

# UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA PORTUGUESA

TOKYO'S RED-LIGHT DISTRICT, THE *YAKUZA* VIDEO GAME SERIES AND THEIR  
ADVERTISEMENTS: A VISUAL ANALYSIS (2005-2010).

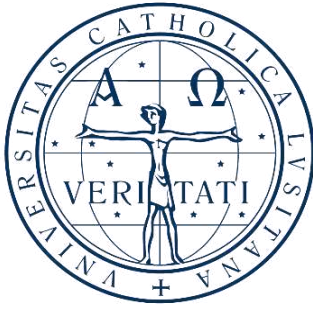
Dissertation presented to the Universidade Católica Portuguesa for the  
purpose of reaching the Master's degree of Asian Studies, specialized in Japan

By

Tiago Cordeiro Bernardo Gonçalves

Faculty of Human Sciences

November of 2024



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## Abstract

This dissertation is focused on a visual analysis of the fictional district of *Kamurocho*, featured in the *Yakuza* videogame series, and its comparison to the district of Kabukicho, located in Shinjuku, Tokyo. Additionally, a visual analysis was made to two advertisements of videogames of that same series. These analyses' objective was to comprehend the transformation of a real space into a fictional one, designed for a videogame, and how that same space (and, by extension, the games) as communicated through televised advertisements. The analyses (of the districts and the advertisements) were divided into categories. In the districts' case, the analysis was segmented into entertainment and food-related categories (i.e., karaoke, bars, arcade games). The analysis of the advertisements was explored in visual and auditory aspects. To complement these analyses, a survey was conducted with a sample size of 78 Japanese adults, to understand their reaction to the topics explored in this thesis (i.e., districts, advertisements). The survey's primary results were: the understanding of the *Yakuza* series by most of the sample size, despite being seldom played; a common knowledge of the Kabukicho district; and advertisements that are more representative of the games being sold are the most positively received. This work concludes that the videogame district is faithful to the real-life district and that the better mass communication of the game revolves around utilizing footage of the actual game.

**Keywords:** videogames, red-light districts, *Yakuza*, advertisements, Japanese districts.

## Resumo

Este trabalho foca-se na análise visual do distrito fictício de *Kamurocho*, presente na série de jogos *Yakuza*, e a sua comparação com o distrito Kabukicho, localizado na cidade de Shinjuku, Tóquio. Adicionalmente, foi feita uma análise visual a duas publicidades dos jogos da mesma série. Estas análises tiveram como objetivo compreender a transformação do espaço real num espaço fictício, desenhado para um videojogo, e como esse espaço (e por extensão, os jogos) foram comunicados através da publicidade televisiva. As análises (dos distritos e das publicidades) foram divididas em categorias. No caso dos distritos, a análise foi segmentada em categorias de entretenimento e restauração (i.e., karaoke, bares, jogos de arcade). Por sua vez, a publicidade foi explorada no que toca aos seus aspetos visuais e auditivos. Para complementar as análises feitas aos distritos e à publicidade, foi aplicado um questionário com uma amostra de 78 pessoas japonesas adultas, com o objetivo de averiguar a sua reação aos tópicos falados na tese (i.e., distritos e publicidade). O questionário teve como principais resultados: o reconhecimento da série *Yakuza* pela maioria da amostra, mesmo sendo pouco jogada; um grande conhecimento no distrito de Kabukicho; e qual o exemplo de publicidade mais representativo dos jogos a serem vendidos e qual o mais bem recebido. Este trabalho concluiu que o distrito do videojogo é fidedigno em relação ao distrito real, e que a melhor comunicação do jogo para as massas envolve a utilização de imagens do próprio jogo.

**Palavras-chave:** videojogos, zonas de prostituição, *Yakuza*, publicidade, distritos japoneses.

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## Introduction

As seen in many other countries worldwide, Japan has provided society with multiple entertainment avenues. The country has offered unique entertainment experiences thanks to its different culture and values, ranging from radio shows, television programs, and the art of cinema. This also holds for the video game industry.

While the concept of video games originated and became popular in the United States, thanks to the success of Pong by Atari (Koyama, 2023), Japan soon became the home of many popular video game franchises. Series such as *Super Mario Bros.*, *Dragon Quest* and *Metroid* originated in the country and have become a worldwide phenomenon, all with their distinctive target audiences.

Just like the mediums of cinema and television, Japanese culture shines through many of these titles, but it's clear that some of them incorporate Western values and art styles. *Metroid* is an example thanks to its inspiration from Ridley Scott's *Alien* movies. (Banerjee, 2024)

However, as the videogame industry evolved, so did the representation of Japanese culture to a wider audience. This is especially evident in the videogame franchise that will be analyzed in this thesis, the *Yakuza/Like a Dragon* series, developed by *Sega*. The name *Yakuza* was used for international markets until the release of *Like a Dragon: Infinite Wealth* in 2024 while *Like a Dragon* has been the name of the series in Japanese markets ever since its inception in 2005. For the sake of simplicity, the name *Yakuza* will be used throughout the thesis.

As the international name suggests, the series revolves around the activities of the *yakuza* which represent a great percentage of the organized crime committed in Japan. The *yakuza*'s influence has been growing ever since the Japanese economic boom started after the end of World War II and they have engaged in various legal and illegal activities such as extortion, gambling and distribution of methamphetamine. Despite this, however, it is not unlawful to join *yakuza* syndicates. (Hoshino & Kamada, 2021)

The *yakuza* have their origins in *bakuto*, groups of organized crime dedicated to gambling in 18<sup>th</sup> century Japan. Some of the most popular *yakuza* customs originated from *bakuto*, most notably the act of cutting off one's finger to apologize to their bosses. (Árnason,

2014) They have since evolved and expanded into different activities, and there are currently over 80.000 *yakuza* members, but that number has been decreasing over time. (Shikata, 2006; Hoshino & Kamada, 2021)

One of the key aspects of the *Yakuza* series is the locations in which the stories of each game take place. The player travels through a gamified version of a real-life Japanese city, and the one that appears the most often is *Kamurocho*. *Kamurocho* is similar to its real-life counterpart, the red-light district known as Kabukicho.

Kabukicho is a red-light district in the city of Shinjuku, in Japan's capital, Tokyo. Kabukicho is known for being host to a wide array of activities related to sex and pleasure, but it is also home to various other entertainment avenues such as karaoke and gambling.

This thesis is not the first one to make a comparison between Kabukicho and *Kamurocho*. Other articles such as Lakshmi Menon's article on "Expressions of Tokyo in Video Games" (2018) where not only describe the *Yakuza*'s series *Kamurocho* as a near-faithful recreation of Kabukicho. It also talks of other games' interpretations of the Japanese capital, such as *Persona 5*, made by Atlus. *Persona 5* also takes place in Tokyo, but it distinguishes itself from the *Yakuza* games by providing smaller parts of each city of the capital.

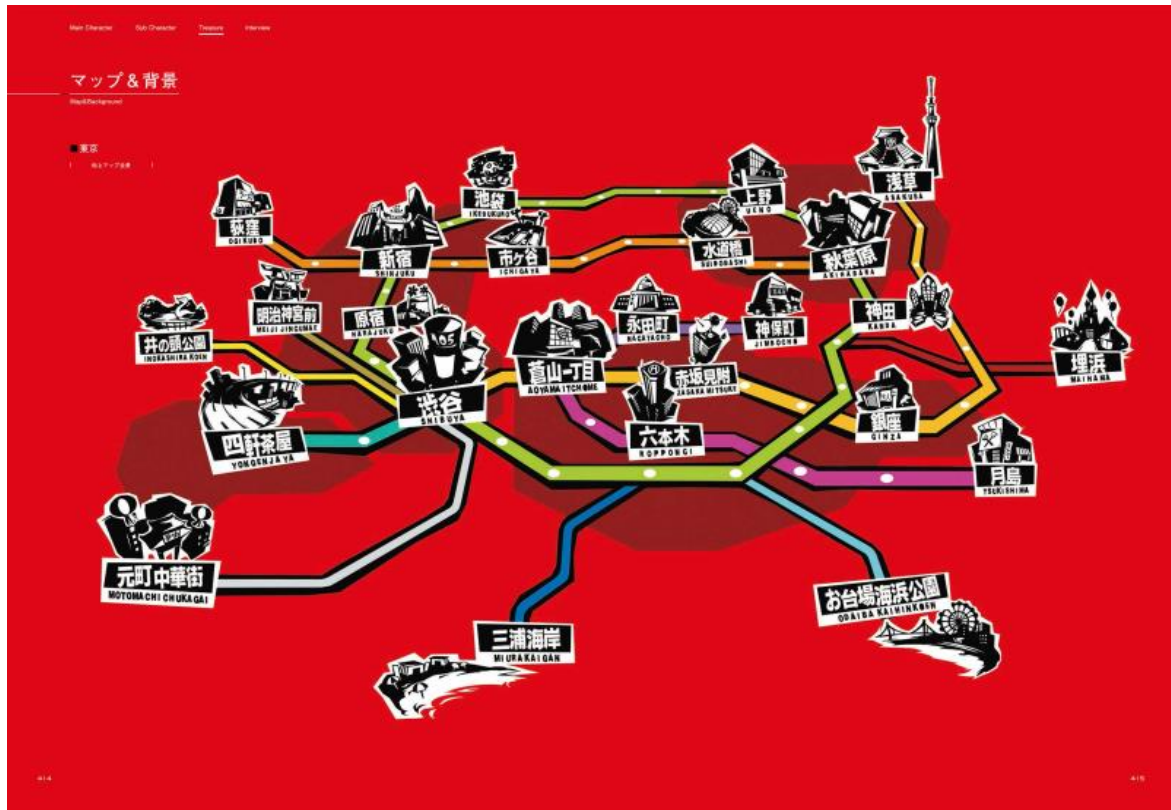


Image 1 – The subway map of Tokyo seen in *Persona 5*. Unlike the *Yakuza* series, *Persona 5* remains the same city names as the ones seen in real-life.

However, many articles only discuss that Kabukicho and Kamurocho are similar to each other, without pointing out specifics and mentions how *Kamurocho* becomes its character in the *Yakuza* series due to it being the host of many activities. When I played some of the *Yakuza* games a few years ago, I wondered how different *Kamurocho* was from its real-life counterpart Kabukicho. In what aspects does *Kamurocho* distinguish itself from Kabukicho and in what ways? Are the stores presented in the game the same as they are in real life or are they different? As such, one of my main objectives for this thesis was to compare both the real-life and the gamified versions of the same district, with the many buildings present in both or one of the versions such as the store *Don Quijote*.

The *Yakuza* series was chosen for this analysis due to having more complexity in its environments. Players can explore inside many of the buildings seen in *Kamurocho* and can participate in many activities. Although this visual analysis will only be conducted on *Kamurocho*, the *Yakuza* series introduced other cities as the stories continued. One of the

most prominent examples is in *Yakuza 2* with *Sotenbori*, which is based off the real-life red-light district in Osaka, Dotonbori.



Image 2 – *Sotenbori*, as seen in *Yakuza Kiwami 2*, the remake of *Yakuza 2*. (Gematsu, 2017)

*Kamurocho* was the district chosen for this thesis due to its bigger prominence in the *Yakuza* series, being the main explorable city from the original game to *Yakuza 6*. In addition, the thesis will analyze the versions of *Kamurocho* seen in *Yakuza* (2005) and *Yakuza 4* (2010). The first game's version of *Kamurocho* is the original form the city took that future games would be based on. While the district has changed in various ways throughout each game, the original *Yakuza* game still provides the most concrete version of the city.

In the case of *Yakuza 4*, that game was chosen because it provides the most easily visible change to the district: the vertical expansion of *Kamurocho*. This vertical expansion allows players to explore the underground malls and parking lots of the district, along with the rooftops. The other games in the series will be mentioned in the analysis if need be.

