

Basics 1: What is Nico Nico Douga?

Nico Nico Douga is a Japanese video-sharing platform – a genre that is in the West nowadays predominantly associated with YouTube. Nico Nico Douga was originally created in December 2006 as a mash up of Youtube and 2-channel – the latter is Japan’s most popular BBS (bulletin board system). Since summer 2007, Nico Nico Douga has its own servers, and therefore streams all video content on its own.

The interface of Nico Nico Douga – English translation

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/>.

The most spectacular innovation of Nico Nico Douga is the way comments are placed on Nico Nico Douga. Users of Nico Nico Douga can write directly on the moving image. They comment while they watch videos, and add the comments directly on top of the video. All following users can see comments of former users as part of the video (most comments scroll into the frame of the moving image from right to left, and remain visible for some 4 seconds).

Users comment the videos that are streaming in the background, as well as each other's comments. The amount of comments varies. Sometimes you find only one or two comments scrolling over the video. At other moments the whole screen is full (this is called a "Danmaku"). When the amount of comments on a video exceeds a certain limit, old comments make space for new comments. From a technical perspective this is no rocket science. What makes Nico Nico Douga so special is the way this platform has taken up. Nico Nico Douga exists since little more than one year, but is by now the 6th most visited website in Japan. There are more than 6 million registered users, more than one million (!) uploaded videos, and more than one billion (!!) comments – and all this in the course of one and a half years.

Apart from the commenting function there are many other features that make Nico Nico Douga very interesting for our research. Nico Nico Douga has an effective form of ranking and an innovative tag system. Both order and at the same time stimulate the production of user-generated videos. The majority of videos on Nico Nico Douga are not only uploaded, but also created by users (and indeed, it is now, with some exceptions, forbidden to upload TV content on Nico Nico Douga, due to the pretty strict copyright laws in Japan).

Popular genres include "MAD movies". This are self-made music videos that remix existing footage, often combined with songs that are

performed by vocal synthesiser (the singing is created by a popular software called Vocaloid). You can find lots videos of gamers filming themselves, and there is also a fare amount of “Tried singing” and “Tried dancing” – these are categories on the platform, so no insult here to the amateur artists. A lot of this content is the result of an almost evolutionary work of video making: Fans copy each other in thousands and thousands of versions (the vocaloid star “Hatsune Miku” is maybe the most known). Most videos are therefore part of a giant collaborative work process, and not so much single pieces of content. Again, there is much more to be said about this collaborative form of creation, and more about this on this blog soon.

Nico Nico Douga has by now a huge and devoted fan base of “Nico Chuu” (which you might translate as “Nico Nico junkies”). Nico Chuus watch huge amount of videos every day. Some of them produce videos, other only upload, and many comment only – some of them might even only watch, but they are still Nico Chuus, because of the huge role that Nico Nico Douga has in their lives.

Nico Nico Douga might remain a specifically East Asian phenomena – BBS are much more popular in East Asia then in the West. More recently, Niwango (the company behind Nico Nico Douga) has launched a Taiwanese version, but still most of the content and the comments remain Japanese. Nico Nico Douga suddenly catapulted Japan to the forefront of web innovation (originally, Japan was slow to take up broadband and PC-based Internet – until recently, it was mainly accessed through mobiles, which leaves much less space for innovation). For us at the metadata project, Nico Nico Douga is one of the most fascinating things happening on the web at the moment: It almost seems as if on Nico Nico Douga, it is not metadata, which serves data, but data, which serves metadata.