.cnn.com/2001/BUSINESS/asia/07/12/tokyo.otaku/>

The otaku are constantly seeking new functionality, new ways of using devices,” says Tim Clark, a Tokyo-based analyst at Ion Global. “They are the ones that are the bell weather for each sector. They are the first buyers, the leading edge, the driving force behind the product development.”

Being persistent, Otaku are always actively involved and the first to respond to the new products. During their spare time, they are also following the most recent information of their interests. Most of the Otaku’s research capabilities are equal to the professionals in that field. Grassmuck wrote in his 2000 article “Otaku seeks out a tiny area about which he wants to know everything.” Therefore the quality and quantity of the information become the essence of hierarchy in Otaku’s world. Those who have better knowledge are respected more within the peer group. So in other words, valuable information becomes the symbol of status in Otaku world. “The otaku are concerned with having valuable information, and the value of information depreciates as more people know it.” (Eng, 2006) In the PhD thesis, Eng (2006) defined one of Otaku’s ethics that:

Information is the most important thing, but information does not have fixed intrinsic value. The essence of information is secrecy; the utility of information comes from its movement. (Eng, 2006, p. 73)

Information is only shared by Otaku when they consider the exchange of information is positive. Occasionally, they also accidentally “share” the information by showing off to the peers wanting to prove that they have more valuable information than others. However such urge to show off becomes the main motivation for them to collect more information, which in Toshio’s opinion is one of the main qualities of being otaku.

## **2.3 The development of Otaku**

For the research to conclude the most compelling and culturally relevant definition of Otaku, one must take into account of the work already done to define otaku and take a close look at the origin of otaku. Therefore more background information of Otaku will be discussed from different perspectives in coming chapter.

### **2.3.1 The origin of Otaku**

For most English speakers, the word Otaku itself may not make any sense. It may help the reader to have a better clue of the thesis if we go back to the very beginning. The etymology of “Otaku”, according to Volker Grassmuck, a German sociologist, who in 1989 became a guest researcher at Tokyo University’s Socio-Technological Research Department, literally means “your house” in Japanese; also it is often used as a very polite but distant way of saying “you”. However the historical turning point of why Otaku are called Otaku is quite ambiguous. Grassmuck (1990) believed that “Otaku” was something that members of fans called themselves.

Some informants convey that it was in the advertising world, others say it was in the circles of animation-picture collectors: "please, show me your (otaku) collection." The most trustworthy rumor has it that it first came up among people working in TV and video animation companies. From there it spread to the viewers of animes and the closely related worlds of manga (comic-books) and computer games. (Grassmuck, 1990)

Grassmuck (1990) also theorized that the most distinctive effect of using “Otaku” is a way to reflect the nature of the Otaku as being “emotionally distanced from the mainstream culture and even their own peer group.” On the other hand, Tomohiro Machiyama, the famous Otaku/pop artist, suggested that the use of “Otaku” “as a form of address amongst anime fans was mimicked from the Macross anime



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directly.” (Macias and Machiyama, 2004) The main character of the anime Hikaru Ichijoe frequently uses the extra-polite “Otaku” when talking to other characters. (Macross, 1982) Leaving behind the question when Otaku first appeared, it was quite clear that when the term was introduced into popular discourse. The first published report describing the usage of “Otaku’ among fans was written by Akio Nakamori in 1983. Since then, the concept Otaku has been studied and analyzed by many scholars, domestically and internationally.

Otaku came a long way since it first appeared in Akio Nakamori’s published report. Once it was introduced into popular discourse, it has gained the attention inside and outside Japan. The phenomenon did spread its influences geographically and culturally. However at the early stages, the study of Otaku was not mature enough for people to understand what was beneath the title. Being new and mysterious, Otaku was put under the microscope of the mainstream culture, whether it wanted or not.

What really brought otaku to the center of the spot light was the notorious kidnap-murder case, which took place at 1989 in Japan. A 26-year-old printer’s assistant named Miyazaki kidnapped, molested and murdered 4 little girls. When searching his residence, a huge collection of anime and manga, including pornographic copies, were found. Apparently he was socially isolated and lacking human contact according to his friends and families. As a hardcore fan of comic and anime, as well as an anti-social person, Miyazaki was tagged as Otaku immediately after the case was made public. “Otaku are a media-phenomenon in several ways. The media created first them, then the name for them, they inhabit the media...” (Grassmuck, 1990) The Japanese media picked up on the case and repeatedly referred to Miyazaki as an Otaku on public occasion, thereby imprinting the term into the public’s head. As a result, Otaku was associated with the sociopaths like Miyazaki. Medias superficially blamed Miyazaki’s brutal behavior on animes and Manga. Otaku at that stage “had gone from being merely weird to genuinely scary.”

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(Eng, 2006) Japan in the early 80's was suffering deeply from the trauma of post war syndrome. It was also when the days of school violence started. The severe communication barriers between parents and children led to a younger generation that could only release their anger and disappointment with violence, towards their parents or peers and even younger kids. The aggression of the students was stopped with disciplinary measures and school-rules. However according to Grassmuck's article, "*Otaku* are the post-'school violence' generation. Superficially they are good and well-behaved students, study hard, and get good grades, but underneath the surface they are run-aways. *Otaku* is a shelter for them." (Grassmuck, 1990) Lawrence Eng (2006) concluded "The Miyazaki incident was both a cause for further anxiety and an outlet for the media to deal with preexisting anxiety via a scapegoat, perhaps, in the form of anime and manga subculture." (Eng, 2006, p. 58)

*Otaku* later have been regarded with huge amount of fear and resentment over the last decade. Such attitudes somehow also found their way to America *Otaku* discourses. Yale sociology professor Sharon Kinsella turned the heat of discussion from the attitude of Japanese postwar adult society towards individualism when taking western culture as a comparison.<sup>6</sup> In the article *Amateur Manga Subculture and the Otaku Panic*, Kinsella (1998) wrote:

(White) youth cultures in the UK and USA have, increasingly, been humorously indulged and wishfully interpreted as contemporary expressions of the irrepressible creative genius and spirit of individualism that made Britain a great industrial nation, and America a great democracy. But individualism (*kojinshugi*) has, as we know, been rejected as formal political idea in Japan. Institutional democracy notwithstanding, individualism has continued to be widely perceived as a kind of a social problem or modern disease throughout the postwar

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<sup>6</sup> Kinsella, Sharon. 1998. *Amateur Manga Subculture and the Otaku Panic*

period.” (Kinsella, 1998, p. 291)

The postwar Japanese adult society has anxieties about its youth culture becoming more individualistic and isolated and less interested in fulfilling mainstream social duty. Therefore with the help of the media, Otaku was pushed to the center of the heat, becoming the main target to be blamed at. Yet the negative image did not stop it from being spreading around the world.

### **2.3.2 The rise of Otaku**

In the late 80s and early 90s, *Okada's Otaku no Video*, often referred as the “video made by otaku for otaku”, was introduced to America. The video, made two years after Miyazaki's incident, told story about Toshio's opinion of Otaku lifestyle. Eng (2006) described it as “a pseudo-documentary about Otaku, and depending on who you talk to, a celebration of the otaku lifestyle, a tongue in-cheek self-parody regarding the excesses of fandom, or a dire warning of what can happen when one takes comics and animation too serious.” (Eng, 2006, p. 59) Ever since the video entered America, there has been a heated debate among the fans. Within some fan communities, “Otaku” became part of the specialized jargon. Some fans, considering themselves as being similar to those information elites portrayed in the *Otaku no Video*, called themselves Otaku to positively categorize themselves as obsessive and extremely knowledgeable about their object of interest. “Perhaps they identified themselves as Otaku because the English language lacks any better terms to describe them.” (Ibid)

On the other hand, part of the fan group was strongly opposing the use of the term since it bore the dark connotation. Such opinions were held by those who asserted that Americans who called themselves Otaku were ignorant of its true meaning. There were the other fans taking position in between saying that whether the original meaning in Japan was negative or positive was not important, they

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preferred to define “Otaku” as “anime fan”. For those who respected the history of Otaku but were able to ignore the superficial negative stereotypes, instead of being simply called “fan”, they want something more potent. They ended up defining themselves as “elite fans, hardcore and obsessive fanatics with vast amounts of knowledge who could be looked up to by aspiring newbie fans.” (Eng, 2006, p. 60)

There are innumerable instances of “Otaku” being used instead of “fan” in a positive manner, among which was the most outstanding contribution of Toshio Okada. As the leading researcher of Otakuism, Toshio took part in many events, gave lectures at conferences, published books, and even built a website in 4 different languages to educate the next generation of Otaku. “Due to the work by people like Okada, the eventual glamorization of computer cultures in Japan, the mainstreaming of parts of anime culture, and the identification of new youth subcultures for the Japanese adult culture to be afraid, otaku in the early 2002 lost some of its potency in Japan as a dangerous subculture.” (Eng, 2006, p. 63) In Larimer’s (2001) article “Staying In and Turning Out”, he wrote that “being otaku has even become hip”.<sup>7</sup> In the 2000, for the first time, the Japanese government’s Educational White Paper highly praised anime and manga as important Japanese art forms achieving popularity and recognition abroad. The art and fashion world are other fields where Otaku entered with high profile. Takashi Murakami, a well-trained Japanese artist with deep Otaku roots proclaimed that the Otaku subculture has evolved into a powerful mainstream force (Poku=Pop+ Otaku) that will produce Japan’s most original cultural products.<sup>8</sup>

In early 2002, Otaku has its unconventional debut on New York Times Magazine article, introducing the Japanese fashion world. “Fashion otaku have garnered a certain amount of respect, perhaps because the fashion industry has found a way to milk profits out of the subculture that was previously considered too frightening to

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<sup>7</sup> Larimer, Tim. 2001. “Staying In and Turning Out.”

<sup>8</sup> Cruz, Amanda, Miodori Matsui, and Dana Friis-Hansen. 1999. *Takashi Murakami: the Meaning of the Nonsense of the Meaning*. New York: Harry Abrams, Inc, Publishers.

even talk about publicly.” (Eng, 2006, p. 66) By then Otaku had become respectable and somewhat hip in the mainstream American press. On May 2002 issue of *The Pulp*, magazine for American fans of Manga, published an article about Japanese fashion scene saying that:

Otaku (which means folks who get into their hobbies heavily) used to be on the dark side of Japan. Nowadays otaku actually look healthier than non-otakus in Japan. Maybe because it’s always better have some energy than none. (Evers, 2002)

This comment was given under the historical context of Japanese younger generation who are lost, growing up in postmodern society, not knowing why and how they should live. They do not have energy and curiosity to do anything and cannot find any goal to fight for.

In America, the concept of Otaku also becomes more and more popular among the younger generation since it has become one of the biggest export markets of Japanese animation business. And during the lecture give by Toshio in MIT, he claimed that “there are no mere ‘fans’ or ‘consumers’ of anime - there are only otaku.” Toshio (2003) explained that “here it takes effort to keep up with anime as an adult American. Hence, the effort marks adult anime fans as ‘otaku’.” (MIT Lecture)

### **2.3.3 The death of Otaku**

However, Toshio Okada did not rest at the peak of Otaku progress for too long. In year 2009, he shocked the whole Otaku community by publishing his book *Otaku, you are dead*. In the book he expressed his confusion regarding the Otaku community at the end of the first decade of 21st century. In his word “Otaku recently have become strange.” (Toshio, 2009, p. 144) He felt that he couldn’t

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relate himself to Otaku anymore since the Otaku mainstream was driven to another direction.

According to Toshio's explanation, Otaku went through three major generations. At the very beginning, the society named a brunch of fans Otaku by drawing a circle in order to distinguish them from the "normal" people. People within the circle could be fans of various topics. But the major members of Otaku were believed to come from the early science fiction fans. Let alone the different interests, Toshio believed it was one thing that brought all the Otaku together, and that was the wisdom and freedom to decide one's own likes and dislikes. In Okada's opinion, the average people are often led by the mainstream media or other influences when choosing what or who to like. It is Otaku's unique character that allows them to follow only their heart when choosing whose fans or fans of what to become. Even though Otaku can be fans of different figures or themes, it is common sense within the community to share the mutual respects. Such character was one of the signature marks within the description of the first generation Otaku who were born in 60s. This generation corresponded to the generation of television kids. The first generation Otaku grew up with television, among which were mostly Star Trek's fans.<sup>9</sup> Since it was pre-Miyazaki time, Otaku was not branded with psychopath or pedophile tag. They nurtured their hobby in a relatively free environment. The society was not paying too much attention since the adults were busy occupied with economical and survival issues. Kids who stayed out of the adults' way were actually appreciated. So growing up in such background, Otaku at that time was mainly used to address their own peers within their own community even when they become adults.

Then came the second generation of Otaku, due to the Miyazaki's case, they were brought under the microscope. This generation was similar to the first generation Otaku, they had their access to Manga and discussed what they liked with friends,

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<sup>9</sup> Star trek. Movie and Tv series..

sharing the information within their own circle. However the situation suddenly changed when they entered their 20s. After the Otaku killer was apprehended, the media shifted their attention from the sole murder of the case to the whole Otaku community. As a result, the second generation Otaku became the main target of discrimination and took all the blame. There was a time when Otaku had to keep their heads down in order to blend into the mainstream society. Toshio Okada (2009) claimed that despite the interference of parents or teachers at school, the number of Otaku was not really decreasing that much. Instead, they just went back to their own world where they could share the same interest, holding the idea that the other adults from the outside world will never understand them anyway. (Toshio, 2009, p. 71)

As to the third generation, Okada considered them as the “take-it-for-granted” generation. This generation grew up surrounded by all the Otaku elements. They were free to choose depending on what exactly their interests were. But they did not appreciate enough the freedom they had because of they were born with such advantage. The second generation had to fight for what it took to become Otaku. They had limit access of information while the third generation had possibility of accessing a whole range of different media. Due to this hybridity of media the third generation of Otaku was incapable to differentiate the information they were getting. Whether it was comic books, animated series or computer games, all of them could be based on the same story. Since they could get the same story from a different media, they did not care too much about the source of the information. Also they were not diligent enough to find out as much information as possible about what they liked. They were easily satisfied with what they thought they knew instead of trying to collect as much information as possible since the all the information they needed was on the Internet. When one is offered too much, one does not cherish enough. Without the struggle, the third generation did not realize how much effort it took Otaku to develop so far. All they cared was about their own interest, not so much about Otaku as a group of people living on a same continent that could be

sinking very soon. It is Otaku after the third generation that confused Okada, which led him to the conclusion that Otaku dose no longer exist.