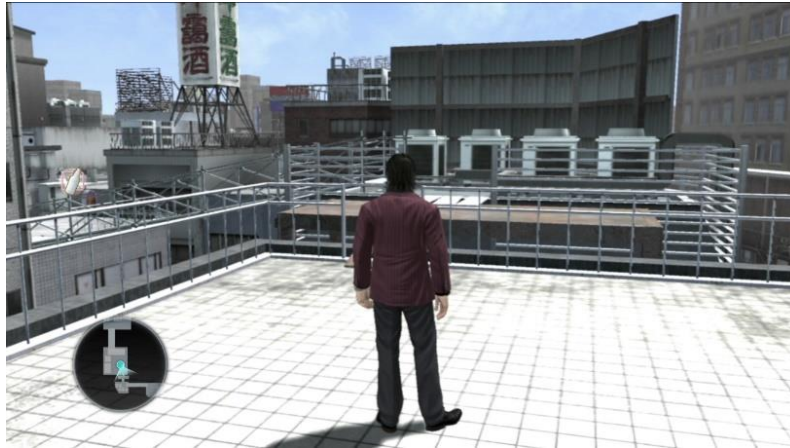


Image 3 – A view of *Kamurocho*'s rooftops, as seen in *Yakuza 4*.

Additionally, I was fortunate to be able to travel to Tokyo during October of 2023. This stay was another aspect that compelled me to make this visual analysis regarding the *Yakuza* series. In that stay, I was able to travel to Kabukicho and I participated in some of the district's activities. Originally, the thesis had a different video game series as its main topic, but thanks to my personal experience with the *Yakuza* series, and this field work conducted in Kabukicho, I decided to choose this series as the basis for this thesis, in addition to the other reasons listed.

Another question that I've had is regarding how Japanese video games are presented and advertised to audiences. In addition to my question regarding the differences and similarities between *Kamurocho* and Kabukicho, the other question that I had for this thesis was how *Kamurocho* was presented to the Japanese consumer.

The other part of this thesis will be the analysis of two television commercials made for the *Yakuza* series in Japan, one from the original *Yakuza* game and the other from *Yakuza 4*. The first commercial focuses on presenting the concept of what the videogame is to the player, via a live-action setting, while the second commercial focuses on presenting the game's various activities quickly.

These advertisements were chosen due to their link to the games being analyzed in the thesis and what each commercial presents. Due to their focus on presenting the concept and the activities of the games, they provide the viewer with the knowledge of what the games are about and what you can do in them, both characteristics being present in my question.

Alongside the visual analyses being done for the districts of *Kamurocho* and Kabukicho and the two *Yakuza* television commercials, this thesis will also present a small analysis of the results of a survey conducted for this thesis, which was done with the intent of gathering quantitative data on various topics. These topics include whether a Japanese person has ever been to Kabukicho, if they have ever played a *Yakuza* game, and from those who have, what elements of *Kamurocho* stand out. In addition, the survey asks respondents to watch the two television commercials being analyzed and to describe what elements of them stood out.

Overall, this thesis aims to further understand how elements of a space are translated into the world of video games, via elements such as the interactable buildings and the activities available. In addition, this thesis also seeks to understand how these elements are presented to a Japanese audience with television commercials and how that same audience reacts to them.

## **Methodology**

Chapter 1 of this thesis will be a visual analysis of the interactable buildings and activities seen in the red-light district of *Kamurocho*, present in *Yakuza* (2005) and *Yakuza 4* (2010). This visual analysis will look at these activities and describe their function and, if applicable, their relation to the game's story. These will be divided into different categories, ranging from restaurants to arcade parlors. Due to the five-year difference between the two games analyzed, if applicable, that relation will also be shown.

The original *Yakuza* game was chosen for this visual analysis due to being the first game in the *Yakuza* series, thus setting the groundwork for the district of *Kamurocho* that would be expanded and seen in future titles. It is the only district available to interact with in the game, and considering its amount of content, other games besides *Yakuza 4* were not included to keep the focus on *Kamurocho*.

*Yakuza 4* was chosen as a companion piece to the visual analysis of the original *Yakuza*. Just like the first game, *Kamurocho* is the only city present in *Yakuza 4*, but the addition of rooftops, underground malls and parking lots has expanded the number of

activities available. The other reason why *Yakuza 4* was chosen was to have another time point for the analysis and describe any potential differences that locations may have between the time points of 2005 and 2010. The games themselves take place in the same time frame as their original release dates.

Chapter 2 will be an expansion of the topics presented in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 will serve as a visual analysis to the red-light district of Kabukicho which served to inspire the *Yakuza* series' *Kamurocho*. In a similar manner to Chapter 1, Chapter 2 will also divide the different locations of Kabukicho into categories. Each of them will be given a brief history of their relationship with the district or with Japan as a whole, if the brief history with the district is not applicable, due to either having a very minor presence or its history in the district not being well documented.

Some of these categories will be accompanied by fieldwork conducted at these locations. This is thanks to my brief visit to Kabukicho, where I was able to experience some of the locales there.

In addition, Chapter 2 serves to make comparisons with how these locales are represented in *Yakuza* and *Yakuza 4*. If applicable, other games in the *Yakuza* series will be mentioned, but the focus will remain on the two games mentioned prior. These comparisons will also be made on a visual level, comparing aspects such as similar logos, brands that carried over into the games, or the function of said activities.

Chapter 3 gives a visual analysis of two television commercials for the *Yakuza* series, one for the original game, and the other for the fourth mainline title. This visual analysis will be conducted using a semiotic approach, taking the signs, and analyzing their potential meaning. This visual analysis will be separated into these categories: visual and verbal register; audio register; and the relationship between all registers. Within the first category, there will be a distinction between denotation and connotation. Denotation is the literal meaning of the signs present in the commercial while connotation is related to their symbolic meaning.

Chapter 4 will be related to the data analysis of a survey. This survey was made to understand Japanese people's general knowledge of the real-life Kabukicho and their knowledge of the *Yakuza* series and its district of *Kamurocho*. It was also made with the

intent of understanding Japanese audiences' general reactions to the advertisements analyzed in Chapter 3. The analysis made will be mainly descriptive, separating the method from the results. The method will be organized into these categories: participants; instruments, procedure for data gathering and procedure for data analysis. There will also be a dedicated analysis section, connecting most of the answers to Japanese society and culture, with the assistance of academic articles.

Overall, most of the analysis presented in the following thesis is qualitative in nature, with the exception of Chapter 4 which focus on the quantitative analysis of statistical data.

### **Limitations**

There were a few limitations presented in this thesis. While the survey was able to have 78 answers, most of them came from people residing in the Akita prefecture, so the scope was not as far-reaching as one would hope. Furthermore, the survey itself had some questions that could be considered dubious. For example, questions like "Do you think this commercial presented the game well?" should've been targeted only at people who had played, or at least, heard of the *Yakuza* series. An additional answer, "I don't know" would have been applicable here. There was also a discrepancy between the number of people who answered they had been to the district and the number of answers of the second question of the Kabukicho district. This can be explained by some people of the sample having knowledge of the series and understanding from an outsider's perspective.

In terms of the chapter's writing, due to the investigator's stay in Kabukicho being limited, there was no substantial fieldwork in many locations of the district. This fieldwork might have added new information, especially regarding hostess clubs or slot machine parlors, as important aspects of the *Yakuza* games and commercials.

In Chapter 3, when it came to analyzing the television commercials and relating them to Japanese culture, there was also a lack of academic articles explaining many aspects of the advertisements. While some characteristics, like the use of color and gender representation, were explored, others like the cinematography were not.

## State of the art

Japan as a country and a society has been analyzed and discussed through a myriad of ways. Whether that would be its culture or its values, Japanese society has had plenty of history to talk about. That also extends to its various prefectures, ranging from the cold northern region of Hokkaido to the tropical south seen in Okinawa. As many people know, the current capital of Japan is Tokyo, and it's regarded as one of the biggest metropolitan cities in the world.

Within the heart of Tokyo, there exists a city called Shinjuku, and within that city, there exists a red-light district called Kabukicho. Due to its nature as a red-light district, Kabukicho has been mainly analyzed and studied through the lens of its sex industry. The sex industry of the district has been discussed in many ways. These can range from the concept of selling intimacy (Takeyama, 2010), to the process of even researching the topic itself (Yamagishi, 2010).

Articles such as "Sex Workers, Regulation, and "Right to the City": The Streets in a Red-Light District of Tokyo", by Toru Takeoka (2015) discuss the involvement of the local government in the sex industry and how there are many people related to it living in the district. The topic of the people involved in that industry is also brought up frequently in these articles, as one of the avenues for the industry, the hostess clubs, involve the customer forming a "temporary relationship" with one of the hostesses. In the case of Akiko Takeyama's article, she discusses host clubs instead, discussing how many male hosts are feminized and are, ironically, subjected to the gaze of Japanese women.

However, outside of the sex industry, Kabukicho isn't studied much. From my research, many articles that focus on the district study it from that topic. It's understandable why people would analyze it from that angle, considering Kabukicho's status as a red-light district, and also as home to many other locations and entertainment avenues. Kabukicho is home to karaoke parlors, hot springs, a variety of cafés and restaurants, batting cages, arcade buildings and recently, a skyscraper by the name of *Tokyu Kabukicho Tower* was built, housing many of these things in one tower.

Of course, many of these activities are not exclusive to Kabukicho, or even to Japanese red-light districts. However, they represent a huge portion of the activities one can partake in in the district, alongside the ones related to the sex industry.

Some of these activities, like karaoke, have been studied in their Japanese form in many ways, talking about its history, its effects on music (Ogawa, 2005), and even comparing it to other countries' approaches to the activity, such as Finland (Piironen, 2020). Convenience stores have also been studied, especially when it comes to their performance, geography and rise in the Japanese country (Nishida, 2018).

Video game arcades in Japan have also been studied a lot especially when it comes to their history and their role (Pelletier-Gagnon, 2024). This is logical considering the amount of importance these have as a public entertainment venue in Japan, and how much Japanese video games have risen in popularity, not just in their home country, but all over the world.

The rising popularity of video games extends to the series being analyzed in this thesis, the *Yakuza* video game series. Oddly enough, despite its popularity in Japan, studies surrounding the series often analyze its localization and the process of bringing over a video game tied to Japanese culture overseas.

The *Yakuza* series is additionally analyzed as a way of experiencing Tokyo, and by extension part of Japan, in a video game. The main city that is visited the most throughout the series is called *Kamurocho*, and it is said to be a recreation of the district mentioned earlier, Kabukicho. Articles such as Leandro Lima's "Kamurochō, Kazuma and I: Experiencing a Ludofomed District in the Yakuza Series" (2022), analyze and discuss *Kamurocho* as a "living space", bringing topics like authenticity and nostalgia to the table. Even a doctoral dissertation by Andrew James Borecky (2022), about the usage of video game music to circulate Japanese culture outside of the country, also describes the *Yakuza* series as a form of "visual realism" and "altering and recreating popular landmarks from Kabukichō to deepen the fidelity of the space".

When it comes to advertisements, there have been numerous articles studying them in various forms. Since advertising is a way of communication that reaches a vast audience, that can be used to promote many things, studies have talked about advertising from multiple

perspectives. These range from gender stereotypes (Heathy, 2020), and advertising cultures (de Waal Malefyt, & Moeran, 2020) to the general discourse of advertising (Jaworska, 2020).

This also extends to Japanese advertisements, which have also been studied through the lenses of gender and racial representation (Ogawa, 2020), but regarding Japanese video game advertisements, studies surrounding them are slim. Japanese video games are studied intensively, as proven by the *Yakuza* example from earlier, but mentions of advertisements about them are slim.

Despite that, video game advertisements from other regions of the world have been analyzed. An example of such is the article titled “What Does a Gamer Look Like? Video Games, Advertising, and Diversity”, by Shira Chess, Nathaniel J. Evans and Joyya JaDawn Baines (2017). This article discusses how people who identify themselves as “gamers” are represented in video game advertising, mainly in terms of behavior, sex and ethnicity.

Semiotics are also studied frequently, and considering semiotics is generally described as the study of signs, there have been many articles to introduce the concept, and one of the biggest books surrounding the topic is that of Charles Sander Peirce, simply titled “Semiotics”, dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Considering the simplicity of the concept, a topic could be studied with it.

There have been studies utilizing a semiotic approach in advertising, such as Martin Solík’s article, dating back to 2014. Using that approach, this article concludes that the use of colors, shapes and words have a hand in shaping our emotions regarding that advertisement and creating *stimuli*, the reactions evoked by them. But one of the other conclusions of said articles is that “not everything connotative must be necessarily a symbol, metaphor or metonymy”.

