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Series: Nico Nico Douga Texts¹, Nr.4.

Tag-Wars: A conversation with Hamano Satoshi san

Hamano-san is a researcher at Nihon Gigei Inc, and one of the few, who has started to write the media theory of Nico Nico Douga. He published a pioneering article in InterCommunication ("Nico Nico Douga owo megudu bouken" = "An adventure on Nico Nico Douga"), and covered Nico Nico Douga extensively on his blog on Wired Vision and here on Hatena.



Hamano-san, the media theorist of Nico Nico Douga.

In these writings, Hamano-san describes Nico Nico Douga as a form of "pseudosynchronous architecture". It reintroduces on the Internet an experience that was formerly exclusive to Television and Radio: A feeling of community, which arises out of joint consumption. Comments on the video are of course not really synchronous, but they feel synchronous. They are pseudosynchronous.

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/>.

This means: The ideas of Hamano-san are very close to some of my own first ideas about Nico Nico Douga - I have been thinking about the temporal side of Nico Nico Douga with concepts like emergence, presence and scratch. So you can imagine that I was pretty excited to meet Hamano-san. And these high expectations were more than fulfilled! Hamano-san is not only a ground-breaking and smart writer, he is also a very inspiring conversation partner. What makes this encounter even more memorable: He told us about his newest enquiry, and he was even so generous to allow us to break the news of his yet unpublished research!

In the recent months, Hamano-San has taken part as a participant observer in the Tag-wars on Nico Nico Douga. So what are these Tag-wars? Unlike other video sharing platforms, Nico Nico Douga limits the amount of possible tags to 10. The uploader of the video can lock five of these. The rest is open to free negotiation. That is: Users can delete tags and add new ones instead. This artificial scarcity of tag space has generated a new form of tagging.

Popular new videos stimulate tag wars: Tags are deleted and uploaded every other second. One example: Fans of one character in an anime video try to place their tags, and fans of other characters react. Tags are therefore not only used to add effective descriptions. They are also a place of collective competition. At other times, tags are simply used to communicate. Hamano san showed us tags such as "I am going to bed now". They are used for anonymous and not documented communication (as they are not anymore accessible after they are deleted).

An especially interesting example are funny and weird tags. Such tags can be simple one-off jokes. If such a tag is to survive, it has to be typed in again and again, as tags get constantly deleted to make space for other tags. Some tags are so original that other taggers join in. An

even higher honour for a well-made tag is, when the uploader locks it, so that it cannot be deleted anymore. The highest success is, when a new tag spreads to further videos and therefore becomes a commonly used tag.

There is much more to say about tag wars, and soon you will be able to read about it on the blog of Hamano-san (if you can read Japanese). Once more I would like to stress that all I write in this entry is a first summary of the research of Hamano-san, and therefore fully to his credit! For us at the metadata project these tag-wars are almost a revelation: Tags become a means of anonymous negotiation and collaborative contest – this is more than we could dream for when we originally formulated in our internal research papers that "metadata becomes content and content becomes metadata".