### **2.3 The influence of Otaku**

Over the past decades, Otaku culture has undergone radical changes globally. Anime fans are generally considered as Otaku, but there seems to be more Otaku outside the anime fandom. Undergoing in deep study of the development of Otaku community and what Otaku exactly do, it is impossible to neglect what kind of the influence Otaku has brought to the society.

#### **2.4.1 Positive factors**

In previous chapter it was argued that being an Otaku is far more than just a simple anime fan. Otaku are always the pioneers of new technology and they adapt quickly to the new technologies. The key element in Otaku world is information. In order to get the first-hand information, they always keep a close eye on the technology development trend driven by their thirst for cutting edge information. And even though they were not the prime target group for testing new technologies they become the first ones to test them motivated by the highly competitive Otaku rules. To them, involving with a new technology is one kind of information. Still their focus is not merely on the new things but also on the new ways of understanding the old things. They are constantly seeking for new data no matter how trivial the details are, as long as it concerns their primary interests. This trait allows Otaku to develop a better ability to read media. “Media literate” is what Eng (2006) called them, “in addition to their general proficiency with information technology, otaku have above average skills when it comes to reading complex media.” (Eng, 2006, p. 191) No matter what kind of subject Otaku is into, it requires huge amount of information to become an expert in its field. It is to some degree like academia, Otaku discover a topic and dig deep in it. Living in the information exploration age, Otaku are exposed to enormous amount of information presented through different



kinds of medium. It is important for them to select useful information, distinguishing the reliable ones from the online trash information. “In short, otaku have an eye for detail and are able to process not only vast amounts of information, but information that is encoded for niche audiences.” (Eng, 2006, p. 192) Such long-term practices train Otaku to become the expert of interpreting and analyzing.

Collecting information is just one of Otaku’s advantages. When it comes to their interests, they are really cautious and particular about the accuracy of the information and quality of the products. Facing the vast fields of information, it is quite common for them to stumble across the inaccurate ones. Yet Otaku have zero tolerance for mistakes, whether the inaccurate information comes from non-Otaku or their peers, they feel obligated to correct the mistake by quoting authentic sources. It happens quite often that Otaku involve in intensive discussion with their peers about certain facts of the topic, similar to an academic debate. Therefore, the ability to think critically and conduct logical arguments is a highly valuable skill that is beneficial to Otaku all through their life.

In addition to their argumentative ability, Otaku also create their own work. Although the format of their work is limited, it is their enormous knowledge of the original work that inspires them. Their first hand knowledge of the new technologies allows them to experiment and to remix the original material until they come up with new contents, reveling their personal feeling and understanding. in postmodern context it is hard to distinguish original work from the re-appropriated ones. “Otaku [...] instead have produced numerous works that exemplify what postmodern creativity is all about combining preexisting and disparate elements to create new works.” (Eng, 2006, p. 198) As a result, Otaku are not only passive audience, they also participate in the process of creation.

Lawrence Eng categorized “apolitical” as one of the disadvantage as being an otaku

in his doctoral dissertation<sup>10</sup>. In the dissertation Eng (2006) argued that “some otaku are not old enough to vote, but even for those who are, political debates are not common in otaku communities, and there seems to be a general sense of apathy regarding their privilege and responsibility to participate in the political process.” (Eng, 2006, p. 204) But to my knowledge it is not just Otaku who are indifferent to politics but the whole younger generation. As a matter of fact it is Otaku’s lacking interests of other topics makes them more concentrate on their own subjects. Leaving behind the meanings or purposes, what they have is pure and simple admiration to a certain subject. With the sheer enthusiasm and without any utilitarian attempt, they are having absolute fun with what they love. Of course it is not to say that Otaku are completely deprived from social power. Since Jenkins (2006) stated that “room for participation and improvisation are being built into new media franchises” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 145), Otaku can be powerful consumer and their involvement with the technologies puts them in the role of an active social participants.

### **2.3.2 Negative factors**

There has been on-going discussion about Otaku’s obsession. And it is a clear fact that Otaku’s lifestyle can be viewed as addictive. “Otaku obsession with information can be considered a form of information addiction, with the otaku constantly looking for the next fix, damaging their aspects of his or her life in the process.” (Eng, 2006, p. 201) Before the Internet boom, all the information was stored in certain format and there were restrictions for Otaku in gaining access to the information that they wanted. However in the digital age, it is more convenient to access the information, with the link hypertext. They cannot stop themselves and the competitive nature of Otaku does not help. The competition to gain more knowledge than others may drive them into the vicious circle.

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<sup>10</sup>Eng, Lawrence.2006. Otaku Engagements: Subcultural Appropriation of science And Technology.

Sadly the obsession could lead to more severe consequences. It is one of the known stereotypes that Otaku are socially incompetent, but this might be a misunderstanding and it should be clarified. It is not that Otaku do not possess social skills but they are most of the time focused on their own topics. They have no desire to waste time talking with people with whom they do not share the same interests. If there is nothing useful to be gained from the conversation, they would rather not have it. The exchange of useful information is the key element for Otaku to start the communication with others. As a result, Otaku are communicating mostly with people from their own community. It is not the people that they have problem communicating with but those who fail to provide them useful information.

For non-Otaku, Otaku seem to be in a strange state of mind. They not only invest almost all of their spare time in their hobby but also their money as well. To become an Otaku is not cheap. It is true that some of the information can be found free on Internet, but otaku are true believers in the intellectual property rights and they think that there should be a price for any information. “Otaku, who have dedicated so much time and energy to the intellectual property of others as well as creating so much of their own, might wonder why anyone would have such a dismissive attitude towards intellectual property.” (Eng, p. 217) Eng (2006) defined Otaku as “a form of middle class resistance because working class youth do not have the monetary resource and access to technology that are so crucial to being successful as an otaku.” (Eng, 2006, p. 199) Otaku are heavy consumers and such hobby might be huge financial burden for those Otaku who are still studying or may not have sufficiently high income.

For some people derivative artworks demand creativity but some may also consider such art being of lacking originality and creativity. Even though Otaku have solid knowledge in their field of interest, that kind of expertise is not generally appreciated or considered serious enough. It is not common to associate Otaku’s achievements and knowledge in their field of interest to their real life. Otaku,

although possessing enormous amount of info, is always regarded as unsuccessfully and immature from the mainstream point of view. Meanwhile the information they gather is often seen as useless and meaningless for real life.

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## Chapter 3. Approaching the Internet Era in the light of Otaku

As it has been discussed in the previous chapter, the key figure of Otaku study Toshio Okada was preoccupied by his discovery of the death of Otaku. (Tohio, 2009) Concentrating merely on the Otaku community, Toshio might not be able to see the bigger picture of the contemporary tendency. His passion of Otaku might keep him blindfolded, stopping him from noticing how much impact Internet has brought to the present society. Not able to accept the changes within the Otaku community, Toshio would rather state the death of Otaku. By doing so, he denied the possibility for Otaku to evolve under the influence of Internet. However, Otaku like any other cultural phenomenon cannot be vacuumed or preserved. The Otaku community was also shaken by the thriving Internet, however such transformation happened not only inside the Otaku world but also outside. Since both Otaku and non-Otaku were undergoing the same influence, it might be interesting to see if there are any connections between Otaku and non-Otaku today. Through the light of Otaku, the present generation might be interpreted in a different way.

### **3.1 The Necessity of approaching the Internet Era in the light of Otaku**

Internet's participation also contributes to change both the life of Otaku and non-Otaku. Don Tapscott (2009) brought up the concept of "net generation" in his book *Growing Up Digital* naming the children born between 1977 and 1997 in America the Net-Gen. (Tapscott, 2009, p. 16) The name is clearly coming from the fact that most of the children growing up during that period were growing up with Internet. Unlike the children who were born after 1997, the Net-Gen experienced the booming of Internet. "In 1983, only 7 percent of households owned computers. By 2004, the number had grown to 44 percent and a whopping 60 percent of those households had children." (Tapscott, 2009, p. 17) These children might be born

before the Internet booming but they are now the core members of the present society.

Since Otaku are always judged by the mainstream culture, the shift of the value of mainstream society defines people's attitude towards Otaku. It is obvious that Internet today has penetrated into the daily life of the majority of population. Information serving as the priority within Otaku community has become the competitive factor for almost everyone in the present society. Information is easier to obtain today with the development of Internet, which improves people's ability to select and process information. Otaku had better skill to process information before, however today the gap of the information-process-ability between Otaku and average people become narrower. Such influence brought by the Internet might alter the relations between Otaku community and non-Otaku society. In order to find out how tremendous the changes are, it is crucial to study the deeper impact of such phenomenon through the help of the previous studies about Otaku.

As the witnesses of the developing technologies, this generation is experiencing the transformation brought by Internet both in their private and public life. While the old generation is trying to adjust to the Internet era, the Net-Gen is living with Internet now. It is unclear how the regular use of Internet will affect behavior in the long run, especially the behaviors of children and young adults who are growing up with these tools. By comparing their way of interacting with Internet, one might be able to get a clearer picture of how much the Internet has changed human relations.

As Otaku are going through the influence of Internet as well, the main goal of this research is to find out what is the connection between Otaku and non-Otaku in contemporary society.

The questionnaire was designed to prove that the Internet has shortened the distance between Otaku and non-Otaku, therefore the concept post-Otaku will be introduced

after taking a closer look at non-Otaku's online behavior through the perspective of Otaku. The results will be compared in order to find out the similarities and differences between Otaku and non-Otaku's online behavior.

### **3.2 The Design of the Survey**

For the purpose of finding out the connections between the characteristics of people living in contemporary society and Otaku, a questionnaire is designed in a way which would focus on how Net-Gen spends their spare time regarding to their hobbies. Neil Selwyn, Stephen Gorard and John Furlong (2005) contented in their article that "now the internet is popularly celebrated to be transforming all sectors of everyday life – from the economy to civic society, commerce to leisure – hastened by the emergence of new internet-capable platforms such as the mobile telephone, digital television and games console." (Selwyn, Gorard, & Furlong, 2005, p. 6) Since Internet became the key element of people's life after the emergence of the digital era, whether as the tool or the object of people's obsession, the influence of the Internet is going to be the major concern throughout the whole survey. In particular, this study aims at understanding how the Internet has integrated into Net-Gen's daily lives and their social interactions, while obtaining a broader overview of people's attitudes towards the Internet and, indeed, to identify those users who come closest to resembling Otaku who uses the Internet daily to perform a range of obsessive activities.

The goal of the questionnaire is to find to what extent people depend on Internet in their spare time for pursuing their hobbies. The survey is based on a questionnaire sent out to 30 participants, which are divided into three groups according to their age. Since the scale of the survey is relatively small, it is unpractical to expand the survey onto international scale. So in order to retain the credibility of the survey, the target group is limited to only Chinese citizens who reside either inside China or aboard. Among all the 30 participants, 3 are residing aboard and the other 27 are

living in the main land China. The answers given by the participants who grow up in the similar cultural background make it easier to construct the solid analysis.

### **3.2.1 The Age of the Target Group**

Three age groups represented in the survey are following: 21 to 30, 31 to 40, and 41 to 50. Young people between 20 and 30 are on the verge of adulthood but can still have clear vision of what childhood was like.

College students are an ideal study group for life histories of interactive media. They are young adults whose memory of childhood and teenage media use is relatively fresh but who are mature enough to have started building lifetime patterns of media use. And, as noted previously, this group's formative years correspond to accelerated growth and usage of interactive technologies. (Mcmillan & Morrison, 2006, p. 76)

Participants whose age is over 41 are also included because John Holmes (2011) proposes in his article "They suggest a belief that something is fundamentally distinct about the ways the generation in question appropriates digital technology in comparison with older generations." (Holms, 2011, p. 1105) By comparing the age groups, one can have a better view of how different generations are reacting to interactive media. At the beginning, teenagers were also taken in into the consideration because Holms (2011) wrote "[...] a belief that young people are universally, naturally and deeply engaged with the internet and its potentialities." (Holms, 2011, p. 1105). However when the level of accessibility of the Internet is being measured, the fundamental rule has to be for the participants to have full access to Internet according to their own free will. Usually teenagers under 20 are still in high school, mostly living with their parents, as a result either teachers or parents may monitor their access to Internet. In order to have the overall picture of



their access to Internet, it has to be their own decision on how much time they spend on Internet doing exactly what they want. University students these days grew up with video games and many began to use the Internet before they started university studies. In 2002, a research conducted by the Pew Internet & American Life Project showed that university students are early adopters and heavy users of the Internet. (Jones, 2002). So the participants are targeted in such way that they have the full control of their free time after the study or work.

### **3.2.2 Gender and the Language**

Since the survey is based on a small sample, the gender factor will not be taken into the consideration. It is mentioned that in Neil Selwyn, Stephen Gorard and John Furlong's (2005) article that gender is not the key element that influences the use of Internet

Thus, it is not being an older adult or a women per se which makes you an internet user or non-user, but the opportunities, needs, motivations, material circumstances and lived experiences of being an older adult or a woman which all amount to (non) engagement. (Selwyn, Gorard, & Furlong, 2005, p. 20)

So the gender of the participants will be random with no interference throughout the process of disseminating the questionnaire. However there is one factor that might influence the result of the research and that is the language of the questionnaire. The questionnaire is conducted in English with no Chinese translation, which, to a certain degree, limits the participants of the survey.<sup>11</sup> Considering the level of the language of the questionnaire, all three groups of the participants will need to be able to comprehend the questionnaire in English. This

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<sup>11</sup> Given that English was the most influential foreign language around the world, it was also taken very seriously in China as well. English courses were given from the first year of primary school in past decades and some parents even started to take their kids to study English when they are still in kindergarten.

means most of the participants had to have advanced knowledge of English in order to fill in the questionnaire. What was potentially problematic was the age group between 41 and 50, since they did not have such extensive English language studies while they were in school. So in order to be able to answer the questionnaire, they should have higher education background.

### **3.2.3 The Design of the Questionnaire**

Identities, especially among the young, are fluid and complex (Osgerby, 1998) and difficult to measure or hold constant. This means that tangible points of reference, such as the sites in which identities are shaped, need to be found to understand variations in the lives and destinies of young people. (Lee, 2005, p. 318)

Even though the time a person spends at work or at university matters great deal throughout one's life, it is home where he or she could be relax and completely free from the interference of others. The activities people conduct in such environment do help in shaping their characters. The questionnaire is going to focus on how people spend their spare time in order to take a close look at how people in this generation are intertwining with Internet in their daily life, processing the unlimited amount of information presented online. Despite the fact that technologies are neutral, they can be shaped within particular contexts and can be packaged in ways to make them appealing and relevant to the lifestyles of those who are normally bypassed and uninterested in technology. There will also be questions, which aim at finding out people's general knowledge about Otaku. With a general idea of their attitude towards Otaku, they are also asked to answer whether they think they are Otaku or not as a reference to show the differences or similarities about their online behavior.