Many articles that talk about semiotics also use advertisements as examples, such as Giorgia Aiello’s article titled “Visual Semiotics: Key Concepts and New Directions” (2020), where an advertisement by *Panzani* about pasta is used.



Image 4 – The *Panzani* advertisement used in Giorgia Aiello’s article.

In her article, she uses this example to express how to separate denotation and connotation, with denotation being the objects that appear in the image, while connotation is what can be concluded from it, in this case, it’s “Italianicity”.

The opposite also happens, with semiotics being mentioned in articles related to advertising, such as “Discourse of advertising” by Sylvia Jaworska (2020), denoting that advertising is “a complex semiotic aggregate”, and concluding that the discourse of advertising is everywhere, and can be discussed in artistic, emotional, rational, and creative ways.

There has been a crossover between video game advertisements and semiotics. In a doctoral dissertation conducted by Lukas Bydlinski titled “Video game consoles, video game advertisements and the " Video Games" magazine: An analysis of the symbolic meaning of video game consoles from the early 1990s to the early 2000s as conveyed by print advertisements in the German " Video Games" magazine” (2021), the author makes plenty of analyses to the various video game advertisements, using a semiotic approach: describing and interpreting places of products on the ad; their use of colors; the way the ad was shot, dividing categories into denotations and connotations, just like Giorgia Aiello’s *Panzani* example in her article.

Chapter 3 will focus on analyzing two television commercials of the *Yakuza* series, which will be done through a semiotic approach similar to Bydlinski’s dissertation. The

difference is that that thesis used still images found in magazine advertisements, while the analysis done in this thesis uses various shots of the videos seen in those commercials.

## Chapter 1: The *Yakuza* series and its main location, *Kamurocho*

*Yakuza* is a video game series developed and published by the company *Sega* and has had critical and commercial success ever since the release of its first game in Japanese stores in 2005. It took a few more years for it to find success in international markets, renaming itself from its original title *Like a Dragon* to *Yakuza*, but has now also become popular with those markets. The name *Yakuza* will be used throughout the rest of this thesis, for simplicity's sake.

The company *Sega* has been responsible for introducing a wide range of videogames since its inception in 1965. They started their business with many arcade titles, and eventually branched to home consoles with the *SG-1000* in 1983. After the commercial failure of the *Sega Dreamcast* (1998), the company exited the console business in 2001, but has continued to offer many console titles since like *Sonic the Hedgehog*, *Virtua Fighter* and the *Yakuza* series (Koyama, 2023)

In the first game, players see control of *Kazuma Kiryu*, an ex-*yakuza* who after going to prison for 10 years, taking the fall for a crime he didn't commit, now sees to find what has happened to his former clan and solve a mystery concerning a little girl named Haruka and 10 billion yen. From there, the story will follow twist after twist until the 10 billion yen are found.

The first game became a resounding success in its home country, and spawned many sequels, that expanded on the lore and gameplay introduced in the first title. Initially, the series failed to find an audience in Western markets, but the release of *Yakuza 0*, a prequel of the entire series, helped the series become popular in those regions. (Borecky, 2022)



Image 5 – The Japanese box art of the original *Yakuza* game.

The series is well known for having deep plotlines concerning a wide range of topics, such as organized crime, respect between blood brothers, among others. But the games are also known for providing players with a wide variety of side missions, that see the characters performing odd tasks such as: delivering pizzas; calling someone on the phone, typing messages to chats in adult livestreams; and dancing with a character called “Miracle Johnson”, a parody of pop singer, Michael Jackson. Many of these activities happen in the red-light district of *Kamurocho*, based on the real-life Kabukicho, located in the city of Shinjuku, in Tokyo, Japan’s capital (Borecky, 2022).

While there have been many other cities and locations featured throughout the series and its many spin-offs, *Kamurocho* stands as the most prominent one, not only because it was the first one ever showcased, but also because it remains visitable in most of the mainline entries, even when another city is introduced, such is the case with the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> games.

Being based off the red-light district of Kabukicho, *Kamurocho* features a lot of activities for the player to interact with such as: karaoke avenues, restaurants, hostess clubs, and much more. During this first chapter, a visual analysis of the gamified *Kamurocho* will

be presented, describing the interactable locals of the district. These will be divided by various categories, in line with the game.



Image 6 – Map of the city of *Kamurocho*, as shown in *Yakuza*.

The map above is the one present in the original *Yakuza* game. The player can make it appear at any time by pausing the game. The shapes filled with colours that are not grey represent the buildings that the player can enter inside and interact with. The different colours are used to separate them into categories.

The red shapes represent shops. Inside them, the player can buy various items ranging from healing items, such as food or drinks like the “Stamina X”, to help the player in battles; perfumes; cat and dog food; and various other miscellaneous items such as bags and watches, to help the player progress in the game’s side-missions.

The purple shapes are clubs, which include hostess clubs. In a hostess club, the player character can have conversations with one of the hostesses available, which vary depending on the club being visited. The conversations involve listening to what the hostess has to say, and then the player is given a few options on how to respond. There are many NPCs (non-playable characters) the player can interact with throughout the game that give *Kazuma*

*Kiryu* advice on what a specific hostess may like, and what objects she prefers. NPCs is an acronym for “non-playable characters”.

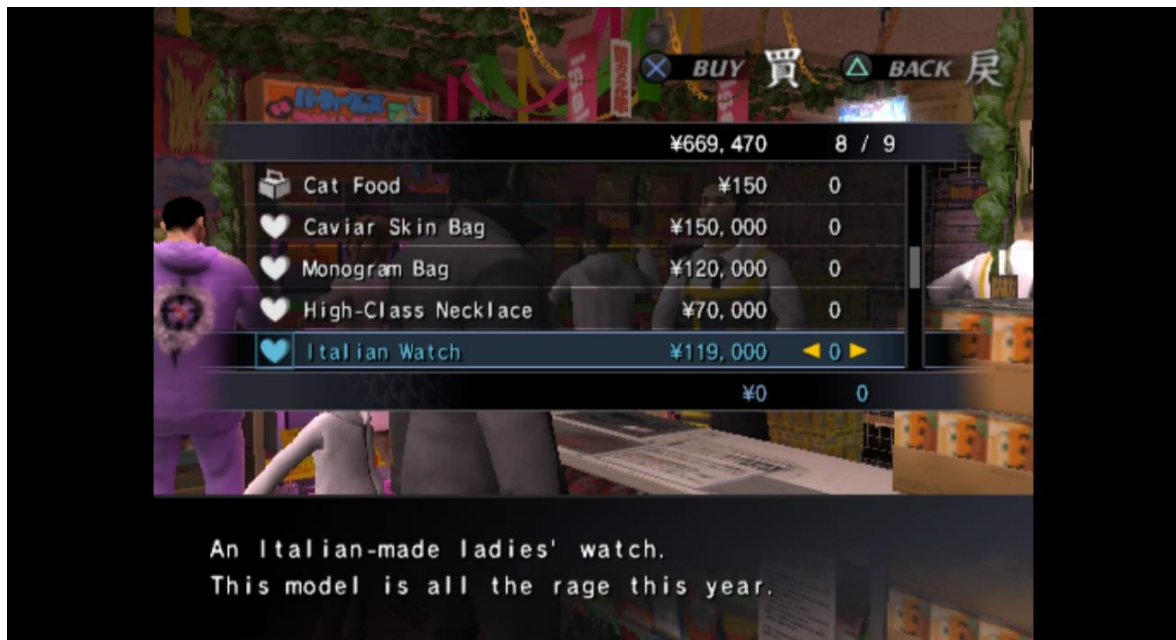


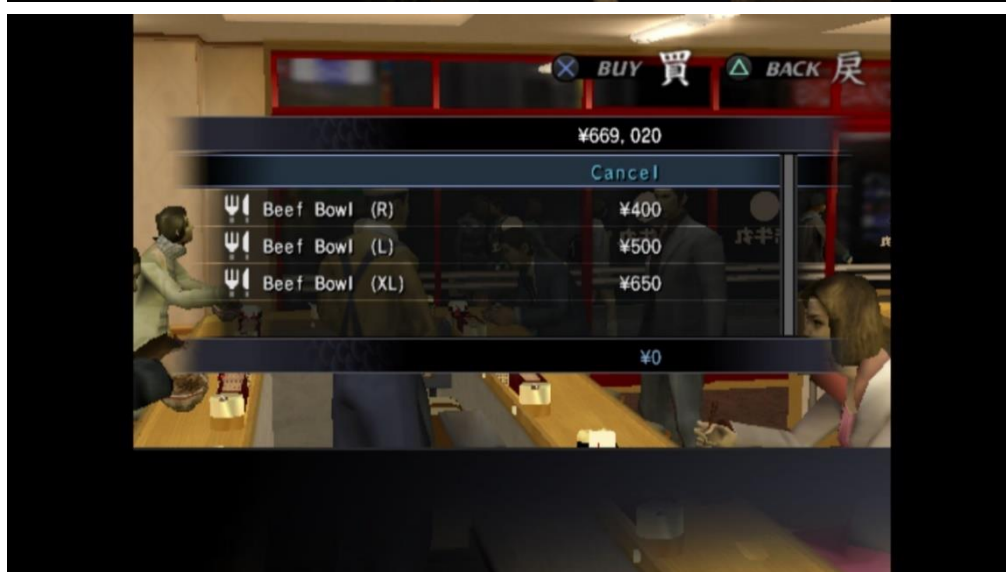
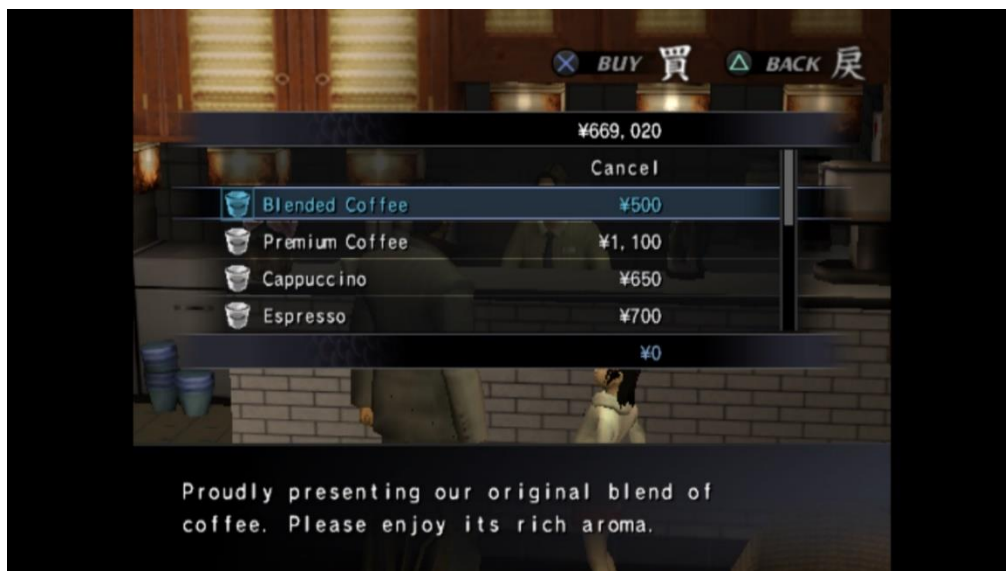
Image 7 – A list of the many items one can purchase at the in-game *Don Quijote*.

In addition to getting to know a hostess' personality and interests, the player character can also give her an object. Depending on which object is given, it may rise or lower the affection the hostess has for you, as represented by the hearts seen on the top left corner of the screen.



Image 8 – The player character, *Kazuma Kiryu*, having a conversation with one of the women available at one of the game’s hostess clubs.

The yellow shapes represent cafés and restaurants. Each of these buildings have their own menu and contain different products for the player to buy. Each of these has their own prices, and they help the player heal their health bar and gain experience points. These can be used to level up *Kazuma Kiryu*, granting him more moves, a bigger health bar, and a larger Heat gauge. Heat being a mechanic in the game that allows the player to do more powerful attacks.



Images 9 & 10 – The list of products one can buy at *Café Alps* (top) & *Akagyū* (bottom). The list of products the player can buy is different in both places, because the top image is of a café, and the bottom image is of a beef bowl restaurant, common in Japanese cities.

