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Series: Nico Nico Douga Texts¹, Nr. 6

So what is “kuuki”? Our first focus group

Wow! My head is still spinning from a whole afternoon and evening with a group of 9 Nico Chuus, all of them very generous and interesting. They gave 6 hours of their precious time, which they could have used otherwise to watch Nico videos. Instead, they taught me some basics of essential Nico Nico Douga knowledge. So lets quickly summarise some of the stuff I learned.

All of the members of our focus group watch many hours a day. They watch Nico videos in a row, and almost all videos to the end (this is, by the way, different from YouTube, where users watch the majority of videos only for the first seconds). Scrolling forward occurs, but again, not that often. Nico chuus watch the full video, and they watch these videos mostly at home, and mostly alone.

Some videos are watched again and again and again. Sometimes, the Nico chuus also loop the video, so that the videos can function as a background for other activities. They also come back to the videos to check new tags and new comments. Or they might just enjoy new co-watchers – one member of the focus group, a print designer in her 20ties, tells us that she has recently seen a video which was uploaded by someone with the comment: "I have seen this series before, but now I come back to watch it with you!"

When you are a Nico Chuu, you check normally every day the ranking in the specific categories you follow. The ranking is based on the

¹ In this series of short and preliminary (!!) texts we publish first results of the Metadata Project's ethnographic research on Nico Nico Douga. You can find more under "output" on <http://www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/media-research-centre/project2.php> and on our research blog: <http://d.hatena.ne.jp/metagold/>.

number of views, the number of comments, and the registration on “mylist” (the equivalent of bookmarks). Usually they check the videos that appeal to them – starting with the ranking of the first 100 videos, and then working themselves even deeper in the ranking. As soon as they are watching the video, the real fun begins.

To comment on the video means to become part of “kuuki”. All participants stressed that I, as a gaijin (= foreigner), will find it very, very hard to ever fully understand what “kuuki” means. The term exists independently of Nico Nico Douga, but it has a special significance on Nico Nico Douga (and 2channel, for that matter): It means to catch the sense of atmosphere, when you read the comments. At least in some way. A little bit. They stress: Kuuki is impossible to explain.

When you write comments, kuuki enables you to write appropriate comments. Sometimes, it might be appropriate to just “sing” along by typing in the words synchronously with the lyrics of the songs. At other times you engage in a Danmaku, and litter the screen together with others. You might type in another variation of a mis-hearing, or simply express your admiration.

This appropriateness is very important. If you do not catch it, you might either be commented on negatively (“come back in 6 months!”), or, even worse, ignored, and your comment will remain a single lonely sentence on the screen. On the other hand, kuuki does not simply mean that you write, what everyone else does. Sometimes it does, sometimes it does not. You can also write something unexpected, and start a new wave of comments.

Hm... that will indeed take a bit of time to understand. The only comfort that they gave me, while they pointed out my total ignorance, was, that they themselves learned this special version of kuuki in the course of the last year. On the one hand it relates to Japanese

background knowledge, but this is not enough to understand kuuki on Nico Nico Douga. Even Japanese new users take a while until they catch the kuuki on Nico Nico Douga.

Most users type in directly, while they view, without much time to think. They react spontaneously in their comments – again, this is part of kuuki. At other times, they stop the video to insert the comments. This is especially important when the exact time of the comment is crucial. There are lots of other practices, and during the course of the focus group I see, for example, some amazing examples of comment art. Comment art is a form of Ascii art, and it uses the comment function on Nico Nico Douga to create symbols and images.

Such comment art stays only for a very short period of time on Nico Nico Douga, because soon other comments will change the art piece. The video above recorded such a moment on Nico Nico Douga. In this particular case, the comment art celebrated the moment when the video in the background had gained 3 million views. The moment has passed, but the recording remains. This recording was then uploaded again, and it is now overlaid with further comments. One of the first comments says, that this new recording has now already 200 000 views as well.

About half of our group engages in the “tag-wars” that I have learned about only some days ago from Hamano-san. One user, a woman in her thirties, told us that for her this is a question of passion: If you care about a video, you care about its tags. So if you see that a particular tag of this video is deleted by another user, you feel outrage, delete another tag and re-insert the old tag. Tagging as a form of care and passion: This indeed is something to follow up for us at the metadata project!

After the focus group we all went out for some very delicious Northern Japanese sea food, and the more beer I drank, the more I thought I finally got a glimpse of what “kuuki” means in real life!