There are 24 questions in the questionnaire, which lead to different aspects of

people's habit of using the Internet, but there are also questions aiming at finding out how the participants arrange their private time. In general the questionnaire is categorized into 5 major groups of questions: (1) who is (and who is not) using the internet; (2) for what purposes people are using the internet; (3) how are they interacting with the Internet and how much time do they spend doing that; (4) how much Internet has changed people's life; and (5) people's knowledge about the concept of Otaku and their opinion about the possibility of becoming one.

In the end "At an individual level, 'the internet' is not one technology but means different things to different people and is used in different ways for different purposes." (Selwyn, Gorard, & Furlong, 2005, p. 7) A survey like this can reveal how contemporary people are functioning in the age of digital technology by offering the detailed information about their relationship with Internet.

### **3.3 The findings on Internet behavior**

Since "snowball or chain referral sampling is a method that has been widely used in qualitative sociological research" (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981, p. 141), this questionnaire was distributed through the Internet using the Snowball sampling<sup>12</sup> method. Since the participants are categorized into three age groups, the author initially sent the questionnaire to three recipients among friends and families who were interested in the study. Each recipient fits to one of the age requirements. Later they started to forward the questionnaire according to the similar rules to whomever they considered qualified for the age and language requirement. At the end 30 of the questionnaires were filled in and sent back within a time limit. Out of 30 participants, only one was working part time and all the other 29 participants had full time job, working between 6 to 11 hours per day. When asked how they prefer to spend their after work time, 25 of them answered that they would rather spend their spare time at home and 5 of them would prefer to spend it outdoor.

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<sup>12</sup> Snowball Sampling: The method yields a study sample through referrals made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest.

More surprisingly, out of 30 participants, 27 of them spent most of their spare time on Internet when at home; only 1 prefer reading and 2 prefer watching TV at home. Only 4 options were given in this question yet not a single person left the answer in blank. It actually showed that 90% of the participants were spending their spare time online at home while only 10% on TV and reading. 26 of them would be engaging with Internet every day and the rest would only use computer once or twice a week. A list of the things they most likely to do online were given: (1) checking emails, (2) watching movies, (3) on social networks, (4) random surfing online, (5) shopping online, (6) searching for information, (7) playing games and (8) on study/business/work/research. Such options were collected through the observation, as when the online activities were being discussed, these were the prior options mentioned by people the author has encountered through out the years. The results were: 15 persons used the Internet to do online shopping and to search for information related to their hobbies; 13 persons were watching movies or doing study/business/work/research on Internet; 12 were checking their Emails; 10 were surfing randomly online; 8 were spending their time on social networking and 6 were playing games online. Among all the options, shopping online and searching for information were the most popular activities. When asked how much time they were spending on Internet every day, 14 of them spent more than 5 hours per day on Internet while 6 of them spent between 3 to 5 hours, leaving only 10 spending between 1 to 3 hours every day.

### **3.3.1 The purpose of using the Internet**

From the results of the questionnaire, participants with the age ranging from 21 to 50 were spending most of their spare time online when they were at home. As their purpose of using Internet varied a lot, it could be checking Emails, watching movies, on social networks, random surfing online, shopping online, searching for information, playing games or doing research. When given the option to choose

which of the Internet technologies they considered indispensable, 23 among 30 picked the World Wide Web, 19 picked Email and 14 of them picked online streaming video. However, it is curious that within 19 people who chose Email, 9 of them were from 41 to 50, which meant almost everyone in the age group between 41 and 50 thought Email was the most important invention when concerning their engagement of Internet. On the other hand, only 4 people from the 30s group chose the Email. But when given the option of social net working, 7 people from age group 20s picked that activity while only 3 picked social net working in the age group 40s. The concept of social net working came relatively recent and that was visible from the results obtained from the people over 30 years old. They were keener on contacting others by Email. Social net working is apparently not as important to people in their 30s and 40s as it is to those who are in their 20s.

### **3.3.2 The habit of using Internet**

In order to find out how did the participants develop their habit of using the Internet, a certain detailed questions were asked in the questionnaire. All the participants' involvement with the Internet in the past 6 months was taken into consideration. Since Internet has become the main source to obtain information today, the time people are spending online searching for information cannot be ignored. Prior to the survey, the author started to collect possible activities being conducted online through the news, articles and among friends, here are the categories: online news, commercial products/services, reference material, research, financial information, health information, online chat group, job, rental information and online maps. They were asked whether they were accessing those categories on daily basis, weekly, monthly or they might never access them during the past 6 months.

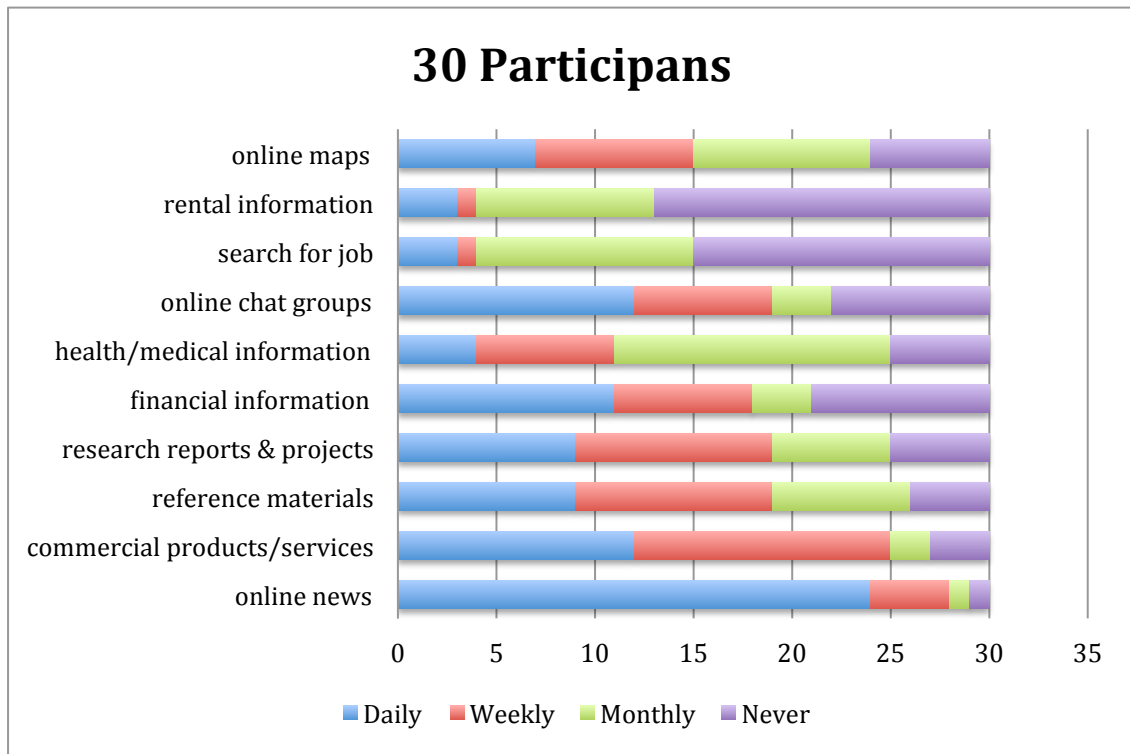


Chart 1: Internet Access

As the chart shows, out of 30 people, there are 24 persons accessing online news daily, 12 persons accessing chat groups. 12 of them are accessing the commercial products and 11 of them financial products. Only 3 persons are searching for job information and rental information online daily. As a matter of fact, 15 people claim that they will never search for job and 17 people will never search rental information online. On a monthly basis, 50% of the people are searching for health information online in the past 6 months.

It was quite obvious that all the participants who had access to Internet for the past 6 months had quite different approaches to it. There was a wide range of time they spent at home on the Internet. Out of 30 participants 26 were accessing Internet daily among which 14 of them were spending more than 5 hours per day online, which was approximately the same time they would spend at work. Those 14 people might be considered as heavy users. 19 of the participants admitted that they were spending too much time on Internet but only 13 of them had the intention to make

some changes and while the other 6 even though realized their engagements with Internet might be problematic, they refused to make any changes. About one third of the participants were happy with their usage with the Internet.

### **3.3.3 The role of Internet in daily life**

The questionnaire made a general overview of the central role that Internet is playing in people's life. Yet rather than completely changing their old lives, the participants' usage of Internet showed that their uses of the Internet were clearly intertwined with their previous life. To some degree, the activities that were conducted by the participants online were not invented after the appearance of the Internet; instead, they existed long before the Internet era. Methods used by the participants were simply replacing the old ones that were used to obtain the information. They were pursuing existing interests rather than 'creating' new interests. People who were using the Internet on a frequent basis were generally building upon and extending previously developed interests by introducing to a new sources. Only the information sources today can be easily personalized, they can be seen as the individually constructed technology – used by some as a reference tool, and by others as communication tool.

The idea of individualization of tools became more obvious when the answers were given when being asked "how frequently would you use the Internet instead of certain activities listed during the past 6 months". There were all together 13 options given, among which were mostly activities could be conducted without the involvement of the Internet in the early days. Before the Internet, TV was the main media for entertainment at home. Today Internet becomes the more popular channel.

Also people would contact each other mainly by phone or letter instead of Skype or Email before. Paper used to be the main material for publishing books, newspapers

and magazines. The idea of virtual exercises such as Wii would not exist in the past and people would actually go out to be social instead of sitting in front of the computer poking each other on Facebook<sup>13</sup>. Today with the help of E-bank, you do not need to leave the room to buy a ticket, pay your bill or do your shopping. In the past, in order to accomplish these chores, one needed to leave home go to the several locations and possibly wait in the queue. It is understandable that people would just pick the more convenient way to handle the everyday routine. Out of all participants only 5 were still willing to write traditional letters, and only 7 preferred to watch TV on a daily basis. 18 out of 30 used alternative applications calling through Internet instead of making “phone calls” on a phone. 19 of the participants gave up the old-school paper and started reading everything online. 18 of them switched to the Internet payment and transferred their business to the online banking. 14 of them decided to watch movies online instead of going to cinema. There were 11 participants who had quite extreme answer saying that they would cut down their sleeping time in exchange for more time online.

### **3.3.4 The replacement of Internet in daily activities**

Obviously serious changes have happened since we entered the Internet era and the Internet has changed the lives of people from the past. The questionnaire feedback showed that the use of the Internet became main activity when compared to the more traditional ones like watching TV, talking on the Mobil phone, going to cinema or reading books etc. However there are huge differences between the three age groups when it comes to the issue of technology replacement. First two age groups had similar pattern of replacement but participants between 40 and 50 had showed the huge difference in this pattern. Their encounter with the Internet happened at the time when they had already formed certain life patterns. So when asked if they would replace TV with Internet, only 4 said yes. In the younger age group, 19 out of 20 participants said that they were already watching TV channels

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<sup>13</sup> People poke their friends or friends of friends on Facebook for a lot of reasons (ex: just saying hello, getting their attention). When you poke someone, they'll receive a notification.



online. While the participants in their 40s were still using phone as the major communication tool, the other two groups were already switching to online interactive communication tools. There are differences in the way different generations are using technologies, in almost every instance older generations were incapable of following the trends of the digital technologies. While the young adults were busy building their social relations through virtual space, they did not realize that actually their choice of technology could potentially isolate them from the older generation within a family.

### **3.4 The findings on Otaku**

At the end, the questions about Otaku were raised regarding to people's knowledge about the concept of Otaku and the possibility of being one. When asked to describe their engagement with Internet, among 30 participants, 19 admitted that they had spent too much time on Internet and only 13 would like to make some changes. 6 of them were comfortable with the idea of the Internet dependence and were not willing to make any changes. Only 11 claimed that they were satisfied with their engagement with Internet. It is interesting to see that the majority of the participants actually have very clear understanding of their relationship with Internet, whether satisfied or not, they were comfortable enough not to want to make any changes.

When the question regarding the concept of Otaku was raised, the feedback was positive. 13 persons, covering almost half of the participants, actually knew the concept of Otaku very well. Within the rest from 30 participants, 14 of them had heard of the concept before and only 3 persons admitted that they had never heard of Otaku before. As the image of Otaku developed through the representation of media and academic studies, different participants could be exposed to different image of Otaku prior to this research. In order to have a clearer view of how they understand the concept of Otaku, several descriptions relevant to Otaku image from the previous Otaku studies or public opinion were offered as the multiple choice

answers. Following characteristics were listed in the questionnaire to fit the profile of Otaku: (1) massive knowledge of comics and Manga; (2) fantasizing about virtual figures; (3) spending too much time on Internet; (4) staying single; (5) have the hobby of collecting; (6) not willing to communicate with strangers; (7) seldom go out, spending most of their spare time at home; (8) couldn't live without the computer; (9) become obsessed with something or somebody; (10) having problem functioning socially; (11) nature ability to process information and do research.

When presented with all the descriptions above, the results are as follow: Out of 30 participants, 22 agreed that Otaku seldom went out and spent most of their spare time at home; 14 participants thought Otaku were those who spent too much time on Internet and 13 believed that Otaku could not live without their computer. 12 participants considered that Otaku were mostly single and 11 participants agreed that Otaku were usually fantasizing about virtual characters, which could be one of the reason why they were mostly single or the other way around. 10 participants thought that Otaku usually had massive knowledge of comics and Manga and 8 participants were actually able to notice that Otaku usually had natural ability to process information and conduct research. Then 8 people agreed that Otaku were not willing to communicate with strangers and were usually obsessed with something or somebody. Only 6 participants thought Otaku were not able to function socially and 5 among 30 participants thought Otaku have hobby of collecting.

As a result, the key figure of Otaku from the opinion of the participants were firstly, staying at home a lot; secondly, inseparable from their computer; thirdly keeping virtual relationship instead having real relationships in reality. Though the definition of Otaku reflected differently in different participants' answers, it is no wonder that when being asked whether they consider themselves as an Otaku, their reactions were also diverse. 4 options were given to the participants according to different level of acceptance as admitting being an Otaku, which were (1) Yes, I am an Otaku;

(2) To some degree, I would call myself an Otaku; (3) I don't think I am Otaku enough and (4) There is no way I would call myself an Otaku.