The white shapes represent the bars and clubs related with the main plot of the game. These places are important when it comes to progressing the story of *Yakuza* and serve as a point of interactivity between the various characters of the storyline. They can also be served as ways to view some of the game's side-missions. These are smaller stories not related with the main plot that the player can choose to participate in and help other citizens or stop someone malicious from getting their way.



Image 11 – One of the cutscenes seen in one of the side-missions the player can trigger and participate in.

The light blue shapes represent buildings that contain minigames inside them. These minigames range from crane games the player can play in the two Club Sega's that exist in the district, to pulling the lever in slot machines found in *Volcano*. The crane games give the player toys that can be used to trade in with some NPCs or in certain side-missions, where the gifting or trade of certain objects may be required.

When it comes to the slot machines found in *Volcano*, they are simply a form of in-game gambling, where the player starts by trading part of their in-game money for medals. Those medals are then used for the slot-machine, where the player can gain more or nothing. Depending on how many medals the player has received, they can trade these medals for items. Some of them are found in other stores in the game, but others are not.



Image 12 – A slot machine being played inside the gambling building known as *Volcano*.

The dark blue shapes on the map represent the bars that the player can visit, solely to consume drinks. These drinks temporarily give the game a higher encounter rate, meaning that the player will encounter enemies to fight with more frequently. Additionally, *Kazuma Kiryu* will also accumulate Heat faster during these fights which, for the player, means more opportunities to gain powerful attacks. Although, just like many of the game's other places, certain side-missions can appear here as well.



Image 13 – One of the game’s side-missions being triggered at the Bar *Shellac*.

Outside of those areas, there are two additional locals that the player can interact with, that are mandatory visits during a playthrough of the game’s story. Those are the *Millennium Tower*, located at the center of the district (shown with a pink marker in Image 6), and Purgatory, located at the northwest corner of *Kamurocho*.

The *Millennium Tower* is not always available for the player to enter, but when it is, it contains a few areas for the player to explore. These boil down to a few escalators, and depending on the part of the story the player is currently experiencing, they can also contain a few fights against people trying to stop *Kazuma Kiryu*.



Image 14 – An image depicting the insides of the *Millennium Tower*.

According to the series' lore, the *Millennium Tower* was built in the year 2001, during the turn of the millennium (hence its name), while the playable protagonist was locked in prison.

The other location that players can interact with in the original *Yakuza* title is Purgatory, located in *Kamurocho's* West Park, a place where homeless people can hang out. Unlike the *Millennium Tower*, players can freely come back to this location after they arrive at it for the first time.

Purgatory contains the West Park, where players can run around in, receive lessons from a character named *Sotaro Komaki* to learn new moves or talk to some of the game's various NPCs. But Purgatory is also home to an underground section, where they find one of the game's characters, *Kage*, who helps *Kazuma Kiryu* locate certain people during *Yakuza's* plot.



Images 15 & 16 – Images depicting the outside area of Purgatory (top) and the underground area of Purgatory (bottom).

Additionally, the underground portion of Purgatory contains a fighting arena, where players can engage in various battles against many opponents, and a casino, where the player character can engage in various forms of gambling outside of the slot machines found in “Volcano”, such as blackjack and poker.

In the time between the original *Yakuza* game and *Yakuza 4*, five years had passed, and as such, the red-light district of *Kamurocho* has been expanded vertically. Players can now access the rooftops, the underground mall and the parking lots of the district. While these new locations don't offer many new activities for the player, unlike the many streets of *Kamurocho*, these provide new locales for players to experience the new side-missions that *Yakuza 4* has to offer.

Out of the new locations, the underground mall is the only one that contains individual buildings to visit, such as the *Cuez Bar*.



Image 17 – The underground mall of *Kamurocho* seen in *Yakuza 4*.

When it comes to categorizing the places, the player can access in *Kamurocho*, they are now broken up into 5 categories: Restaurant; Store; Amusement; Nightlife and Important. The last one is related to locations that are visited throughout the story, thus being important to the progression of the game.



Image 18 – The updated map of *Kamurocho*, as seen in *Yakuza 4*. While there are more locations to visit, the number of categories has decreased since the original game.

Many of the locations seen in the original *Yakuza* game have stayed intact, offering the player the same activities as before. The most apparent example of this are the cafés and restaurants, as they still offer the player the ability to consume food items to either restore their health or their Heat gauge. New restaurants such as *Watami* have opened in the district since last time, providing the player with more options and easier access, since with the increase of restaurants, many of them are now closer together.

Bars have grown since *Kazuma Kiryu's* adventure in 2005. Bars continue to offer the player the ability to consume various alcoholic beverages, with the addition of a comment describing them. Many of the drinks offered include the *Yamazaki 12 Years*, the *Sky Vodka*, and one of the most expensive drinks in the game, the *Hibiki 30 Years*, being offered for 5,180 yen, most likely due to its age.



Image 19 – A comment being made on the *Yamazaki 12 Years*, by one of *Yakuza 4*'s protagonists, *Shun Akiyama*.

However, in addition to that, bars can now host various minigames, such as darts and pool. These cost a bit to play, with pool costing around 800 yen, but they can be enjoyed in a variety of ways. They can be played by yourself, against a A.I. opponent, or they can be played with a second player.



Image 20 – Pool, being played in the *Cuez Bar*, in *Yakuza 4*.

Out of all the minigames added since the original *Yakuza* game, one of the most recognizable ones to appear in *Yakuza 4*, is the ability to interact with the Karaoke-kan buildings and sing karaoke. In *Yakuza 4*, there are four playable characters, but not all of them can sing in this mode. Out of the game's four playable characters, the only ones that can sing in karaoke are *Kazuma Kiryu* and *Shun Akiyama*. *Masayoshi Tanimura* can do interjections in a few of the songs, but in the case of the last playable character, *Taiga Saejima*, he wouldn't be able to sing karaoke until the following game, *Yakuza 5*.

The karaoke minigame acts like many other rhythm video games, where the player presses the buttons that appear on screen in time with the melody of the song being played. As alluded to before, the player can bring in another person to do karaoke with them. Whether that be one of the hostesses from the returning hostess clubs, or *Hana*, a major character in *Shun Akiyama's* storyline, these characters can either take the main stage or do interjections alongside the player character's singing. In the case of the song "Pure Love in *Kamurocho*", the player can team up with one of those characters and perform in a duet.



Image 21 – *Shun Akiyama's* assistant, *Hana*, singing a song in the karaoke minigame.

Another activity added in *Yakuza 4* is the ability to access hot springs, or *onsen*, as they are known in Japanese. These places allow the player character to relax, and in that process, regain their health bar. You are also offered the choice to play a game of table tennis

afterwards, with a female host, whether that'd be a hostess from a hostess club, or a hostess from the hot spring establishment itself.



Images 22 & 23 – Pictured at the top image, *Shun Akiyama* relaxing in a hot spring. Pictured at the bottom image, *Shun Akiyama* playing table tennis.

Many of the important locations have changed since 2005, the year the first *Yakuza* game took place. For example, due to the previous owner's absence, the bar *Serena* has now

seen a new owner, and it has been renamed to *New Serena*, but the location itself still holds a similar look and purpose.

The *Millennium Tower* also hasn't changed in terms of how the player interacts with it, since it's only accessible during specific parts of the story, but the bar Ares is no longer accessible.

What has seen major change is Purgatory, which occupied the West Park of *Kamurocho*, located at the top-right corner of the map. In the original game, Purgatory was not only a place where homeless people could reside and interact with each other, but like mentioned previously, it was also home to an underground area. Due to events that occurred in *Yakuza 2* and *Yakuza 3*, the Majima family of the Tojo *yakuza* Clan has removed all of it, and started construction of *Kamurocho Hills*, becoming the second tallest building of *Kamurocho*. Like the *Millennium Tower*, access to it is restricted except for certain parts of the plot.



Image 24 – *Kamurocho Hills*, close to being fully constructed, as seen in *Yakuza 4*.

## Chapter 2: The basis for the district of *Kamurocho*, Kabukicho

The red-light district of *Kamurocho* found in the *Yakuza* video game series shares very strong similarities with the district of Kabukicho, which is found at the city of Shinjuku, located in the Japanese capital of Tokyo. Kabukicho is described as a red-light district, due to the high presence of sex-related clubs in its streets. The following will focus on presenting many factions of Kabukicho and comparing them with their counterparts in *Yakuza*'s *Kamurocho*. These factions will be divided into smaller sub-chapters, categorizing them into sections.



Image 25 – One of the entrances to Kabukicho. (photo by Tiago Gonçalves, October 2023)

## 2.1. The sex industry of Kabukicho

Unlike many red-light districts, Kabukicho stands out in an interesting way due to Japanese law prohibiting prostitution since 1956, which has caused many sex workers in the district to work around it in many forms. (Takeoka, 2015)

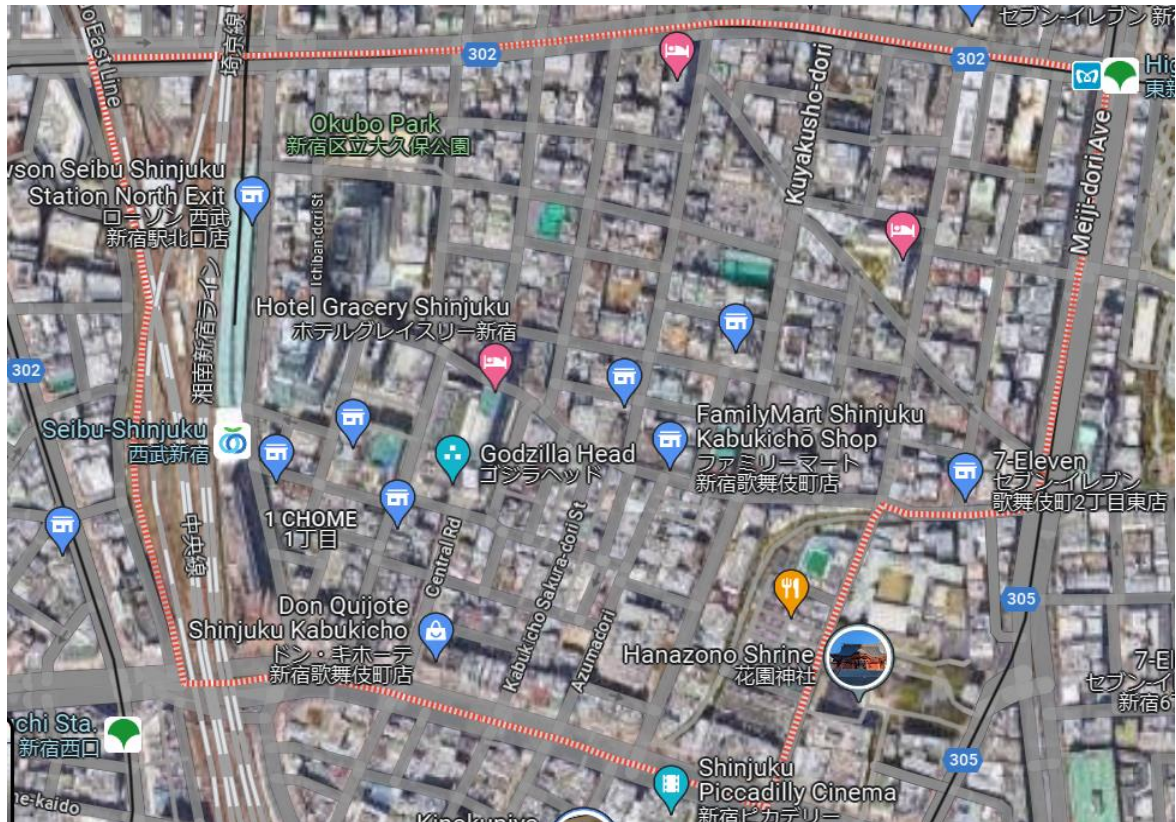


Image 26 – Map of Kabukicho, as seen on Google Maps in 2024.

Kabukicho was originally designed to be an area dedicated to cultural activities, including theatres and restaurants, as a response to the destruction of Japan's traditional kabuki theater in World War II. Starting from the 1950s, the district developed extremely quickly (Takeyama, 2023). Even with the banning of prostitution in 1956 (Takeoka, 2015), many entertainment venues in the district flourished and as such, Kabukicho is now known as the largest pleasure district in Japan. There exist other red-light districts like it, such as Nichome that is regarded as a gay district, but Kabukicho remains the biggest and the most

popular. While official numbers are not available, there is an estimate of around 300 host clubs in Kabukicho (Takeyama, 2023).

Many Japanese people are split in how they perceive their country's sex industry: it's either considered inherently violent, or it's a legitimate form of business. Commodification of sex has had a long history in the country, taking roots from Japan's Edo period, but it exists in many more ways outside of what's considered sex work in the West (Patrick Gray, 2022)

The banning of prostitution in Japan only accommodated direct intercourse between female and male genitalia, so other sexual activities such as oral sex were not referred to when passing the law, so they remain relatively uncontrolled. (Takeoka, 2015)

The reason why the word "relatively" is brought up is due to the current regulations that exist for those types of sexual activities such as: following a permit and notification system set out by the police; the inside of the rooms of sex clubs should not be visible from the outside (as seen in the image below); and advertisements for these clubs are extremely restricted.



Image 27 – An image of a sex-related club, promoting from the outside that it's on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor. Note that the club itself cannot be seen from the outside. On the right side, we also see a man advertising a 60-minute course for only 2,499 yen.

Since advertising for these clubs is very limited, these clubs are mostly advertised by street-advertisers, who go on the streets with signs promoting the club in question, with a grand-offer to help convince potential customers more. (Takeoka, 2015) With advertising for anything related to the sex industry being illegal in Japan, this type of street advertising with no “budget” behind it is completely outside of the scope of legality, and this type of advertising is normally funded by the *yakuza*.

In the district of Kabukicho, workers in the sex industry tend to occupy these positions: there are the street-advertisers, as mentioned prior; but there are also the recruiters, whose main job is to convince/persuade women to work in the industry, since it’s always looking for new workers.

There are two types of workers: there is the “buying-out” type (*kaitori*), which is the one that corresponds to the entertainment side of the sex industry, more exemplified in hostess clubs, where women give men pleasure in non-sexual ways, focused more on providing connection with a man; and there is the “forever” type (*eikyu*), which are the women that work in massage parlours and can also act as escorts for the customer that calls them (Takeoka, 2015).

By comparison, a lot of these factors are present in the video game *Yakuza*. During one of the chapters of the story, *Kazuma Kiryu* finds another character in the story, Detective *Date*, drunk at the bar *Serena*, and the owner of said bar says that he missed a call from his daughter, and she left a message. Via the message, *Date*’s daughter is heard angry at her father for ignoring her and wanting nothing to do with him.

*Kazuma Kiryu* decides to search for *Date*’s daughter, *Saya* and finds her talking to a friend about her boyfriend. Said boyfriend is later shown to not care about *Saya*’s wellbeing and flooding her with debt. The boyfriend’s friends help her pay the debt by becoming part of a sex movie, recruiting her to become part of the sex industry.



Image 28 – An image of the cutscene where Detective Date is told that his daughter is in debt, and she’s being recruited to the sex industry to pay it off.

And this is on top of the interactivity present in the hostess clubs available in *Kamurocho*, that was talked about in chapter 1.

In future *Yakuza* titles, many of the hostesses available are modeled after real-life people. For example, in the remake of the second mainline title of the series, *Yakuza Kiwami 2*, one of the hostesses available is a woman named Kiara Asuka. She is modeled after the Japanese model of the same name, and at the time of the game’s release, she was an adult video actress, up until her retirement from the industry in 2020.



Images 29 & 30 – Kirara Asuka as she appears in *Yakuza Kiwami 2* (left) and her real-world counterpart (right).

## 2.2. Karaoke in Kabukicho

Karaoke as an entertainment business saw a rise in growth in Japan during the 1980s, due to the increasing lower cost and the ever-growing selection of songs for people to choose from (Green, 2022).

In the 1980s, karaoke also saw a difference in how it was approached and sold, as the karaoke on-a-box service began to be sold. This service allowed users to go inside a small, private room, and sing while not disturbing anybody outside of that room. Because of this private setup, which no longer restricted karaoke to just bars, people of all ages could participate in this art, as drinks were no longer the only thing on tap (Green, 2022).

Nowadays, even after the economic bubble burst, karaoke is still very popular as an entertainment business, being seen in many parts of the country. This also extends to Kabukicho, where multiple karaoke venues are available. The one we visited was the largest one in the district, having multiple floors, with many private rooms in each.



Image 31 – The Karaoke establishment the author of the thesis visited during his brief time in Kabukicho. (photo by Tiago Gonçalves, October 2023).

Inside the building, the customer pays a fee of around 1,000 yen to be able to use one of the private rooms for an hour. They are required to buy a drink or a small meal (like French fries) for that karaoke session. Additionally, the customer has the option to bring a couple of small instruments, like maracas and tambourines, to the private room for others to use. In my case, I brought two other people to karaoke, and we took turns singing the songs we wanted.

A curious thing that we saw in the music selection is that one of the songs available was *Baka Mitai*. This song originates in *Yakuza 5* and was originally made for that game. That was the first song I played during my stay at the Karaoke-kan, as seen on image 26.



Images 32 & 33 – Pictures of the private room used for our karaoke session. The left image (32) shows the television monitor and another screen below it. The right image (33) showcases the table of some of the contents we used for the session. (photo by Tiago Gonçalves, October 2023)

As seen on image 32, the room contained a television monitor showcasing the song that was picked and its lyrics, that are to be sang by the customer (or customers) in time with the blue light that comes across the Japanese characters. These are timed in accordance with the original song.

Image 33 showcases the table that surrounded the customers in the room, and on it, a few objects can be seen. These include: the menu for the food items available to purchase, which are then delivered soon after the call is made; a maraca, one of the instruments chosen for the session; and the most important of which, the tablet, which is connected to the smaller screen seen in the television set. The tablet allows the user to select which songs they want to sing, either choosing them one at a time, or in the form of a list. They can select from a wide array of songs, ranging from songs popular in Japan, to songs sang in different languages, such as Korean and English. The speed of the songs can also be altered before or during their runtime.

While not shown in the pictures, close to the door of the room, there exists a phone where customers can make their call to order food. After the initial hour purchased has passed, the phone will ring, and the customer will be prompted to leave the room or to extend their session by an extra hour. During our experience, we didn't extend the session, and we brought the instruments back and paid for the food we ordered.

In the *Yakuza* series, while karaoke establishments can be seen in the first game, it wouldn't be until *Yakuza 3* that players could interact with them and participate in the art of karaoke. The minigame activity was conceived by Ryosuke Horii, current director of the *Yakuza* series, to put his passion into the game and to potentially impress then-director of the series, Toshihiro Nagoshi (PKFT, 2021).

While the idea of having *Kazuma Kiryu* singing was polarizing to the developers (PKFT, 2021), nevertheless, the minigame was put into *Yakuza 3* and became a success with audiences and gave origin to some of the more iconic songs in the series, namely *Baka Mitai* which, as mentioned before, was introduced in *Yakuza 5*, and has become an internet meme.

In *Yakuza 3*, there were only 6 songs that *Kazuma Kiryu* and/or other characters could sing to. It was also possible to bring a hostess from one of the hostess clubs nearby to sing karaoke, as well as have *Kazuma Kiryu* do interjections in the middle of the song or play an instrument.

As mentioned in chapter 1, in *Yakuza 4*, the number of songs nearly doubled from *Yakuza 3*, and in addition to *Kazuma Kiryu* and the hostesses, one of the game's playable

characters, *Shun Akiyama* could also sign out a few songs exclusive to him, such as “Pure Love in *Kamurocho*”.



Image 34 – An image depicting *Shun Akiyama* (right) and his assistant *Hana* (left) singing “Pure Love in *Kamurocho*” together, in *Yakuza 4*.

In the game, you’re allowed to play two songs while you’re in the activity, and after those two songs are played, the player will be prompted to extend their karaoke playtime, by paying an additional fee. The last part is very similar to the experience I had in *Karaoke-kan*. The private rooms seen in the minigame are also like those found in *Karaoke-kan*, and in the case of *Yakuza 4*, the user-interface seen in the activity reflects how tablets in karaoke stations look like.

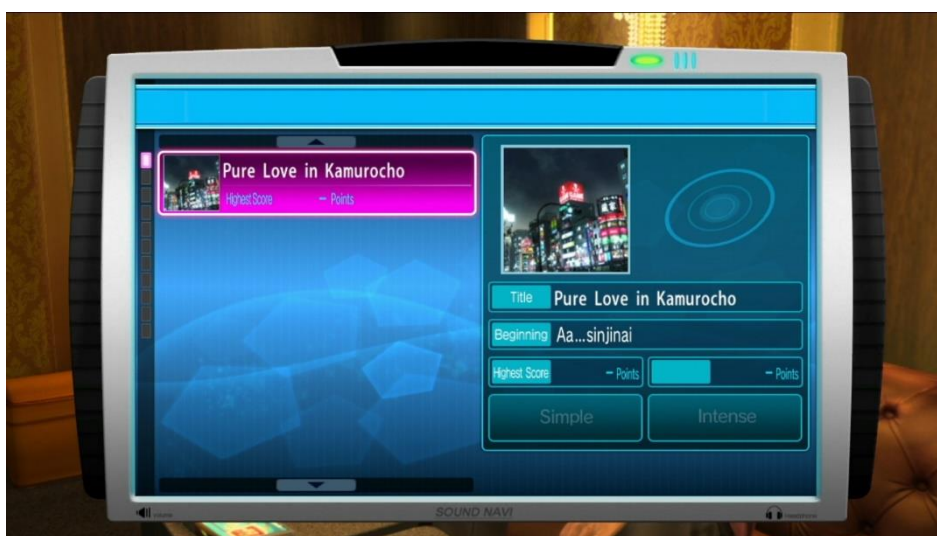


Image 35 – The user interface of the karaoke minigame, as seen in *Yakuza 4*.

### 2.3. The *Tokyu Kabukicho Tower*

One of the biggest locales of the red-light district of Kabukicho is the recently built *Tokyu Kabukicho Tower*, which finished construction in early 2023, and is also the first skyscraper in Japan to be designed by a woman, Yuko Nagayama (Meyer, 2023).

*Kabukicho Tower* consists of 48 floors and is about 225 meters tall. The floors themselves are divided into three segments: the lower floors, the middle floors and the upper floors. The lower floors, which span from floor 1 to floor 5, consist of various cafés and restaurants, flower shops and a kabuki hall on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor. Kabuki being a type of Japanese traditional theater, with an only male cast, an art form that has been practiced since Japan's *Edo* period.

One of the most notable floors of the lower part of the tower is the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, as it holds the *Namco Tokyo* entertainment center, which allows people to enjoy a wide variety of arcade games, such as various types of crane games or even modern arcade video games such as *Taiko no Tatsujin*, a popular rhythm game that is played by using a big drum.



Images 36 & 37 – The entrance to the *Namco Tokyo* entertainment center (top), and the *Taiko no Tatsujin* arcade video game (bottom). (Ikidane, 2023)

Bandai Namco is one of the biggest entertainment companies in Japan, being recognized for their popular console and arcade video games, such as *Pac-Man* and *Tekken*. The company continues to distribute many of their arcade games all across the country, and Kabukicho is no different.

The middle floors of the Kabukicho *Tower*, which span from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> floor, consist of the *Milano-za Theater*, the *109 Cinemas Premium Shinjuku*, and the bar *Jam17*. These span across multiple floors and offer a premium experience when it comes to enjoying theater, music or video, watching movies, and offering a place to socialize with each other with the sound of music in the background.

The upper floors consist of two hotels, the *Hotel Groove Shinjuku* from the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 38<sup>th</sup> floors, and *Bellustar Tokyo* from the 39<sup>th</sup> to the 47<sup>th</sup> floors. These are very premium hotels by nature, as they offer rich experiences such as a spa and a penthouse.

In the *Yakuza* series, the closest building to the current *Tokyu Kabukicho Tower* is the games' *Millennium Tower*. Unlike Kabukicho's skyscraper, the *Millennium Tower* does not offer much in terms of entertainment and rarely allows the player to explore inside of the building. Like mentioned in chapter 1, the tower is only able to be explored during certain points of each game's story, where the player character either fights a hoard of foes or simply triggers a cutscene that progresses the plot.