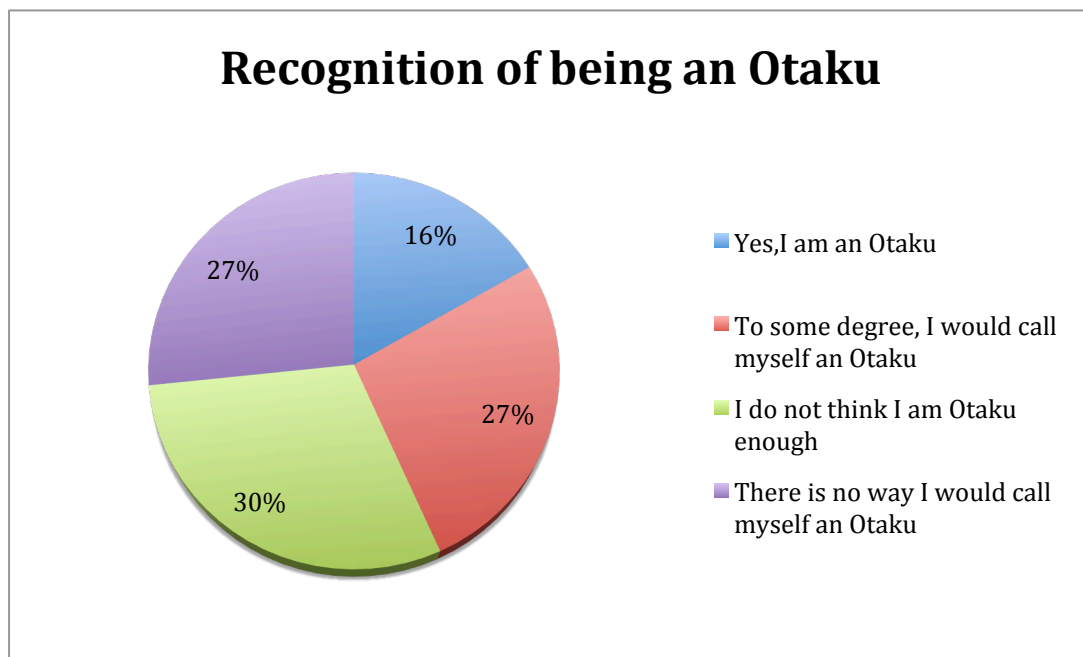


Chart 2: Recognition of being an Otaku

The number of answers was surprisingly balanced. 9 persons, the biggest number out of all 30 participants, chose “not Otaku enough”. And both “too some degree” and “no way” were chosen by 8 participants. Only 5 participants claimed that they were Otaku.

## Chapter 4: The Discovery of Post-Otaku Phenomenon

Despite all the critics, either positive or negative, Otaku phenomenon will not alter according to our will. The evolvement or transformation can be a response to the development of the social environment.

As it was mentioned previously, Toshio Okada spoke his opinion loud and clear in public by publishing another book with an alarmist title *Otaku, you are dead* in 2009. He briefly reintroduced the history of Otaku and his understanding of how Otaku has evolved from the first generation sci-fi fans to the third generation growing depending on the Internet. Many of his opinions were very unique and thoughtful, which could be agreed to a certain degree. However it is his conclusion that caused the issue. Starting the book with all kinds of hypothesis thinking where exactly was Okada going by claiming that Otaku are dead, later it is discovered that what Okada meant was the Otaku he knew, the Otaku he was so proud of and stood for were dead. (Toshio, 2009, p. 156) As what he claimed himself to be, the second generation, he considered their generation was the ones who had to fight for Otaku the most.

The situation changed when the Otaku murder case broke out in 1989. It quickly got all the attention from the media and academia, taking the once neglected subculture to the center of the stage. Many scholars were analyzing Otaku's mental state on television and the news was broadcast around the major channels. The devil-like image of Otaku was planted deeply into the adults' head. Ever since then, it was not easy for the second generation of Otaku. Any behavior resembling Otaku would be considered sick and wrong. It was not exaggerating to say that the second-generation Otaku grew up surround by discriminations. (Tohio, 2009, p. 71) However it was also such painful experienced that gave most of the

second-generation Otaku courage and power to fight for what they loved. Some of them decided to give up or just kept in low profile while still enjoying the joy of being an Otaku, but not Okada. In order to change the other people's opinion about Otaku, Okada started to write his "Otaku bible"-- *Introduction to Otakuology*, trying to explain the charm and fun of being an Otaku. In Okada's opinion, the key concept of being an Otaku is "the free spirit of choice when concerning one's hobby and taste" (Tohio, 2009, p. 56) As an Otaku, one cannot be influenced easily by the public opinion or what is being advertised on the mainstream media. However he considered it his mission to let the publicity have the chance to know Otaku for who they really are and then make their own decision whether to like to hate Otaku. He even managed to give lectures at the top university of all Japan, which is Tokyo University and also in MIT.

As the power of strength that introduced Otakuology to the popular culture study in Japan, Okada was quite successful and recognized by the academia not only in Japan but also around the world. So it was quite fair for anyone who was shocked to hear that the father of Otaku announced the death of its "child". It seemed that Toshio was being arbitrary and came to the conclusion too fast. What he tried to prove in the book was that the Otaku he believed in or used to be proud of had already turned into normal people. "They didn't disappear, they just all went from someone special back to ordinary people." (Toshio, 2009, p. 144) However it was also his own argument that the evolution of Otaku was just like updating the computer software. The new version was always altered based on the previous versions. Since Okada agreed that Otaku could evolve from the first generation to the third generation, why exactly are the Otaku after the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation or if we may call it now the 4<sup>th</sup> generation not Otaku anymore? If according to Toshio, Otaku after the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation "went back to the ordinary people's team" (Tohio, 2009, p. 144), could it also be possible that it is actually the ordinary people who are marching towards Otaku planet? Kuniko Miyanaga (1991) pointed out that there has been a growing individualism among people on the periphery of Japanese culture

(e.g., artists, people in the fashion industry, people in small businesses) since the end of the war. (Kuniko , 1991, p. 5) Since the value of the whole society in Japan was strongly influenced by individualism, why cannot the 4<sup>th</sup> generation of Otaku be the one who grow up as individualism? Even though they could be more self-centered than the Otaku in the early generation, they still keep the key spirit that occurred in Okada's mind, which is "the free spirit of choice when concerning one's hobby and taste." (Tohio, 2009, p. 71) They may not care that much about Otaku as a group of people sharing the same Otaku planet, but they never give up their own interests. That idea makes one wonder if Okada was claiming this only because he felt hurt and disappointed after sacrificing so much for establishing the Otaku study only to find out that he was actually building a kingdom for a bunch of ungrateful kids. However, this was not happening only within the Otaku world, it also happened to average people. Many adults were expressing their concern for the next generation. Since we entered the postmodern society, there is a possibility that Otaku did not die. Instead, it is up to date, following the mainstream culture and entered post-Otaku era? Even though such hypothesis might be too far fetched, it can still give us another glimpse of light when analyzing the result of the survey.

#### **4.1 Analyzing the survey: the similarities and differences between non-Otaku and the Otaku**

The purpose of conducting this survey for one reason is to take a closer look at how the people today are interacting with Internet. Another aim is to have a general idea of how people today are thinking of the concept of Otaku. From the result of how Otaku and non-Otaku were conducting the Internet activities, it is possible to spot out the similarities and differences of their behaviors. Of course the assumption will not be holding up if none of the participants actually recognized themselves as Otaku. However the feedback showed that actually only 3 out of the 30 people have never heard of the concept of Otaku but they still filled in that question when being asked to describe Otaku through their own interpreting of the word. The fact that 14

participants had heard of the concept and 13 participants knew the concept well proved that Otaku was not such an obscure or strange concept to process anymore.

In the questionnaires, certain descriptions of the Otaku were given to the participants. The majority of the participants who actually had certain knowledge of the concept of Otaku agreed on that Otaku was a group of people who seldom went out and spent most of their spare time at home online. Somehow the key value of being an Otaku according to Toshio Okada's definition, which is the Manga mania, is being listed as the less crucial element of being an Otaku. Out of 30 participants only 8 were under any circumstances calling themselves Otaku while the rest of the participants could more or less spot some resemblances with Otaku. Why would they even consider the possibility to be called Otaku or why would they acknowledge that they might be to some degree Otaku? The answer might be found through their use of Internet. Since most of the participants suggested that staying at home using Internet during free time was the most obvious characters of being an Otaku, the way they interact with Internet is worth looking into.

Romanyshyn (1989) stated that computers become 'extensions of ourselves, reflections and echoes of who we are, were, and will become' (p. 193) – sometimes disrupting and altering and sometimes reinforcing and replicating already established and entrenched patterns of day-to-day life. [...] Thus, the impact of the internet could be seen in terms which reflect the extent to which its use enables individuals to live their day-to-day lives, experience their everyday pleasures and to participate and be part of society... (Selwyn, Gorard, & Furlong, 2005, p. 22)

In this case, all the participants are separated into two groups, those who think of themselves as Otaku and non-Otaku. Otaku group with 13 members includes both those who consider themselves as Otaku and those who think that they are Otaku to

some degree. The second, non-Otaku group consists of 17 persons who can never imagine being an Otaku and those who think that they are not Otaku enough. As mentioned before, the dominant images of Otaku is the way they spend their spare time, either on indoor or outdoor activities. Among all 30 participants, only 5 participants are spending their after-work/study-free-time out door. And, of course, almost all the participants who consider themselves as Otaku prefer indoor activity - Internet. 4 out of 5 outdoor persons belong to the non-Otaku group.

When questioned about how often do they use Internet, the answers were surprisingly similar. 12 out of 13 participants from the Otaku group had daily access to Internet while in the other group, 14 out of 17 participants were using Internet on a daily basis. However, it was the time they spent every day that showed the difference in their pattern of usage. Within 13 Otaku participants, 9 of them were spending more than 5 hours on Internet each day. This basically means that most of the participants who belonged to the Otaku group were spending more than 5 hours online on a daily basis and only one participant spent less than 3 hours. Within the non-Otaku group, 6 participants were spending more than 5 hours per day using the Internet while 8 participants had less than 3 hours of Internet access. Even though there were less than half of the non-Otaku participants who were spending more than 5 hours on Internet on a daily basis, which made the gap between two groups relatively big, almost all the participants were having daily contact with Internet.

In order to get a closer look at the participants' online activities, options in multiple choice type answer were given to them, describing the activities they might be conducting online which were: checking Emails, watching movies, using social networks, random surfing online, shopping online, searching for information about hobby, playing games and study/doing business/work/research. In the Otaku group, among 13 participants, the biggest number picked "searching for information for hobby" as their main activity online while the second most popular reason for using Internet was to do random surfing. However in the non-Otaku group, the major



reason for the participants to use Internet was actually for online shopping. Then the second most popular reasons were “watching movies” and “ searching for information for hobby”.

Later, more detailed questions about their online habits were raised regarding the frequency of their access with following categories in the past 6 months: online news, commercial information, referential materials, research projects, financial information, health information, online chat groups, job information, rental information and online maps. It was the participants’ daily online activities that were mostly concerned when analyzing the results. Among 17 participants in the Otaku group, 16 of them accessed online news daily, 7 of them had online chatting habit, 6 of them accessed commercial and financial information, 5 of them were searching for reference information online and accessed online map, 3 of them were doing their research online while only 2 were searching for information related to the job and one was checking rental information on. While in the non-Otaku group which included 17 participants, also the majority which was 12 persons, were accessing online news every day, 6 participants were being exposed to commercial information and conducting their research online, 5 of them had daily chatting habits and also habit of reading financial information, 4 of them were searching for healthy related information and using referential information online, only 2 were searching for rental information and using online maps, at the end only one person was searching for job online on a daily basis.

After having a closer look at the participant’s daily online habit, there were not too many differences between the Otaku users and non-Otaku users. This is evident when comparing their daily habits concerning with following information - online news, commercial information, referential information, financial information, online chat group, job and rental information. Only when talking about the research habits, 6 out of 17 non-Otaku users actually were collecting the information regarding to their hobbies online every day while within the Otaku group, only 3 of them were

doing so. Then none of the Otaku participants were searching information concerning the health issue however there were 4 non-Otaku participants who were trying to do such research online every day. Otaku users were more active when it came to the daily use of online maps while only 2 of the non-Otaku participants used online maps daily. As a matter of fact, the patterns of online habits between Otaku and non-Otaku users were quite similar despite their different understanding of Otaku concept.

According to the data from Global Digital Statistics 2014<sup>14</sup>, out of 7 billion people all over the world there are 2.5 billion Internet users at a global level at the beginning of 2014, which means that there is a 35% Internet penetration worldwide. And the Internet penetration by region goes as: North America 81%, Western Europe 78%, Oceania 63%, CEE 54%, East Asia 48%, South America 47%, South East Asia 25%, Africa 18%. Also according to Internet Live Stats<sup>15</sup>, there are 641 million Internet users in China and 279 million Internet users in the United States by the end of June 2014.

Within the past decades, Internet has managed to enter most of the family in major cities around the world. Since then, it has inserted the influence that cannot be overlooked to our daily life. It brought changes to the patterns of socialization, communication and participation in the society in general. So during the survey, the participants were asked to fill up the questionnaire describing their activities as being replaced by Internet for the past 6 months. The list of the activities are as follow: watching TV, talking on the phone, writing letters, sleeping, exercising, reading, going to cinema, going out to socialize with friends, doing household work, going to the bank, going to the shops, buying tickets and paying bills.