The reason why these two are being compared is because of their similar role as the skyscrapers of their respective districts, but it's clear that what's inside each of the towers is completely different from one another.

## 2.4. Convenience Stores and *Don Quijote* in Kabukicho

The convenience-store industry business in Japan has grown and thrived over the years and has become a big part of modern Japanese society. No matter where one goes, there is usually a convenience store right by the corner, with the most popular companies being *7-Eleven*, *Lawson* and *Family Mart*, as displayed in the image below. (Nishida, 2018)

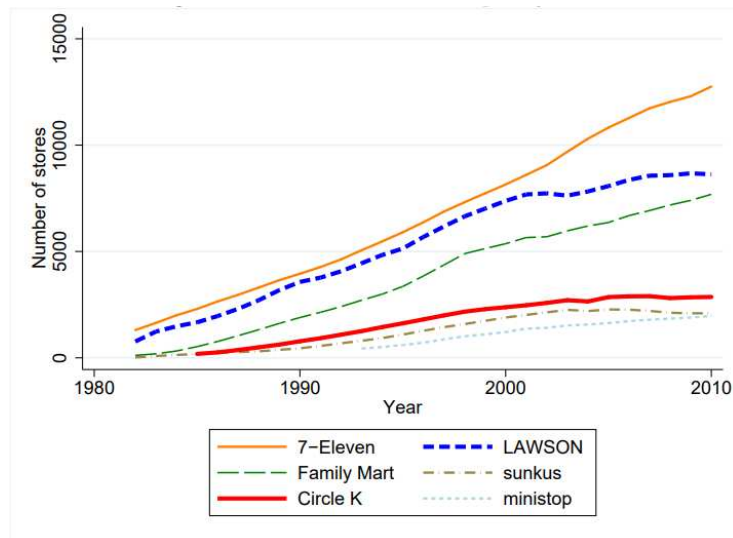


Image 38 – A figure representing the total store counts in Japan by year, starting in the early 1980s to the early 2010s. (Nishida, 2018)

As the name suggests, a convenience store is a store that offers convenience to the customer by providing a wide variety of products to purchase. Whenever someone is in a hurry and needs something to eat quickly, a convenience store is there to help the person in need. And considering the fast pace of Japan’s capital (Matsuno, 2023), convenience stores have been more used with time, as seen at the image above.

Since Kabukicho is in Tokyo, Japan’s capital, there are also convenience stores around the district, such as the “big three” mentioned previously. There exist over 10 convenience stores in just the district alone, most of which are from those three brands, but brands such as *Ministop* are also present.

In the image below, the blue markers that have a store symbol on them indicate where convenience stores are, and if zoomed in more, more blue markers will appear. As said previously, there really does exist a convenience store around every corner.

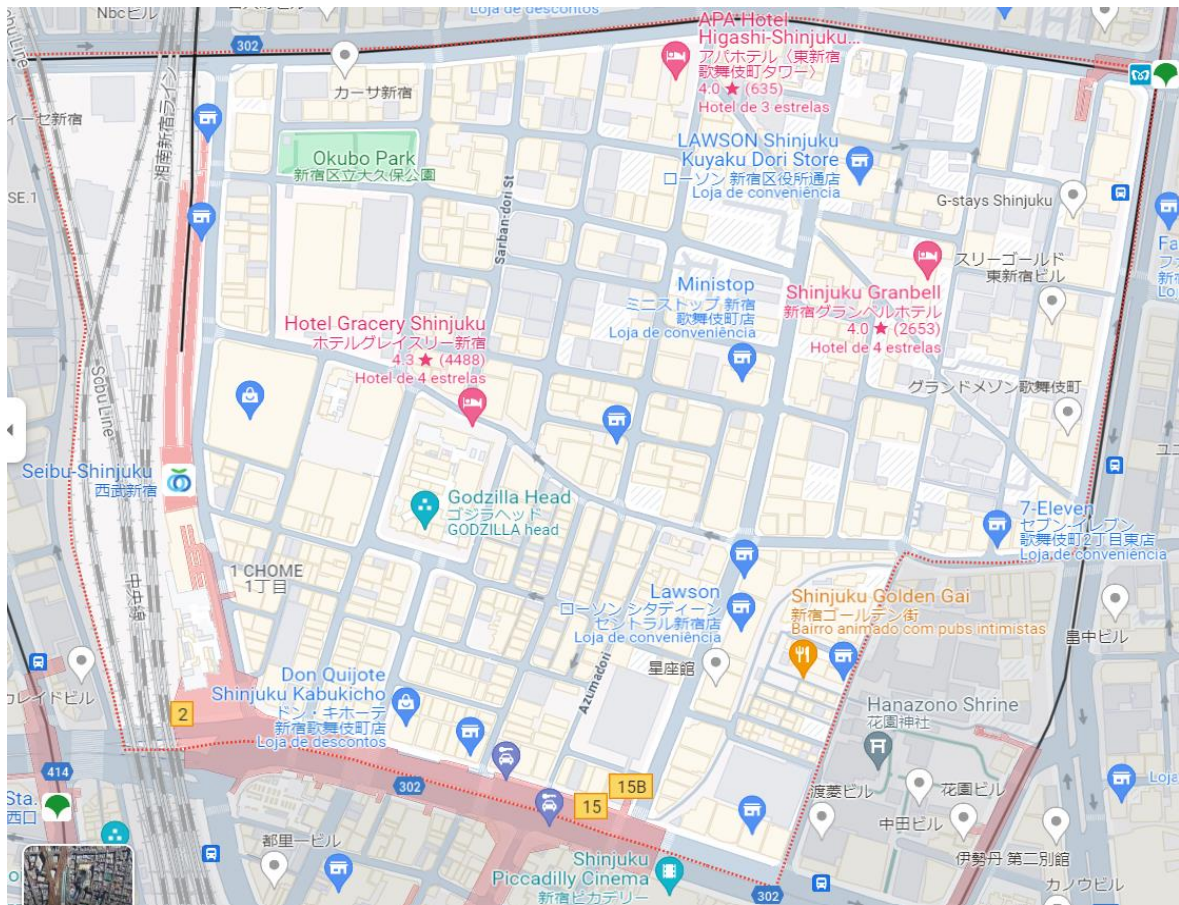


Image 39 – The red-light district of Kabukicho, as seen on Google Maps. The red dots around it depict the borders of the district.

While not a convenience store, there also exists another big store in Kabukicho that deserves to be mentioned, due to also providing the customer with a wide array of items. Although the products being sold there are different than those seen in *Lawson*, *Family Mart* and *7-Eleven*. The name of the store is *Don Quijote* and it is located at the south of the district.

*Don Quijote* is generally described as a discount store, but not all its items are at a low-price, since it also includes more expensive items such as watches and purses. (Carey, 2021) There are many *Don Quijote* stores throughout the country and while some are single floor stores, other have multiple, allowing for an even bigger quantity of products.



Image 40 – The entrance to Kabukicho’s *Don Quijote*. (photo by Tiago Gonçalves, October 2023)

Unlike the previously mentioned convenience stores, *Don Quijote* also has their own mascot. The mascot is called Donpen, a blue penguin with a Santa hat, that has the Japanese katakana character ト (do) on his belly. In the store’s official website, he is also seen wearing many other outfits, representing Japan’s other prefectures and other countries that *Don Quijote* is also in, as seen in the image below. The only Japanese prefecture the store chain is not present in is Kochi. (Don Quijote, 2024) In addition to this, the *Don Quijote* store chain also has its own theme song that is heard in the stores themselves, called “Miracle Shopping”, sung by Maimi Tanaka.



Image 41 – An image depicting five different versions of Donpen, as seen on the official website, found here: <https://www.donki.com/en/>

These elements help *Don Quijote* stand out from the many convenience stores present in Kabukicho, and by extension, the rest of Japan.

In the first *Yakuza* game, there are only two brands of convenience stores in *Kamurocho*, and they are called *M Store* and *Poppo*. There exists only one *M Store* in the district, located in *West Shichifuku Street*, while *Poppo* has two locations, located in *Tenkaichi Street* and the *Nakamichi Alley*.



Images 42 & 43 – The entrances to the M Store (top) and Poppo (bottom) convenience stores found in the original *Yakuza* game.

Even though the names of these brands are exclusive to the *Yakuza* video games and do not exist in the real world, their logos are very similar to the real-life brands seen in Japan. The *M Store* logo incorporates the use of orange, green and blue colors around it, with the words *M* and *Store* being in green. Convenience stores like *7-Eleven* and *Family Mart* use similar color schemes around their logos for the entrances of their stores, as seen on the image below.



Image 44 – The entrance to a 7 *Eleven* store. Notice how the top of the entrance, the 7 *Eleven* logo is surrounded by orange, green and red colors. (LIVE JAPAN, 2020)

The *Poppo* convenience store logo also has similarities to the *Lawson* convenience store, as the *Poppo* logo uses a similar font to the *Lawson* logo and both logos are surrounded by blue.



Images 45 & 46 – The *Poppo* logo (left), as seen in the first *Yakuza* game and the color-reversed *Lawson* logo, as seen on the company’s official global business website. (Lawson, 2024)

Additionally, what's sold inside of the convenience stores is also a reflection of what's sold in stores like *Lawson* and *7-Eleven*, as seen in the image below.

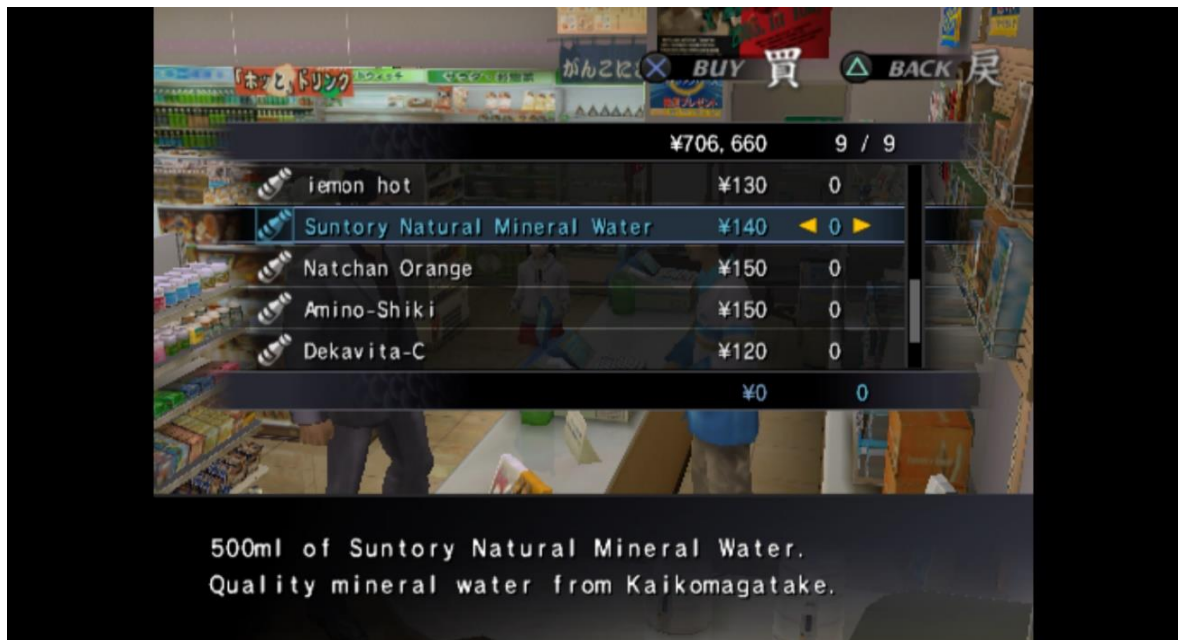


Image 47 – A list of products found at the *Poppo* convenience store, in the original *Yakuza* game.

Many of the drinks seen here are available to buy in Japanese stores, like the *Suntory Natural Mineral Water* and the *Natchan Orange*. These drinks are referenced in the fictional *Kamurocho* and could be considered product placement. It allows a Japanese player to get a sense of familiarity with products that they would probably buy on a regular basis, and it allows players outside of Japan to learn more about Japanese brands.



Image 48 – The *Natchan Orange* drink, common among Japanese stores. (Suntory, 2024)

Despite the company behind the *Yakuza* series, *Sega*, not being able to secure the licensing rights to use brands like *Lawson* and *7-Eleven* to represent the convenience stores present in *Kamurocho*, they were able to acquire the rights for *Suntory* drinks. In addition, they were also able to acquire the rights to use the *Don Quijote* name for *Kamurocho*'s big discount store, as seen in the image below.



Image 49 – The entrance to *Don Quijote* as seen in the first *Yakuza* game.

The entrance shown is very similar to the one seen in image 40, only that image 49 reflects how the store was presented in the year 2005, since not only did the game come out during that year, but the game's story also takes place at that time.

Just like in the real-world *Don Quijote* store, the game version also includes the store's theme song when the player character gets close to or goes inside the building. With this, it becomes instantly recognizable to the player when they're passing by the *Don Quijote* store in *Kamurocho*.

## 2.5. Arcades in Kabukicho

Like mentioned above, the *Tokyu Kabukicho Tower* has a floor dedicated to *Namco Tokyo*, where people can play many arcade titles. A video game arcade is best described as a game center where people can play video games on dedicated machines, which are often called “arcades”. Since the 1970s, with the appearance of the *Pong* arcade machine (Pelletier-Gagnon, 2024), many Japanese players have gone out to the arcades as a venue of entertainment. Despite the arrival of dedicated home video game consoles in the 1980s, video game arcades are still popular in Japanese society, and are still used as a common form of entertainment in many cities of Japan.

The video game company *Sega*, who is responsible for the creation of the *Yakuza* series, is also responsible for the creation of various arcade video games, such as *Virtua Fighter* and *Space Harrier*. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, *Sega* stopped running their own dedicated arcade buildings in Japan (Bullard, 2022), including the previously known *Sega Shinjuku Kabukicho*, which was rebranded to *GiGO Shinjuku Kabukicho* following *Sega*’s decision. (Sega Retro, 2022)

As mentioned in Chapter 1, in the streets of *Kamurocho*, the arcade establishments presented have the *Club Sega* branding, a brand used by *Sega* to denote game centers and entertainment venues (Sega Retro, 2021). These arcade centers include crane games in the first *Yakuza* game, but starting with *Yakuza 2*, they would also include video games, essentially playing a game inside of another game. Starting with *Yakuza 5*, emulated versions of arcade games developed by *Sega* themselves would also be available, such as 1994’s *Virtua Fighter 2*, as seen in the image below.

Just like many activities that can be done in *Kamurocho*, when playing an arcade game, in-game currency will be needed to play, and just like a real-life arcade machine, money will be needed to start the game, or to continue it, in case the player loses a match.



Image 50 – An emulated version of *Virtua Fighter 2* being played in *Yakuza 5*, in a in-game *Club Sega* establishment.

## 2.6. Cafés and Restaurants in Kabukicho

When it comes to cafés and restaurants, just like many other places in Japan, Kabukicho has a lot to offer. Japanese cuisine is known for its distinctive flavors and specialized ways of cooking, and many of them are present in the red-light district. From beef bowl restaurants such as *Beef Kitchen Stand*, or restaurants specialized in *gyozas* (the Japanese version of a Chinese dumpling), such as *Kakekomi Gyoza*, Kabukicho is in no shortage of options to choose from.

During my stay in the district, there was one restaurant I visited, a restaurant by the name of *Ichiran*. The restaurant specializes in *ramen*, a type of soup that envelops ingredients such as leek, beef and noodles, all in a broth made from *miso*.

Each person who frequented the place were given a paper on how they wanted their *ramen* to be served, from the spiciness of the broth to the ingredients themselves. Additionally, unlike many Western restaurants, water is given out for free and in the case of

*Ichiran*, water can be put onto the cup at any time, since a faucet was available at every table. On the top of tables, each person had their own, and views to the sides and the front were partly blocked.



Image 51 – An image of the table where a person eats their food. The paper in the middle is served before sitting down, where one is asked how they want their *ramen* to be served. On the left, a faucet can be seen, giving the customer free water. (photo by Tiago Gonçalves, October 2023)

Before being served, the customer can only see a bit of what's in front of them, and after one of the workers serves them, the window is shut, but if the customer needs something from a worker, they can always call them up, and the window will open to deliver them what they need.



Image 52 – An image of one of the *ramens* available at the *Ichiran* restaurant. As can be seen in the background, the window has been closed as the *ramen* has already been served. (photo by Tiago Gonçalves, October 2023)

## 2.7. Hot springs in Kabukicho

Due to Japan having many active volcanoes, the country hosts the highest number of hot springs in the world. (Serbulea & Payyappallimana, 2012) To the locals, they are known as *onsen*, and they are recognized for being a relaxing spot for many. Hot springs are also known for maintaining one’s health, and preventing many diseases, although this aspect of them has been neglected over time, and their focus has shifted to being a tourist destination, on short holidays. (Serbulea & Payyappallimana, 2012)

Kabukicho isn’t really known for being home to many hot springs. During my research, there was only one locale I found that was home to them, being called *Thermae-Yu*. It is comprised of six floors, with saunas, spas and various baths (Travel Japan, 2024) The establishment has an “experimental policy” regarding tattoos. If a person has a tattoo on their body, it needs to be covered, unless they’re a woman with a “fashion tattoo”. In that case, it only needs to be covered if they’re bigger than 30 cm. (Tokyo Cheapo, 2024)



Image 53 – The entrance to *Thermae-Yu*, as seen on the page of the building found in *TimeOut* (2022).

Like mentioned in chapter 1, *Yakuza 4*'s *Kamurocho* gave players the opportunity to experience *onsen* with *Kamuro Hot Springs* building. The game references the hot springs' healing factors, by allowing the player to refill their health bar, after a bath. Unlike the hot spring seen in Kabukicho, *Kamuro Hot Springs* allows the player to enjoy another activity after taking their hot bath, table tennis.

### Chapter 3: Visual Analysis of two *Yakuza* advertisements

Advertising is described as an activity with the objective of persuading or convincing consumers to purchase, subscribe to or focus on a certain product or service (Jaworska, 2020). The activity has been around for many years, and it normally is used with mass media to promote products or services to a large audience. Radio, newspapers, television, and the internet are all mediums where advertising can be conducted.

Some forms of advertisement, such as commercials, are common to find on television, in many countries around the world. Japan itself is no different in this matter, as plenty of advertisements are shown on Japanese television. Considering Japan is home to some of the biggest video game franchises out there (Koyama, 2023), it is unsurprising that there exist many commercials to advertise those games.

Similarly to other video game franchises, the *Yakuza* series has been advertised in this medium and has had plenty of television commercials in its home country, since its inception in 2005. Many of them focus on showcasing gameplay of each title, including the various activities one can participate in inside the world of the games. Other commercials for the series showcase the plotline of that title, showing small portions of cutscenes from the game's story (GCMC, 2022).

In this chapter, we will take a closer look at two advertisements of the *Yakuza* series, one from the original *Yakuza* title, and the other from *Yakuza 4*. The first commercial is showcased in a live action style, exhibiting the overall concept of the game, lasting around 30 seconds. The *Yakuza 4* commercial shows various activities that the player can experience in the game, and it lasts around 15 seconds. These commercials came out in the years 2005 and 2010, respectively, around the time each game was released.

The two commercials fill the role of demonstrating fundamental characteristics of the *Yakuza* series to potential customers. They act as an entry-point to the games, showing why they are unique, which in turn is part of convincing a consumer to buy a product.

A semiotic approach was employed to analyze these two commercials. Semiotics are described to be the study of signs. Every day we are surrounded by a multitude of signs, all of which have different appearances and proprieties. (Solík, 2014). The usage of signs is

crucial in advertising, especially in television. Many television commercials only have a duration of roughly thirty seconds, so advertisers must describe their product in an effective and concise manner for the audience to easily understand the message.

Each analysis was divided into the following categories: visual and verbal register; audio register; and the relationship between all of them. The visual and verbal register are being grouped into one category, due to the lack of text within the commercials. In the visual and verbal register section of each analysis, there will be a distinction made between denotation and connotation.

Roland Barthes, the first to study semiotics as “dynamic elements of social and cultural fabric”, claimed that visual meaning was divided into denotation and connotation (Aiello, 2020). Denotation is described as the literal meaning of an image, while connotation is the symbolic meaning. This distinction will help structure the analysis, as it will consider both objective and subjective perspectives.

Due to the advertisements only being available at a low quality, some of the visual elements found in the commercials will be hard to decipher, presenting a limitation to the analysis. Unfortunately, no technical sheet that pertained to the credits for either commercial was found.

### 3.1. *Yakuza* television commercial

#### 1) Visual & Verbal Register - Denotation

The commercial starts with a small icon showcasing the number 18 in the center and the words “CERO” on top. Following that, we see a view of various buildings. This shot is viewed from a sky perspective, seeing the buildings from up above. There are various lights surrounding them, with yellow taking center stage, but other colors, such as red, green and light blue can also be seen in some of the buildings. While the buildings are being shown, the camera constantly zooms in on them, until it transitions to a shot of neon lights. The neon lights are mostly in the shades of green and blue, but some of them are colored white, and others are in light shades of yellow. These neon lights are long, thin and are seen vertically. The neon lights sequence is very brief, and they are shown up close diagonally.

We then cut to a scene showcasing a man walking, with neon lights in the background. This man is wearing sunshades, has a moustache and a small beard, and has medium-long black hair. While he's walking, we see a bright red light pass by in the foreground. He is showcased from the side, and the commercial shows him walking from left to right, but the camera is accompanying him, so in the eyes of the viewer, the man stays on the left side of the screen.



Image 54 – A shot of a man wearing sunshades, with neon lights in the background, as seen in the *Yakuza* television commercial.

Afterwards, we cut to a brief sequence of glass breaking on the ground, with a rose petal falling with it. In the right side of this sequence, we see a blue neon sign being reflected. It is hard to decipher what the neon sign is, due to the brevity of the shot and the glass pieces falling on top of the reflection, but it is in the shape of a “U”, with a rounded figure on the top left side of it.

Following that sequence, we cut to another shot of the man in shades that we saw earlier, but now the camera is only focusing on the man's face, with most of the screen being occupied by his sunglasses. The sunglasses are reflecting the neon lights seen earlier, and other neon lights of similar appearance are seen on the right side of the screen. Since the man is walking, we see his face go a bit up, allowing the camera to showcase a bit more of his face, mainly part of his nose.

We cut once again to a shot of glass pieces present on the ground, but we also see a black shoe on top of them. This black shoe stomps on the remaining glass pieces, causing them to break even more. The ground is reflecting many bright signs, which are hard to make out what they are. On the right side of the screen, we can see an orange circular sign being reflected and on top of it, we see two almost circular yellow lights being reflected as well. They disappear right before the beginning of the next sequence.



Image 55 – A shot of a black shoe stomping on top of the broken glass.

Continuing from that, the video once again briefly cuts to another shot of various neon-lights suffering from a short circuit. This shot is very similar to the first neon light sequence seen earlier in the commercial, but the angle at which it is viewed is slightly different. Previously, the neon lights were shown from a side view, with them being focused on the left side of the screen. This time around, the neon lights occupy most of the screen, and the camera is recording them from below.

Afterwards, we cut to a shot of a white drawing of a dragon on the top part of the screen, with red Japanese characters occupying the bottom right side of the screen. Both contrast with the black background. The dragon drawing and the letters are surrounded by fog. The smaller Japanese characters translate as “Scenario Supervision”, and the bigger ones translate as “Hase Seishu”.



Image 56 – The shot of the commercial with the dragon drawing and the red letters. Fog surrounds both.

In the next shot, the video once again shows the dragon drawing and Japanese characters, but this time, the dragon drawing is slightly more zoomed, and the Japanese characters are different. Now, there are a set of characters positioned on the bottom left side of the screen, with another on the bottom right side of the screen. The characters on the left side translate to, from top to bottom: “Appearance” and “Tetsuya Watari”. The characters on the right side, from top to bottom, translate to: “Junko Mihara”, “Yoshiaki Fujiwara”, “Takaya Kuroda” and “Rie Kugimiya”.