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<sup>14</sup> Survey conducted by social media agency WeAreSocialSG: <http://wearesocial.sg/>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users/#trend>

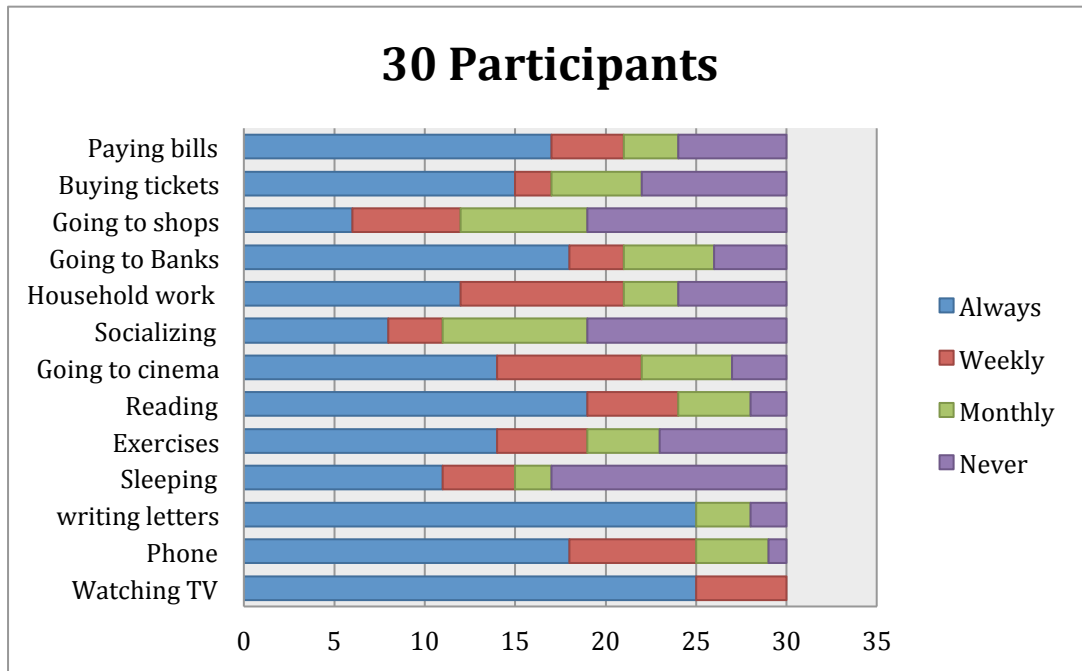


Chart 3: Activities Replaced by Internet

Apparently, from the chart the result is clear that television is losing its power since among all the participants, 25 of them are actually using Internet all the time instead of watching TV for the past 6 months, among which 10 belong to the Otaku group and 15 belong to the non-Otaku group. The rest of the participants are using Internet as the replacement of TV on a weekly level and none of them watch TV instead of using Internet during 6 months prior to the questionnaire. The result is not a surprise because when Don Tapscott was conducting the Generation (N-Gen) Strategic Investigation<sup>16</sup> in 2007, he presented to the question concerning their choice between TV and Internet in front of participants from 12 different countries including America, Canada, UK, Germany, France, Spain, Mexico, Brazil, Russia, China, Japan and India. When being asked either TV or Internet is dispensable in their daily life, every single answer was TV. (Tapscott, p. 84) And within those 5 participants who still watch TV on a weekly level, only one of them belong to the

<sup>16</sup> Generation (N-Gen) Strategic Investigation (2007) examine how today's youth interact with digital technologies to rewrite the rules of marketing and employment. It is based on a landmark, global research project and the expertise of New Paradigm, a world-renowned think-tank headed by strategist Don Tapscott.  
[http://www.cio.com/documents/webcasts/socialtext/wiki\\_workplace/Tapscott\\_NetGeneration\\_Research.pdf](http://www.cio.com/documents/webcasts/socialtext/wiki_workplace/Tapscott_NetGeneration_Research.pdf)

group between 21-30 while the other 4 are from the age group of 41-50. The other communication tool, which is replaced by Internet, is writing letters. In the Otaku group, all of the participants are always writing Emails instead of writing letters and 12 out of 17 non-Otaku are always using Email as the communication tool for long distance relationship. Making phone calls used to be more intimate communication method but it seems that today it is being replaced by social networking or Skype. In both Otaku and non-Otaku groups, 9 participants are talking on Internet instead of talking on phone. In the non-Otaku group, 13 among 17 participants are reading online instead of paper books, newspapers and magazines while in Otaku group it is 6 out of 13. Other than these activities such as going to the bank and paying the bill are conducted online by more than half of the participants. In the Otaku group, approximately half of the participants are choosing Internet over doing exercises, going to the cinema, doing household work and buying tickets. Less than half of them are giving up sleeping, shopping or going out to socialize with friends despite the fact that they all consider themselves as Otaku. The result from non-Otaku group is similar except the only interesting finding is that actually more non-Otaku are actually giving up sleeping for surfing online.

#### **4.2 Otaku in transition—entering post-Otaku**

Results of the survey based on the answers of the participants are bound to bring subjective data. When being asked whether one is or not an Otaku, the answers vary according to the participants' personal understanding of the concept of Otaku. Their knowledge of Otaku could be coming from the publicity of the media rather than academic articles. As it was discussed in the first two chapters, the image of Otaku went through different stages during the development as all the other subcultures. Therefore it is crucial to analyze the result of the survey taking into consideration of the academic description of Otaku as an outsider according to the data obtained through the questionnaire. When being asked if they are Otaku or not and 13 participants chose "Yes" while the other 17 chose "NO". Having in mind the

different descriptions of Otaku which were obtained through the survey, most of the participants agreed on that Otaku was a group of people who seldom went out and spent most of their spare time at home online, searching for information related to their interests. As analyzing the online behavior between two groups, the activities they conducted online were surprisingly similar even though they shared opposite opinion regarding the possibilities of becoming an Otaku.

From Toshio Okada's definition, Otaku are those who has strong ability to adapt to the information exploration age and to do relevant studies and researches by collecting huge amount of rapidly-updating information; who is very sensitive to the visual and textual information and has the ability to analyze and criticize what the authors were trying to say in their work and those who have perseverance, always ready to improve oneself and has a desire to show his collections and knowledge. (Toshio, 2009, p. 21)

Apparently, the majority of the participants in both groups were spending their spare time at home, and while they were at home, they were online most of the time. By being exposed to the digital information on such intense level, it could be argued that most of the participants have actually had "strong ability to adapt to the information exploration age and to do relevant studies and researches by collecting huge amount of rapidly-updating information". With the rapid development of digital technology, one has to always be ready to "update" their knowledge of modern technologies. The results of the survey showed that most of the participants were already giving up the traditional tool of communication and other activities. Instead of going to the real location, many personal affairs are being settled online now. Also the old media is shaken by the revolution of the new media. The television is losing most of its audience in such a scale that it measures in generations so is the paper media such as newspaper, books and magazines. Today people seem to be more appreciative of visual media such as photography or video. Since they are being exposed to such information constantly, the ability to access and analyze visual message becomes a

natural process. While Toshio (2009) was claiming that Otaku were dying out, he ignored the fact that the majority of non-Otaku might be marching towards what he defined as Otaku. And the Otaku community as well is experiencing changes and is going into the next stage.

## Chapter 5. The Interpretation of Post-Otaku Phenomenon

“The global growth rate of Internet use from 2000 to 2008 was 290 percent, meaning that across the world the number of people using the Internet has more than tripled!” (Tapscott, 2009, p. 23) Such an increasing number is on the international level. With such a large number of the general population getting involved with Internet on the daily basis, it is only a matter of time before Internet starts to change the human behavior fundamentally. According to Henry Jenkins (2006) “Rejecting technological or economic determinism, Levy sees contemporary society as caught in a transitional moment, the outcome of which is still unknown, but which has enormous potentials for transforming existing structures of knowledge and power.” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 136) Changes in human relations can already be seen in people’s daily interactions, starting with the relations in their family life.

### 5.1 The deconstruction of family structure

The common structure of a family experienced several stages during the past decades. George Murdock who studied 250 societies across the world, both the traditional and the industrialized, had defined the family as following: “The family is a social group characterized by common residence, economic co-operation and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually cohabiting adults.” (Haralambos & Holborn, 2000) According to his definition, the smallest family unit is known as the nuclear family, which consists of a husband and wife and their children. Nuclear families typically center on a married couple however the couple may have any number of children and children can be blood related to only one side of the parents. If other members are included in the family structure, then the family is called an extended family. Extensions to

the nuclear family can take the form of (1) vertical extensions - including other generations, such as the parents of both sides; or (2) horizontal extensions - including members of the same generation.

Family structures of one married couple and their children were present in Western Europe and New England in the 17th century, influenced by church and governments. The term nuclear family first appeared in the early 20th century. Nuclear family used to be one of the most popular family structures within the big cities. Even though there were statistics showing the sign of the increasing of single-parent-family or family with only adults through the past years<sup>17</sup>, most of children are still living with two parents. From a survey conducted in 2004 we find that “[...] over all, 7 in 10 children live with two parents, about two-thirds live with two married parents, and about 6 in 10 live with both biological parents.” (Robert, 2008)

In many cultures, a family is still seen as the primary unit of the society. There might be different family structures in different cultures but since the survey was conducted among the Chinese living in main land China, the research referred to in previous paragraphs is applicable to this survey as well. In all mentioned countries patriarchal family system is dominant, which indicates that the father represents the power center of the family. The Father figure represents the source of the knowledge, which establishes his high status among the other family members. As the improvement of women’s position in the society, there are more women getting higher education and gaining more charge of their decisions and bodies. In any case, before the Internet era, children used to look up to their parents because there was limitation to their access to knowledge and information. Parents’ education and life experience were the source of their knowledge and the parents were in a position of being mentors of their children. However things have changed with the readily

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<sup>17</sup> Focus on Michigan's Future: Changing Family and Household Patterns:  
<http://web.archive.org/web/20070703063353/http://web1.msue.msu.edu/msue/imp/modii/ii493007.html>



available information online. Nowadays if children have questions they will most likely ask Google first. As a matter of fact, the children's ability to obtain information online is usually better than that of their parents. Consequently the knowledge advantage that parents used to have over their children has been removed. The picture of the whole family sitting around the dinner table listening to the father talking about whatever he was good at might be gone with the wind. Today if there is an argument between the parents and their children, adults cannot just play the "parents card" and force the children to accept their explanation because everyone can instantly check up the fact on the Internet and find the right answer. Parents' authority of information is being weakened by Internet. John Seely Brown, a visitor scholar in The Annenberg Center, commented: "This must be a very special period of time on the history because the role children are playing at home are changing. For the first time on history there are things parents want to figure out while the children are the authorities." (Tapscott, 2009, p. 28) It might be a bit overwhelming but the search engine is assuming the authority over the information in the house. The "grand narrative" at home is deconstructed by the emerging of Internet and the role of the family members are experiencing some radical changes.

Conversely, such changes of the roles might reduce the gap between the two generations in the family. In the 1960s or 1970s, the gap between parents and children was much bigger due to the limited accessibility of the information. These two generations had different opinions of family value and life styles. But the parents and their children growing up in the Net Era share interests in such as sports, music, literatures, movies etc. For instance, children can easily find Beatles' songs online and can also appreciate other classics which were popular among the older generations. There might be more overlapping in music or movies tastes in both generations. In his book Tapscott (2009) wrote that "Today, instead of a gap, there is a 'generation lap' - kids are outpacing and overtaking adults on the technology track, 'lapping' them in many areas of daily life." (Tapscott, 2009, p. 28) Such

evolution of the family structure brings different aspects into the parents and children relationship. Parents are no longer the speakers but also the listeners in this relationship. They are also paying more respect to their children while learning from them, noticing that different people might have better knowledge in different fields. With the more open attitudes, the distance between the family members might be closer. Tapscott believed that the passion towards technology by Net-Gen will in the end encourage the shaping of a more open family relationship. “Net-Gen parents will collaborate with their children in creating an interactive, open family that lives according to a different model of authority - one that disregards conventional family hierarchies and roles - one that is topical, situational, and fluid.” (Tapscott, 2009, p. 240)

## **5.2 The deconstruction of friendship structure**

Not only the relationships between family members were changed, but also the relationships between friends were undergoing changes due to the influence of Internet. As it was mentioned in the introductory chapter, Internet has had a large impact on interpersonal relationships, especially the social networking sites such as Facebook, Tweeter, Flickr, Instagram etc. Social Networking Sites (SNSs), though not being widely recognized, started to thrive after the success of the Facebook. Danah Boyd and Nicole Ellison identified the launch of SixDegree.com in 1997 as the first recognizable social networking site. (Ellison & Boyd, 2007) It combined profiles and friend lists. Through later development, various social networking sites for different purposes and goals, containing profiles, friends lists, guestbook, and diary pages, were launched all over the world, such as Skyblog in 2002; MySpace in 2003 and Facebook in 2004.

Originally restricted to college students, Facebook soon extended membership to high schoolers and is now open to anyone. Still, it is most popular among college students and recent college

graduates, many of whom use the site as their primary method of communicating with one another. Millions of college students check their Facebook pages several times every day and spend hours sending and receiving messages, making appointments, getting updates on their friends' activities, and learning about people they might recently have met or heard about. (Rosen, 2007, p. 3)

With the appearance of new communication tools, the friendship itself can also be redefined. "In its traditional sense, friendship is a relationship which, broadly speaking, involves the sharing of mutual interests, reciprocity, trust, and the revelation of intimate details over time and within specific social (and cultural) contexts." (Rosen, 2007, p. 12) Friendship in the virtual spaces is based on the same concept, however, there might be slightly different approaches. Making friends used to be a private matter that normally involved only the relevant parties. One might encounter friends in public locations but the communication was only between the involved parties. Yet the social networking changed such concept. The friendship among young people these days only exists until it goes public. Through the observation of the author, the definition of friendship relies on whether they are friends on social networking or not. If a relationship is not seen by the public, it does not exist. So to some degree there is always a third party "supervising" the relationship between friends, which might change the essence of friendship. One might feel pressured to accept a friend's request on Facebook because they do not want to be perceived as distant or unfriendly by the other friends.

It seems that the friendships today are more time and energy consuming than they used to be. There was the time when Email first entered our life and it did change the way of communication fundamentally. It truly offered the means for "be friend forever" to happen. Barbie Clarke showed in her research that "children are able to maintain friendships through SNSs in a way that would not have been possible

before, with contact being kept with friends who had moved to a different country, and friendships supported online even though face-to-face communication was not possible.” (Clarke , 2009, p. 1) With these new tools offering people easier and instant communication, one can easily convers with the friends all around the world. One can write to a friend and knows that the Email will be delivered as soon as you click “send” yet one does not expect the reply immediately. Still one expects the reply sooner than to a traditional letter. In the book *Friendship: An Expose*, Joseph Epstein (2006) praises the telephone and e-mail as technologies that have greatly facilitated friendship since there is still the liberty to want to connect or shut down. You can be reached when you want to or you can keep certain distance from your friends. But social networking sites have a different effect: they discourage “being shut off”. On the contrary, they encourage users to check in frequently, “poke” friends, and post comments on others’ pages. (Rosen, 2007, p. 15) When there is the expectation of instant reply, it might result in unbalanced communication. The Net-Gen is “used to instant response, 24/7. [...] They expect everyone to respond to their message immediately, if they do not have it, they might be angry or worried.” (Tapscott, 2009, p. 93) But what is missing in this equation is the first hand information that can only be obtained when one is talking to the other face to face. In reality silence, body gestures and facial expressions could also be responses that carry certain meanings. However in virtual friendship, there is always a time gap between the sender and the receiver. It seems that the social networking brings friends closer since you can reach them whenever you want, however it also offers the receiver possibility to decide whether they want to be connected immediately or not. Even though they have received the message they might still be able to choose when to reply, which might bring out the problems such as unsatisfied expectations. There is always one initiative in conversation and the relationship can only be balanced when mutual parties are contributing to the relationship simultaneously so that no one would be disappointed. So seemingly the initiative belongs to the sender but it is the receiver who decides when to react. So communication online differs

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from making a phone call or paying a door-to-door visit as the receiving side is not in the passive position.

Although there are discussions about the possible positive impacts of the Internet and how its use has brought people closer, that is just one side of the coin. Sherry Turkle brought up her concept of Goldilock effect when describing the present relationship between human beings : “Not too close, Not too far, Just right.”<sup>18</sup> But why would people want to hide r while being constantly connected to each other? Such paradox can be answered by the nature of human beings: “the need to be attached and fear of being hurt. “ (Turkle, 2012) Friendship is diversified and complicated relationship and it carries the potential of being hurt. Every one is vulnerable however it is the Internet that offers the way to secure people within the safe distance.

These virtual networks show a desire to avoid the vulnerability and uncertainty that true friendship entails. Real intimacy requires risk - the risk of disapproval, of heartache, of being thought a fool. Social networking websites may make relationships more reliable, but whether those relationships can be humanly satisfying remains to be seen. (Rosen, 2007, p. 17)

Technology does not just change what we do, they change who we are. And the technology today allows us to customize our lives. Social networking enables us to present ourselves as what we want to be through editing and deleting of the profile, photos, background, or music. Rosen came up with an idea “digital self-portrait”, of which explains how the net generations are, (Rosen, 2007, p. 1) It seems that the Net-Gen are building up their persona through choice of what to display on Internet and what not. Such build up profiles show both their true selves and how they wish

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<sup>18</sup> Sherry Turkle,2012 Ted Talk: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t7Xr3AsBEK4>

to be seen. They offer opportunities for both self-expression and self-seeking. Through such selections of self-presentation, one intends to protect oneself from possibility of being hurt in any relationship. Thus friendship built on the basis of social networking reflects merely how people want to be seen therefore it is most certainly not like the traditional friendship in reality.

The need to control everything seems to have become a common denominator among the people in postmodern society since they are getting more and more used to having everything done according to their own wills. As a result people are becoming more self-oriented and self-centered. Rosen discovered that “now, technology has given us the freedom to tap into our network of friends when it is convenient for us. ‘It’s a way of maintaining a friendship without having to make any effort whatsoever.’” (Rosen, 2007, p. 15) The easier to make a friend, the more one wants from a friendship. Given the fact that people are always “plugged in” digital equipment, they lose the ability to be left alone. Lacking the skills of getting along with oneself, one might reach out desperately for the company of others. The companionship in the past was built on the communications of the equals however social net working appears to offer an easier way to obtain such satisfaction. By sharing ones private life unilaterally, people today are using media technologies to define themselves as individuals with unique identities within the context of family and social structures. As people are getting more self-conscious they might only turn to other people in order to feel less anxious or less alone. When this happens, they are not able to appreciate the company instead they might be using their companion as an extra component to fulfill their fragile sense of self.

In her ted talk, Sherry Turkle explained her concern that being connected constantly is not going to make us feel less alone. On the contrary, if we are not able to be alone, we are going to be lonelier.<sup>19</sup> Such idea agrees with the article “I’m Alone but Not Lonely” written by Volker Grassmuck (1990). In the article he introduced the concept of Otaku and explained to the society that even though Otaku were

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid

present in media as the isolated group who are always home alone they are actually not lonely. (Grassmuck , 1990) Through years of practice, Otaku had grown comfortable into being alone and therefore they were not desperate to be connected unless they wanted to. For them the need for communication is coming from pure interest. Otaku phenomenon appeared before the booming of social networking and they were considered to be the outcast of the mainstream society however people living in postmodern society today are increasingly developing the Otaku traits. For instance the contemporaries only “want to pay attention to the bits that interests them”.<sup>20</sup> In the same manner Otaku only communicate to their own peers within one community based on the common interests. Such way of building connection also goes to the social networking these days. “The hypertext link called “friendship” on social networking sites is very different: public, fluid, and promiscuous, yet oddly bureaucratized. Friendship on these sites focuses a great deal on collecting, managing, and ranking the people you know.” (Rosen, 2007, p. 13) The social networking exposes you through a list of your hobby and interests so you can search for new friends according to these parameters. Some websites even recommend friends according to same interests. The way people now make their friends online is just he similar to the way Otaku used to build up their connections with people.

Every era constructs its own metaphors for psychological well-being. Not so long ago, stability was socially valued and culturally reinforced [...] But these stable social worlds have broken down. In our time, health is described in terms of fluidity rather than stability. What matters most now is the ability to adapt a change-to new jobs, new career directions, new gender roles, new technologies. (Turkle, 1997, p. 255)

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid

Going through the social development process people will inevitably experience the sense of lost or confusion. However they will find ways to adjust relationships with their families, friends and even the public.

### **5.3 The change of public relationship**

There used to be much more reasons for people to leave home, willingly or unwillingly. In order to sustain the daily necessity, one must build up “secondary social relationship” (Mitchell, 2005, p. 82), which includes people we might encounter often in the public. We might know their names or remember their faces but it is not necessary to have an intimate relationships such as we have with our friends or family. For example one might have to go to the bank or to pay the bill on a regular basic; one might have to go to the green market or grocery store to purchase food and daily necessities; one might have to go to the bus terminal to purchase ticket; one might need to buy newspapers and books or go to the cinema to watch a movie. Such necessity requires people to leave their home, to go out and engage in communication with others. Consequently, as we entered the digital era, Internet offers us the possibility to accomplish most of the activities without leaving our own home. With the e-bank and e-commerce, one can easily pay bills, buy tickets, transfer money, and purchase products online.

We should also take note of the trend toward giving up face-to-face for virtual contact—and, in some cases, a preference for the latter. Today, many of our cultural, social, and political interactions take place through eminently convenient technological surrogates—Why go to the bank if you can use the ATM? Why browse in a bookstore when you can simply peruse the personalized selections Amazon.com has made for you? In the same vein, social networking sites are often convenient surrogates for offline friendship and community. (Rosen, 2007, p. 17)



Internet not only offers us the means to handle the trivia, it also provides the possibility for us to work or study at home. “Whereas the industrial revolution forced the separation of home and workplace, the digital revolution is bringing them back together; we will see an increasing amount of electronically enabled homework, and correspondingly burgeoning demand for space in the home to accommodate it.” (Mitchell, 2005, p. 72) Of course it does not mean that people will just be staying at home and not go out at all. It is like what Jenkins (2006) mentioned “the emergence of the new knowledge space links to the breakdown of geographic constraints on communication, of the declining loyalty of individuals to organized groups, and of the diminished power of nation-states to command the exclusive loyalty of their citizens.” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 137) It only encourages flexible work schedules and spatial patterns, and many people will divide their time into varying proportions, including time for working in traditional types of workplaces. The same rules are applied also to online courses given by many universities today. One can stay at home and get enrolled in a university and receive his degree by accomplishing all the assignments and exams given by the professors.

When given more options regarding to dealing with daily necessity, people will have more freedom to arrange their time and more time can be saved from lining up for the queues or going through staff services. Also by making contact online one can avoid many unnecessary fact-to-face meetings at required locations. William Mitchell (2005) wrote in his book *E-topia* that “the newly dense and abundant interlinkage provided by growing numbers of smart places embedded in the expanding digital telecommunications infrastructure is already changing the spatial distribution of economic and social activities – and hence the life and forms of our cities – by enabling dispersed, decentralized transactions among people and organizations, and by facilitating new, flexible, and efficient systems of production, storage, and distribution.” (Mitchell, 2005, p. 71) When the book was published, it was still at the early stage of digitalization, he was making assumptions of what the

cities were going to be like in future, however up until now, it is true that the Internet has been changing the way people live their life and how the city should be constructed. Not everything has to be done with the psychical participations and with Internet acting as the medium; many services can reduce the numbers of their staff at the office. Certain encounters between people have been replaced by Internet, as a result, Internet might alienate people in a way that have never happened before.

#### **5.4 The change of information-human relationship**

According to Jenkins (2006), “The new information space involves multiple and unstable forms of recontextualization.” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 140) There is no doubt that Internet has to some degree re-defined our relationship with information. Such changes might be obvious to some people while ambiguous to others. Therefore it might showcase itself more clearly when being presented with a reference.

##### **5.4.1 The ability to process**

Marc Prensky (2001) separated people living in digital age into two categories: those who were born wired are “Digital Natives who are all native speakers of the digital language of computer, video games and the Internet”; and the rest who “were not born into the digital world but have, at some later point in their lives, become fascinated by and adopted many or most aspects of the new technology Digital Immigrants.” (Prensky, 2001, p. 1) When facing the age of information explosion, one must develop a better skill to process the information. In the past, libraries used to be the best locations for research; newspapers were the main source for what has been going on around the world; schools used to be the key institutions for knowledge, however such boundaries had been broken by the Internet. The problem now is never being unable to obtain enough information. As long as you keep on clicking the mouse, one page after another will bounce out on the screen. It is you who can decide when to stop and how to deal with all the information placed in

front of you. Such unlimited information outburst has brought along great challenges regarding to the progress of information. And the digital natives obviously have better skills of handling the information. “Different kinds of experiences lead to different brain structures” says Dr. Bruce D. Perry of Baylor College of Medicine. “As we shall see in the next installment, it is very likely that our students’ brains have physically changed – and are different from ours – as a result of how they grew up.” (Prensky, 2001, p. 1)

When being said that fashionable portrayal of the young “Internet generation as the forerunners of an emerging techno-social and political culture,” (Holms, 2011, p. 1106), it is fair to say that they are not only forerunners but also the real indigenious of that land. Young people are not only heavy users of technology, but they also to some way embody it. Growing up surfing online, they have to face the gigantic amount of information floating around the cyber space, among which they have to select and process and in the end come up with something useful according to their own needs. Such information could be covering totally different aspects of millions of opinions and ideals so one must be trained to become a critical thinker in order not to be confused and blinded by different arguments. As they are getting used to processing huge amount of information on a daily basis, their brain capacity might be pushed up to a higher level.

Also as the web pages are presented as hypertext, there is not one certain logical line for the readers to follow but all fragments which are scattered all over the place. As a result, the younger people now have developed a way to absorb knowledge parallelly instead of sequentially.

Digital Natives are used to receiving information really fast. They like to parallel process and multi-task. They prefer their graphics before their text rather than the opposite. They prefer random access (like hypertext). They function best when networked.

They thrive on instant gratification and frequent rewards. They prefer games to “serious” work. (Prensky, 2001, p. 2)

#### **5.4.2 The level of demand**

The quantity of information was not the only new problem the digital natives need to deal with, but also the speed of processing such huge amount of information. “I want it, and I want it fast” has become the slogan of the new Internet spirit. There has been complaint from the older generation saying that everything is happening so fast that it is almost impossible for them to catch up. Every day when you open the webpage, there is some new information needing to be processed. If one is not used to such speed, one might feel overwhelmed by the oncoming information. Yet that is exactly what the young generation is after. They are used to the speed. When the button is clicked, they expect to get the answer from Google within seconds; when they send out a message to friends, they expect to receive the reply immediately; when they send an Email requiring some information, they expect to hear from the person within days; when they order a product from Amazon, they expect to receive it within a week. Patience is the weakness for digital natives as they expect to get feedback right away either from their bosses or professors.

Then how is it possible to process such enormous information with such speed? The natives have found their way out. Instead of doing things “slowly, step-by-step, one thing at a time” like the digital immigrants do, the digital natives have acquired through years of interaction and practice and have developed the perfect skill of multitasking. According to survey conducted by Harris Interactive<sup>21</sup>, “during the process of surfing online, 53% of the young people would be listening to MP3, 40% would be talking on the phone, 39% might be watching TV and 24% might be doing their homework at the same time.” (Tapscott, 2009, p. 84)

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<sup>21</sup> Harris Interactive is one of the world's leading market research firms, leveraging research, technology, and business acumen to transform relevant insight into actionable foresight.

The need of always being updated to the most present information prevents people from unplugging from the Internet. Also the ideas of always being connected to the outside world reassure the digital native so that they can focus more on their primary target. Some decades ago, watching TV while doing homework might have been strictly forbidden. However today it is very common for young children to work with the music playing at the background and Facebook logged in. Kids today start to multitask very early on. Three out of every four Net-Gen students claim to instant message while doing their homework. (Tapscott, 2009, p. 174) The parents and teachers inevitably withhold their opinion towards such multitasking skills because they do not believe that they can learn successfully while watching TV or listening to music, because they (the Immigrants) cannot. But according to Prensky (2001), “it’s only because they didn’t practice this skill constantly for all of their formative years.” (Prensky, 2001, p. 3) As we are entering the age of simultaneity, we might be obliged to improve our ability to use our time efficiently and productively. Multitasking might offer one of the solutions to prevent us from getting drown in the information ocean, helping us to dive freely.

#### **5.4.3 The change of role in participation**

Over the past several decades, emerging technologies-ranging from the photocopier to the home computer and the video cassette recorder-have granted viewers greater control over media flow, enabled activists to reshape and recirculate media content, lowered the costs of production, and paved the way for new grassroots networks. (Jenkins, 2006, p. 149)

By now we have explicitly explained what information has brought to our time; one thing we have to remember is that digital natives are not merely passive receivers of

information but also actively involved in producing information.

The Net Geners don't just take what they are given either. They are the active initiators, collaborators, organizers, readers, writers, authenticators, and even strategists, as in the case of video games. They do not just observe; they participate. They inquire, discuss, argue, play, shop, critique, investigate, ridicule, fantasize, seek and inform. (Tapscott, 2009, p. 21)

Almost 80% of them contributed to Internet by reading interactive blogs daily, leaving comments, adding links, and uploading videos. (Tapscott, 2009, p. 88) Differing from the digital immigrants, digital natives would not just sit and listen to what teachers or parents have to say without exploring further on their own through Internet. They have enough freedom to do research on their own will, selecting information that catches their eyeballs. Also they are able to customize everything from the ringtone to the screen of their laptop, from the source of the news to the articles they want to subscribe, from the playlist for running to the bedtime stories they want to listen to. They are always participating and interacting with the new medium and the information they can get their hands on. There are also many remix videos uploaded by fans that can almost compete with the original ones, some even better. They might even be able to edit and cut in order to make the actor they dislike disappear. The digital natives process information in such a different and renovating way that they sometimes blur the crossing line between professionals and amateurs. It happens that there might be more viewers on an ordinary kid singing than on the professional singer on YouTube. People may like the remixing music provided by fans more than the original versions.

Don Tapscott (2009) wrote in his book *Growing Up Digital* that “thanks to Web 2.0 companies in just about every industry can turn their customers into producer - that is ‘prosumers’.” (Tapscott, 2009, p. 208) He explained that “prosumer” was “more

than an extension of mass customization but instead it meant both producers and customers were always actively participating the innovation of products and service.” It is true that through the more convenient communication method, the customers have better chance to interact with the producer directly. As they are always keeping themselves updated with the information online, they might know much more about the product they are planning to consume than ever before, therefore they assumed more active roles in the world of commerce. “Some sectors of the media industries have embraced active audiences as an extension of their marketing power, have sought greater feedback from their, fans, and have incorporated viewer-generated content into their design process.” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 150) In such an approach, digital natives can participate in the creation of the products in an active and ongoing way. In other words, they do more than customizing or personalizing; they add value throughout the product’s life cycle. Such contributions of digital natives as “prosumers” overthrow the concept of customers and producers by remixing the roles of author and audience.

The idea of “prosumer” might not be such a strange concept if we have a better look at the consumption pattern within Otaku society. There has always been quite close connection between Otaku and the authors or with the goods of their interest made by the producers. There used to be more strict boundaries between the author and the audience, for instance, when a book is published, the mission of the writer is accomplished. Whatever information can be obtained depends on the readers and readers only. Still such relations might be altered since today the audience can quite often participate in the process of creation. Many publications would re-direct their stories in order to fulfill the expectation of the readers. New side-project might be started in order to satisfy the desire of the collector. The consumer’s opinion can easily alter the outcome of a product. Just like what Jenkins (2006) stated early in his book “it is clear that new media technologies have profoundly altered the relations between media producers and consumers” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 150), the consumers can easily switch their role to producers today. Otaku are known to be

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actively involved in consuming the original and the parody with equal vigor. They reproduce the original Manga, anime and games by re-reading from their own aspect and sell them in the form of fanzines, fan games, and fan figures at the conventions or online. According to Toshio Okada's term, the basic rules of claiming to be an Otaku required the ability to create one's own fanzine. (Toshio, 2009, p. 20) Such phenomenon can be easily connected to French sociologist Jean Baudrillard's theory predicting that "in postmodern society the distinction between original products and commodities and their copies weakens, while an interim form called the simulacrum, which is neither original nor copy, becomes dominant." (Baudrillard, 1995) Such postmodern characteristic does not only have influence on consumers but also on the authors. There have been many cases of best-selling authors who produced and sold fanzines of their own commercial products. Such transformation showed that even for the producers, the boundaries between original and copy have vanished.

For them (Otaku), the distinction between the original and the spin-off products (as copies) does not exist, the only valid distinction for them is between the settings created anonymously (a database at a deep inner layer) and the individual works that each artist has concretized from the information (a simulacrum on the surface outer layer). (Hiroki, 2009, p. 39)

Such transformation cannot only be seen within the Otaku community but also the whole postmodern society. With the assistance of Internet, once something is published online, it might be spread all over the world within seconds, with little possibilities to trace the origin. It might sound exaggerating but the products of present society are becoming a chain of infinite loop of imitation and reproduction because upon entering the postmodern society the strict division between the professional and the amateur has been abolished. Farsighted Levy (1997) already claimed in his famous book *Collective Intelligence* that "The distinctions between



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authors and readers, producers and spectators, creators and interpretations will blend to form a reading-writing continuum, which will extend from the machine and network designers to the ultimate recipient, each helping to sustain the activities of the others.” (Levy, 1997, p. 121) With unlimited access to material and knowledge, given enough time and devotion now, it is not impossible for normal people to teach themselves to become professional. In the past, only the professionals had the access to a chance to publish their work to be viewed by the audience. However with the new digital technology becoming popular, there are no more firm restrictions. Digital medium offers everyone who has access to the Internet the stage to present their work, leaving the rest of the public viewers as the audience. Apparently what used to be some of Otaku’s most unique characters might share some similarities with characters of digital natives today.

### **5.5 Otaku under the light of postmodernity**

Ever since entering the postmodernity, there have been claims of many “deaths”, such as the death of the God, the death of center institution, and the death of the “grand narrative”, now there is even Okada’s book stating that Otaku are dead<sup>22</sup>. Literally “post” means “after”, so in one way postmodernity can be understand as whatever happens after modernity. “The fields of contemporary intellectual thought and cultural studies frequently use the concept to broadly describe the cultural world since 1960s to 1970s.” (Hiroki, 2009, p. 7) Theories of postmodernism emerged in France in the 1960s, spread to the United States in the 1970s. However it is not until in 1980s that this theory was introduced to Japan. Since the term “Otaku” was broadly recognized in 1989, it is not pure fantasy to make the connection between Otaku and postmodernity. When taking a closer look at the postmodern society and Otaku society, surprisingly, there are quite many similarities between the two.

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<sup>22</sup> Okada, Toshio. *Otaku, You Are Dead*. 2008

The term “postmodernity” or the “postmodern” refers broadly to cultural conditions since the 1970s. And in the year 1984, French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard brought out the term of “decline of the grand narrative” in his book *The Postmodern Condition* and it has been circulated as a useful concept for grasping the characteristics of the world since the 1970s. In the book he introduced “grand narrative” as the postmodern condition, which he characterized as increasing skepticism toward the totalizing nature of "metanarratives" (or "grand narratives," typically characterized by some form of 'transcendent and universal truth') (Lyotard, 1979) In critical theory, and particularly postmodernism, a metanarrative (sometimes master- or grand narrative) is an abstract idea that is supposed to be a comprehensive explanation of historical experience or knowledge. “Grand narrative” are created and reinforced by power structures and are therefore not to be trusted. “In modernity, God and society secured humanity, the realization of this was borne by religious and educational institutions.” (Hiroki, 2009, p. 29) With the arrival of the modern era, natural science introduced a different kind of explanation of things in terms of material processes and causes. According to Lyotard, in the postmodern period, people no longer believe in grand narratives, “grand narratives” are old fashioned and oppressive. Nevertheless, Postmodern society has made the conception of “truth” difficult to sustain, meaning is contested and fragmented, and it is difficult to see a way out of the mass.

Hiroki (2009) argued that the reason why Otaku became obsessed with whatever their Otakuness was, is because “they need some junk subcultures to fill the void from the loss of grand narratives” (Hiroki, 2009, p. 28) However Otaku are never part of the grand narratives defined by Lyotard. It’s not that they failed to grasp the significance of a “god” or “society” instead they never believed in the centralized institutional system. They never had “grand narratives” which meant they could not lose it. They were always wandering outside the mainstream society and as a matter of fact their Otaku society is their “grand narrative” because that is their religion. It might be confusing to call it “grand narrative” therefore in the following text it will

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be referred to as “Otaku grand narrative” to distinguish it from the “metanarrative”. The word Otaku generally referred to those who indulged in forms of subculture such as anime, video games, computer, science fiction, anime figurines and so on. The reason why they choose fiction over reality was not because they could not distinguish between them “but rather as a result of having considered which is more effective for their human relations, the value standards of social reality or those of fiction.” (Hiroki, 2009, p. 27) There was a mature community of Otaku with their own rules and their own key values. Toshio Okada’s book *On Otakuology* built the foundation of such grand narrative by revealing the hierarchy of Otaku society. But no society or community can be suspended in one state of existing forever. Thanks to Okada we know the current status of Otaku world at present.

If the postmodernity can take away the “grand narrative” from the whole society, then how can it not leave any marks in Otaku society? Okada shouted out in his book *Otaku, You Are Dead* loudly that he had problem understanding Otaku these days. Such words coming from someone who had the reputation as the founder of Otakuology, known as “Otaking”, did gain the attention from both the outside and inside of the Otaku society. Even though Hiroki tried to deny there was “grand narrative” in Otaku, he wrote himself in the book that “ In today’s market for otaku culture, the previously accepted **order** is no longer dominant; no more do original comics versions debut, followed by anime releases, and finally the related products and fanzines.” (Hiroki, 2009, p. 39) Such order existed until the “moe (cute) element” entered the Otaku world, which is where Okada (2009) started to lose track of once-familiar-society. (Toshio, 2009, p. 101) Japanese culture has its history with obsession of teenage girls. Starting from 1980s, there are teenage girls with swimming suit on almost all the major magazine covers. Since then, such obsession with cute young girls also found its way into Otaku society. Anything related to “cuteness” became popular among Otaku, as a matter of fact, it slowly became the only thing that is important when evaluating the quality of a comic. According to Okada, the taste of Otaku these days has gone bad. They do not have

the time and patience to appreciate a good Manga, instead, what they need is the “moe” kick. A lot of work is only done to push the moe-related desire to the limit. Also, in his opinion, contemporary Otaku are not that concentrated and invested. Instead of respecting each other as a big society, they become more self-indulging narcissists. According to Okada (2009), such transformation does not only appear in Otaku society but quite common in the whole Japanese society. (Toshio, 2009, p. 147) Facing such impact, Okada felt frustrated and announced the death of Otaku. But can such cultural phenomenon just die? Could it be possible that it did not die but instead entered the next stage of its development like “modernity”? Though being the outcast of the mainstream culture, Otaku society is not completely isolated; therefore it cannot avoid the influence of postmodernity. As Otaku slowly loses its own “grand narrative”, it might have moved towards the post-Otaku era.

Of course such transformation cannot develop out of thin air and there had to be some previous historical foundations such as the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generations of Otaku. There're no trees without root, so throughout the development of Otaku, several key concepts never changed which were their enthusiasm towards new and interesting things, their curiosity towards the new technologies and their ability to access huge amount of information. However in Okada's opinion the Otaku now have less Otakuness in them than his own generation because they are not as eager or as bold as they used to be. Okada started to question whether the modern kids are passionate enough in what they love. They are not devoted enough to know every detail of what they claim they are very familiar with.

But this trait has become very familiar one in general population as well as in Otaku community. It should be examined within the larger cultural frame, with the fast-food culture taking over, very few people actually have the devotion and attention span to dedicate themselves to anything. Not too many people are patient enough to spend sufficient amount of time to reading a whole book. On the contrary, they prefer go to the cinema and “finish” the 300 pages book in hour and a half.

Okada grew up as the generation of television children, and at that time TV and books were their main medium to get in touch with Manga or comics. The Net-Gen grew up connected to Internet like to umbilical cord, and therefore it is not strange that this generation had its own way of fitting into the Otaku world. They might have different perspective on Otaku given their own life experience. One might argue that with the development of Internet, information is much easier to obtain today, should not that be the way young Otaku can contribute to his or hers community more easily? It might be a right argument yet sometimes the ability to access such information could also be a challenge.

Otaku, growing up in the television age, might have had better skill in organizing information and doing research because they had to. At that time, the mainstream media was not offering enough information to satisfy the curiosity of Otaku. Their need for details could not be satisfied by what they got from media so they found the ways to collect the information on their own, and maybe even share it with the rest of Otaku. However today, one might be able to get whatever you want to know about anything or anyone just by sitting in front of the computer, going through one page after the other. Since Otaku are usually more sensitive towards the information than normal people, when facing such huge plate of delicious “food”, where to start and where to stop becomes a problem. Also as all the information is presented as hypertext, one might easily get distracted from one interesting topic and browse into another.

Okada also argued that the young Otaku generation was not consistent enough, that they changed their hobby or obsessions quite often. And yet it is not only the case of Otaku, general population has tendency to do the same. The entire medium is trying to catch people’s attention. All the eyeball-catching headlines and shocking videos are competing for attention and people are encouraged to follow the trend. Young Otaku are simply behaving in the way they are expected to, as people living in

postmodern world. Only such speedy change of fashions or trend can bring more business to the producer and stimulate the market.

Even though becoming Otaku means a certain degree of devotion that degree can change according to the general development of the society. 20% of devotion might not be enough for Okada but for the kids growing up in the fast-everything generation, it might already be quite something. As Okada mentioned that the evolution of a culture is like updating the new system, no one can be 100% certain about where the new version is heading to, which part should be getting more attention, or if the new version is compatible with the previous one. Yet one cannot deny the existence of the previous generation or just invent the new generation out of blue. Hence Okada cannot just decide on his own terms that such group of people is suddenly dead or that it has disappeared. As a matter of fact, there is no such theory which would indicate that a subculture of mainstream culture can die just because it has grown out of the borders of what is considered to be culture or subculture. It might be transforming, evaluating or devaluating, but there is always exchange of cultural elements between the past and the present culture.

As it was established in the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter, when comparing the online activities of people today, there are more similarities between non-Otaku and Otaku than before. People might not have noticed their change of behavior since everyone is so used to having access to Internet every day that they might have forgotten how life used to be before the Wi-Fi era. When reading Okada's critics of Otaku it seems that he is convinced that they have become less unique and more general. He thinks that Otaku of today are just normal people with fanatic hobby. But as it was argued before, Otaku might be developing the 4th generation and that generation is entering the post-Otaku era.

It is true that post-Otaku are less exclusive now. Their main focuses extend from comics, Manga to more diversify content. "Otaku" these days quite often appear in

the public media as a suffix, for instance, one can be fashion-Otaku, dancing-Otaku, movie-Otaku, history-Otaku, or science-Otaku. Such groups of people are referred as people who spend massive amount of their private time on their hobby instead of socializing with people psychically. When losing the “grand narratives”, people do need to find some replacement in order to fill in the missing part and everyone turns to different a direction, however their approach to find either the answer or their own “narrative” might be through the same media. They might rely on the same channel, which is Internet, to seek for information and such media might be the bridge connecting common people and post-Otaku.

Not being approved by the mainstream society used to be one of the qualities that Otaku was proud of. They would like to think of themselves as the unique ones with special tastes. Does that sound familiar? Isn't that one of the characteristics we use to describe the kids today. The need to be noticed, need to be different accelerates their desire to express themselves online, and the social media networking offers the platform. Everything today is interest-oriented and Internet offers the possibility to pay attention to only to what you want to see. All this fits in Okada's definition of Otaku. It might be an overstatement when Hiroki Azuma implied that “we are all otaku in postmodernity” (Hiroki, 2009, p. xxviii), however it is unfair not to acknowledge the similarities between common people and the post-Otaku.

## Chapter 6. Conclusion

### 6.1 The Summary of the Study

Today, benefiting from the advanced digital technology, relatively large population can easily access unlimited information. Consequently, it seems that quite a number of people spend most of their spare time online. This phenomenon has stimulated a hypothesis that we have entered the post-Otaku era. In order to prove this hypothesis, a survey has been conducted in which 30 participants were divided into three age groups, answering questions regarding their Internet habits. All participants have Chinese nationality, among which 3 are residing abroad. The analysis of the survey shows that great similarities lie between contemporary people who are heavy users of Internet and Otaku who were regarded as peculiar people as they were not fond of participating social activities in the past. In addition, some participants who are questioned claim that they are like Otaku while those who do not claim that they are like Otaku do behave to a certain extent as Otaku used to.

This thesis aims at revealing the influence of Internet on human being in the postmodern society through the perspective of Otaku phenomenon. Growing up wired to Internet, the new generation is surfing daily online, taking the convenience brought by the latest development of technology for granted, never giving too much thought to where the new technology is leading us. Such questions were raised by comparing the habit of Internet usage of non-Otaku and Otaku. “Otaku” is a term that originates from a Japanese word, which means “your home”. It was first used to refer to people with an obsession with anime, Manga, and video games. With Internet penetrating quotidian life, the Otaku community was also influenced by postmodernity. At the very beginning, Otaku had a very negative image, as it was often criticized by the mass media. There were people who might be an Otaku but they were too afraid to admit it. However, after Toshio Okada’s effort of clearing up the name of Otaku, many heavy Internet users found themselves being more related



to the phenomenon.

Having proved that we have entered the post-Otaku era, this thesis endeavors to interpret the post-Otaku phenomenon from the following aspects. Firstly, it shakes the well-established social structures which have existed for hundreds or thousands of years, such as families, schools, department stores, museums and education institutions etc. Secondly, the paper argues that entering the post-Otaku era also means that the clear-cut differences between Otaku and ordinary people have been diminishing. Thirdly, the paper states that in fact post-Otaku phenomenon contributes such basic elements of postmodern society as deconstruction and decentralization to present society.

Also if people keep on ignoring the fact that Internet is gradually taking control of our daily life, the gap between Otaku and non-Otaku might grow closer and closer. As we experienced the transitional period of information explosion, the topic of Internet-human relationship will become even more important. It is crucial to analyze it from different perspectives. The thesis wants to confront people with the image of their online behavior and concludes that their way of spending spare time is not so different from post-Otaku Internet users.

## **6.2 The findings of the Study**

As it was mentioned before, the survey is based on a questionnaire given out to 30 participants who were divided into three age groups. It is a survey conducted in a relatively small scale due to the limitation of time and resources, the questionnaire was only distributed within general population, which means it is not delivered inside the Otaku community. It would be interesting to conduct a similar survey within the group who identifies itself as Otaku, and compare their online habits with the results of the general population in the future.

The questionnaire tries to find out (1) who is (and who is not) using the internet; (2) for what purposes people are using the internet; (3) how are they interacting with the Internet and how much time do they spend doing that; (4) how much Internet has changed people's life; and (5) people's knowledge about the concept of Otaku and their opinion about the possibility of becoming one.

It showed in the result that out of 30 participants aging from 21 to 50, 26 were accessing Internet on a daily basis while the other 4 would access to Internet at least once or twice a week. And their purpose of using Internet varied between checking Emails, watching movies, on social networks, shopping online, searching for information etc. The top three activities conducted online among the participants were online shopping, searching for information related to their hobbies and watching movies. From the feedback, 90% of the participants actually spent their time at home on Internet. Though definition of Otaku was envisioned differently by different participants, there were 14 people, which was more than expected, who admitted being an Otaku or "to some degree Otaku". Almost all of the participants had heard of the concept of Otaku before. The most significant result of the survey was the fact that there was not such huge difference between the Otaku and non-Otaku regarding to the online habits. After the overview of how contemporary people were interacting with the Internet in postmodern society, more connection between Otaku and non-Otaku were found such as the intensive relationship between Internet and their hobbies. Also under the influence of postmodernity, the deconstructions of the relationships among their family and friends also resemble the Otaku community.

The patriarchal family has been deconstructed with the Internet entering every family. Parents are neither the only source of the information nor the authority center. Internet becomes the new knowledge resource. Children for the first time switch position with the parents when facing the challenge of new technology, becoming the more skilled ones. The relationships between friends are also altered

by the Internet after the social networking becomes more popular among the peers. Most of the communication between friends is conducted in virtual world with no need to meet fact to fact. Somehow by making our life more convenience, the Internet also gives us less reason to maintain psychical contact. Postmodern human to some degree have been Otakulized both consciously and unconsciously. The Net-Gen today is having quite evolved ways of processing the information. They are no longer just passive receivers of information but active participants in the data processing. They do research; they are interested in new things and become early adopters of the new technology; they are critical thinkers; they recreate and adapt the new media into their own use. These characters are exactly the ones Lawrence Eng (2006) used to describe Otaku in his thesis.

Not able to avoid the impact of Internet, certain signs show that Otaku society has also gone through the influence of postmodernity. Though the findings of the thesis are consistent with Hiroki Azuma's opinion about the possibility of very close connection between Otaku and postmodernity, the author disagrees with the claims that Otaku is the need for filling up the empty hole after losing "grand narrative". Therefore it was argued that when Otaku was introduced to the public at the very beginning, they were outcast who never belonged to "grand narrative". However in their own society, they had their own "Otaku grand narrative" which was shaken during the process of development within their own community. By losing its own key value, Otaku might have entered the post-Otaku era whether they are willing to accept or not. It was such development that brought the Otaku even closer to the general population, leading ordinary people into the post-Otaku world.

Many people feel defensive and resistant when hearing the word Otaku, which was illustrated by the results form the questionnaire. There were people choosing the answer "there is no way I am an Otaku" when being asked their opinion of Otaku. Ironically, participants claiming to be Otaku and those who denied being Otaku actually to a certain extent did behave like Otaku used to. Among those who

thought that there was no chance for them to become an otaku, the facts show that they were already sliding into the post-Otaku world in the last 10 years since Internet started playing a big role in our lives.

### **6.3 The significant of the study**

Our social behavior has been changed because of Internet, particularly the relationships between individuals and the society. Of course Internet could be just one of the factors that is changing people's life style, yet it seems to be a very crucial one. Since Internet has become the key element of people's life after entering the digital era, whether as the tool or the object of people's obsession, the influence of the Internet to the society in general is going to become important research topic.

The goal of this thesis is neither about starting a fight between those who criticize the life style of Otaku, nor to encourage the over indulging usage of Internet. The thesis is trying to first explain what was the essence of Otaku and how it had developed into the post-Otaku stage. By introducing the history Otaku world, the author tries to find out the connection between the post-Otaku phenomenon and Otaku phenomenon. By naming the new phenomenon post-Otaku, the thesis analyzes the relationship between Otaku and non-Otaku. In particular, this study seeks to understand how the Internet is integrated into their daily lives and their social interactions.

### **6.4 The Limitations and Future Possibilities of the Study**

The limitations of the study is that the number of the subjects selected for this survey is not big enough to be more convincing and they only come from China citizens instead of from the world scale which also might influence the validity of the study. It has to be noted that since the questionnaire was designed in English, it automatically excluded certain participators who cannot speak such foreign

language in China.

Also the thesis tries to explore how the Internet has influenced the current younger generation, concerning the newly defined phenomenon of post-Otaku culture. In the thesis, the post-Otaku phenomenon culture will be used as a bridge to study how young people are coexisting with Internet today. Otaku who are suffering serious psychological problems and live an extreme life of isolation, will not be discussed in the thesis.

One of the most prominent findings through the research is about the way people process the information is influenced by the Internet. When surrounded by information, unlike Otaku, who are used to processing unlimited information, young generations are having problems in dealing with this demand. With the rapid speed of information constantly stimulating our brains, it brings challenges to our attention span. Linda Stone describes such reality as “continually staying busy, keeping tabs on everything while never truly focusing on anything [...]” (Small, 2009, p. 17) According to Gary Small in his book *iBrain*, he claimed that undergoing such stress for a long time might cause a mental illness he named - techno-brain burnout.

When paying partial continuous attention, people may place their brains in a heightened state of stress. They no longer have time to reflect, contemplate or make thoughtful decisions...Eventually, the endless hours of unrelenting digital connectivity can create a unique type of brain strain. Many people who have been working on the Internet for several hours without a break, report making frequent errors in their work. Upon signing off, they notice feeling spaced-out, fatigued, irritable, and distracted, as if they are in a digital fog. This new form of mental stress is threatening to become an epidemic. (Small, 2009, p. 17)

It would be interesting to see what kind of results could a future study bring when comparing how post-Otaku and general population is processing the information using Internet as a tool. Furthermore, the study will try to find out if any of them is or had been suffering such symptom because apparently such new diagnose might become one of the most popular mental illness in the near future.

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## Appendix : Questionnaire

17.04.2013

\*All the participants should have Chinese nationality but are possible to reside currently in other countries.

\*Please leave your Email here:

\*It will be great help if you can send the questionnaire back in one week ☺

Thanks a lot for your time and patience.

This survey is 100% confidential. No names or other personal details will be used or passed on to third parties. Information collected will be analyzed and used as evidence for my thesis hypothesis.

1. Are you female or male participant?

Female

Male

2. Which age group do you belong to?

21-30

31-40

Above 40

3. Which country do you live in at the moment?

4. What is your current occupation?

- Full-time employed
- Part-time employed
- Unemployed
- Student
- Student and working
- Retired
- Other

5. How long do you need to work or study every day?

- 3 to 5 hours
- 6 to 8 hours
- 9 to 11 hours
- More than 11 hours

6. When you are free, do you spend most of your spare time

- At home
- Outdoor

7. During a week, how often do you go out after school/work

- Every day
- Twice or three times a week
- Only during weekends
- Once every one or two weeks

8. When you are at home, do you spend most of your time

- On Television
- On Internet
- On books or newspapers
- On radio

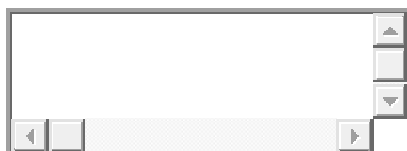
9. How often do you use Internet?

- Daily
- Several times a week
- Several times every two weeks
- Several times a month

10. When you are using Internet, you spend most of your time

- Checking Emails
- Watching movies
- On social networks
- Random surfing online
- Shopping online
- Searching for information related to hobbies
- Playing games
- On study/work/research

If you use the Internet for other activities than those stated in the last question, please specify what they are.



11. How much time would you say you spend on Internet every day?

- Between 1 to 3 hours
- Between 3 to 5 hours
- More than 5 hours

12. Which of the following Internet technologies do you consider "indispensable"?

(Please check all that apply.)

- The World Wide Web
- Email
- Social networking
- Online streaming video
- Video conference calls
- Upload/download files

13. To what extent would you say you use the Internet to search for specific information?

- Most of the time
- Sometimes
- Seldom
- Never

14. Please indicate how often you have used the Internet for each of the following

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categories during the past 6 months:

To access online news

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Never

To access information about commercial products/services

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Never

To access reference materials (information that helps you with your daily life such as cooking recipe, gardening tips etc...)

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Never

To access research reports & projects

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly



Never

To access financial information

Daily

Weekly

Monthly

Never

To access health/medical information

Daily

Weekly

Monthly

Never

To access online chat groups

Daily

Weekly

Monthly

Never

To search for job online

Daily

Weekly

Monthly

Never

To search for rental information online

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Never

To access online maps

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Never

15. How frequently have you used the Internet instead of the following activities during the past 6 months?

Instead of watching TV

- Always
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Never

Instead of talking on the phone

- Always
- Weekly
- Monthly

Never

Instead of writing letters

Always

Weekly

Monthly

Never

Instead of sleeping

Always

Weekly

Monthly

Never

Instead of doing exercises

Always

Weekly

Monthly

Never

Instead of reading books/magazines/newspapers

Always

Weekly

Monthly

Never

Instead of going to the cinema

- Always
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Never

Instead of going out/socializing with friends

- Always
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Never

Instead of doing household work

- Always
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Never

Instead of going to the bank

- Always
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Never

Instead of going do the shops

- Always
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Never

Instead of going to buy tickets

- Always
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Never

Instead of paying bills

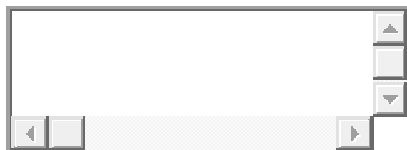
- Always
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Never

16. How do you consider your character?

- Extrovert
- Introvert
- Optimistic
- Pessimistic
- Social
- Unsocial

- 
- A mix of all above

If you have opinion other than those descriptions in the last question, please specify what they are.



17. Do you feel comfortable socializing with strangers?

- I don't have such problems
- I want to know them but don't know where to start
- I don't bother to know them
- I don't feel comfortable with strangers

18. When you are communicating with other people, would you consider yourself

- Active and positive
- Passive but enjoy the conversation
- Passive and not interested
- Depends on the topic and people

19. If you are not going out, what is the reason that keeps you at home

- Internet
- Other digital equipments
- Study/work
- Sleeping

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20. How often do you exercise every week?

- I don't exercise
- 1 to 2 times
- 3 to 5 times
- More than 5 times

21. How would you describe your engagement with the Internet?

- I feel comfortable with the present engagement
- I'm spending too much time on the Internet but I don't want to change anything yet
- I'm spending too much time on Internet and I want to make some changes
- I'm depending too much on Internet

22. Are you familiar with the concept of Otaku?

- Yes, I know the concept very well
- I've heard of the concept
- I'm not sure what exactly the concept means
- I've never heard of the concept before

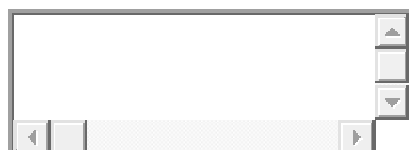
23. In your opinion, which characters would fit the profile of an Otaku

(Please check all that apply.)

- Massive knowledge of comics and Manga
- Fantasizing about virtual figures
- Spending too much time on Internet
- Staying single

- 
- Have the hobby of collecting
  - Not willing to communicate with strangers
  - Seldom go out, spending most of their spare time at home
  - Couldn't live without the computer
  - Become obsessed with something or somebody
  - Have problems functioning socially
  - Nature ability to process information and do research

If you have opinion other than those stated in the last question, please specify what they are.



24. If you have a general idea of the Otaku concept, would you consider yourself an

Otaku ?

- Yes, I am an Otaku
- To some degree, I would call myself an Otaku
- I do not think I am Otaku enough
- There is no way I would call myself an Otaku