We then cut away to a shot where, while two people are walking in the foreground, we see a man in a suit, alongside two women wearing dresses. The woman on his left is wearing a black dress and her body is facing the man, but her face is pointed towards the walking men. The woman on the suited man’s right side is wearing a pink dress and her body is facing the screen, while also looking at the walking men. The suited man and the women are sitting by a table, and that table contains the following: an ice bucket with a bottle on the inside; three bottles on the outside; a couple of cups, and a basket towards the right. Two of

the three outside bottles have a blue drink and are very close together. The third bottle has a different shape compared to the other two and is reflecting the man's black suit.



Image 57 – A shot of a suited man and two women looking at the two people, represented by silhouettes, in the foreground.

We then transition to a shot, recorded from below, of the man in shades who is accompanied by multiple people behind him. These people, just like their leading man, are also wearing suits, and most of them are wearing shades, as we see later in the commercial. The group, led by the man in shades, continues to walk as they enter a room with a brown interior roof, with lights on top. There are also lights present on the floor, illuminating the sides of the pathway they're walking on.

Afterwards, just like previously, we see the side of the leading man's face on the left side of the screen. But now accompanying him is another man in shades, although he has shorter hair, and no facial hair. That man is seen on the right side of the screen.

The last shot of the commercial shows the group of men we saw earlier stopping and looking at another man. The other man wears white, garb-like clothing with red pants and black shoes, which contrasts the outfits from the others in the advertisement. We see the man initially facing down to his left, but then faces the group of men.

We see both parties from an angled shot, once again recorded from below, and we see the room they're in in more detail. We see a chandelier on the top, and multiple lights that surround the room. Yellow lights are more prominent at the top of the room, but we see some red lights on the bottom right side of the screen and behind the group of men, who are now seen on the left side.



Image 58 – A man in white garb-like clothing and the group of suited men looking at each other.

We then conclude the commercial with the game's Japanese logo appearing spelling *Ryu ga Gotoku*. The logo of the company, *Sega*, is seen on the top left corner of the screen and an image spelling *CERO 18*, on the bottom left corner. Below the game's logo, we see text that says, "Releasing December 12<sup>th</sup>". Below the date, we see a link to the website "[ryu-ga-gotoku.com](http://ryu-ga-gotoku.com)", and below the *CERO 18* image, we see the copyright of the game, spelling *Sega Corporation, 2005*.

## 2) Visual & Verbal Register – Connotation

Initial shots involving the buildings and the short-circuiting neon lights give the viewer insight into the general location and tone of the commercial. By the bright lights luminating from the darker buildings, it becomes easily discernible that the commercial takes

place during the night. The neon lights short-circuiting give the viewer the impression that something is not quite right, a certain feeling of uneasiness.

As seen on image 37, the shot of the man in sunshades that we see at the beginning of the video gives the customer the impression that either he might be the cause for the short-circuiting of the neon-lights, or at the very least, have some sort of relation to them. The commercial shows the man with a serious face, not showing much emotion, and this transmits to the viewer the message that this man is to be feared. The addition of the neon-lights short-circuiting seems to be a metaphorical response to this.

The glass breaking on the floor also is another representation of the fear caused by the man in shades' group, just like the neon-lights from earlier. In addition, we see a black shoe breaking the glass, and that shoe most likely belongs to either the man in shades, or one of the members of his group. This further cements the idea that the man and his group are people that should be fretted and that they impose dominance.

The glass pieces that are broken in the ad are also accompanied by a rose petal. This is also another representation of the fear imposed by the group of men, and it could also have the meaning that even the most beautiful object cannot oppose the group of men. The rose is normally seen as an icon for beauty.

What adds on to this are the reactions of the suited man and the two women beside him that we see later in the ad. The man, while giving a discontent face, does not move, showing little confrontation towards the man in shades and his group. The two women are seen close to the man, and touching parts of his body, most likely to have a sense of safety.

Before seeing the man and his two accompanying women, we see two small sequences containing various names written in Japanese characters. For the first screenshot, it says that the product's scenario supervisor will be Hase Seishu. Hase Seishu is a Japanese novelist, known for his various crime novels revolving around the *yakuza*.

With the second screenshot of names, we see the names of various Japanese actors, with the one taking up most of the screen being that of Tetsuya Watari. He was a Japanese actor recognized for his role in many crime films like *Tokyo Drifter*. Having the biggest name is most likely representative of him being the actor who has contributed the most to the product. The four names on the side are also from other actors and voice actors. The first

one is of Junko Mihara, who was an actress at the time and known for her debut in the drama *Kinpachi-sensei*. The second name is of Yoshiaki Fujiwara, who is a Japanese professional wrestler, but also had participated in some Japanese dramas as well. Takaya Kuroda and Rie Kugimiya, the last two names, are more recognized for their voice acting works on *anime*, video games and drama CDs. The names that are presented give the audience an idea that this product will feature an all-star cast, and that it will also have a *yakuza* related story due to Hase Seishu's previous works.

The last few parts of the commercial have the camera being recorded from below, and we start to see that the man in shades is being accompanied by various people. Judging from the brief parts where we see the other members of this group, they all have similar facial expressions to the leading man, lacking emotion and being serious in nature. The low angle of the camera makes the group of men seem superior to the audience, giving them more value than the average person. The group being composed of various people also gives the message of "strength in numbers".

The last major shot of the commercial, before the game's title is revealed, involves the group of men stopping and facing off against a man in white clothing. Once again, the battle is viewed from a perspective that makes both the group of men and the man in white clothing seem superior to the audience. The man in white is given more attention here since he occupies more space in this final shot.

Another aspect that contrasts the group of men and the man in white is their different colors. All the men in the group are dressed in black clothing, while the other man is dressed in white. Black and white are often seen as contrasting colors, due to them being the two opposite neutral colors. Black can signify darkness and evil spirits, while white is seen as pure, contrasting with each other (Sakurai, 2021).

The opposing parties also contrast in how many people they consist of. There are at least more than five people in the group, while the man in white is by himself. The two parties making eye contact also gives the audience the idea that a confrontation, whether verbal or physical, will be happening.

The final screen of the commercial tells the audience what the product is, a video game made by *Sega* called *Ryu ga Gotoku* (the Japanese title for the first *Yakuza* game),

releasing on December 12<sup>th</sup>. The game's age rating is *CERO 18*, which means that the game can only be played for people 18 years and older. The game also has a website, which allows the customer to look up more information about the title.

### 3) Audio Register

During the entire commercial, we hear the main theme song of the first *Yakuza* game, "Receive You". The song starts with the sounds of traditional Japanese drums, and it is then followed by an electric guitar and distorted vocals. Despite it being sung by Japanese artists, the lyrics are in English.

The sounds of short-circuiting are heard when they're accompanied by the short-circuits that appear on-screen. When the broken glass is first seen on-screen, no sounds are heard, but instead they are heard when the shoe stumps on the broken glass later in the commercial. Additionally, during the brief name showcase seen in the middle of the commercial, sounds of lightning storms are heard.

Throughout the commercial, there is a voiceover of an unseen man. That man is never seen, nor does it have a character associated with it, since none of the characters seen in the commercial move their mouths. Due to the man speaking Japanese, I had to consult a third party to translate what was being said.

When the name showcase appears on-screen, the man says: "Can't games step in further?", which can be interpreted as "Can't games get more exciting?". Following that, the man says, "For those who have had enough and are tired of games". And finally, when the game's logo appears on-screen, he says its name "*Like a Dragon*".

The music stops when the game's logo appears, and a dramatic sound effect is heard when the game's logo comes into view.

#### 4) Relationship between the registers

By linking the visual, verbal and audio registers, we can reach many conclusions about what this commercial is saying to the audience. First, it can be concluded that this video game claims to surpass other games, in terms of excitement and ambition. By claiming that this is a game for those “who are tired of games”, it could imply that games have gotten stale and that this one will break that mold. By presenting the commercial in a live action setting and not showing any in-game footage, it complements what the man is saying in the background. By giving an additional notion that this game will be realistic, it will make people think that it’s not a video game, and even people who are tired of the medium won’t get tired of this one.

In the live action setting itself, while it’s not explicitly stated in any part of the commercial, many Japanese people watching the video will recognize the man in sunshades and his group as being members of the *yakuza*. The deadpan expressions and the way they’re dressed help make the audience make that connection. Additionally, in the middle of the advertisement, when two images of various names are being shown, one of the names showcased is “Hase Seishu”, who is known for his *yakuza*-related crime novels. For the members of the audience watching the advertisement, that is another connection that they can make to the group.

The commercial also makes it clear that the group is a “force to be reckoned with”, as the environment around it is seen being destroyed while the group passes by it, and most people outside of the group are shown being fearful. The broken environment is a physical representation that the group is not to be messed with, and the black shoe stomping on top of the glass gives more confirmation to that notion.

Besides the *yakuza* and the man in white clothing, the people that react to the presence of the former are two women and a man. The two women surrounding the man are the only women present in the entire commercial, and just like how the *yakuza*’s clothing gives the audience the idea that they’re *yakuza*, the outfits these two women wear give off the idea that they’re hostesses. The table close by them, which contains a few drinks and other miscellaneous objects, also gives the viewer the notion that they’re in a club. The sequence in the middle of the commercial is short, but it makes it clear to the audience that the *yakuza* are passing by a hostess club, and some people are being caught in the middle.

The two women hold on to the man, giving the impression that if something were to happen, they would cling on to him for safety. This, combined with the commercial depicting women as hostesses, a job with the objective of giving pleasure to a man, is reflective of the gender representation seen in many Japanese commercials. In the media field of Japan, it's still common for male-dominant situations to exist and for the ideal role of women to be in men's dreams, either in pleasure or by taking care of household chores (Ogawa, 2020).

Women are normally represented in Japanese commercials as weak, passive and very dependent, while men are seen as dominant and aggressive (Indrowaty et al, 2020). While there is no physical confrontation between any person showcased in the commercial, the last shot of the commercial does imply a confrontation of some kind, represented by the distance between the groups and the colors associated with them.

The man in white clothing shown at the end of the commercial is shown to be the only person that can stand up to the *yakuza* group. His color scheme contrasts with the black seen in the suits of the group, and his firm posture makes it clear to the viewer that he can stand up to them. In traditional Japanese culture, white was used as the color of the sacred and was not much used in ordinary situations. Black was used in *montsuki*, black garments with a family crest in white, and were seen as dignified and formal. (Hibi & Fukuda, 2000). While the men in suits seen in the commercial are not wearing *montsuki*, the suits they're wearing also present them as formal.

Additionally, right before the commercial ends, the *yakuza* group stops in place when they reach the man in white clothing, so it's likely that they would have a conversation.

The main message of this commercial is to transmit the existence of a game called *Like a Dragon* to the audience, and that this game will be a realistic representation of the *yakuza* life. Having authors such as Hase Seishu on-board, alongside actors like Tetsuya Watari, who are well known for media related to the *yakuza*, gives the audience reassurance that the video game *Sega* is selling will meet those expectations. Due to the high representation of Japanese men in the advertisement and the game's age rating, it's clear that the game's target audience is of Japanese male adults.

### 3.2. *Yakuza 4* television commercial

#### 1) Visual & Verbal Register – Denotation

The commercial starts with four symbols of different colors appearing on the screen. These symbols are, from left to right, a green triangle, a red circle, a blue cross and a pink square. Right next to these symbols, we see a small, restricted trademark logo. Underneath these symbols, we see text that says, “SOFTWARE FOR PS3”.

We then cut to a shot of a Japanese girl wearing a yellow bikini with white horizontal stripes, looking directly at the screen. The girl has light brown hair that is tied up. She occupies most of the screen as she does a low crouch. On the right side of the screen, we see a bar with different colors. These colors are, from top to bottom: pink, purple, violet, dark blue and light blue. At the bottom of the bar, we see a small red figure in the shape of a heart, that is constantly moving in a pounding-like motion. We also see a thin horizontal yellow line near the bottom of the purple section of the bar. On top of the bar, we see some white text saying “score” and “13000”, surrounded by a pinkish glow. The text saying “score” is smaller than the number on the right side of it. The numbers transform from “13000” to “13100”, and the yellow line on the bar rises a bit but is remaining at the bottom of the purple section of the bar.

We then cut to another shot of a girl and a man sitting on a white couch. The man is seen on the right side of the screen and wears a crimson suit with very thin vertical white stripes. The suit only covers the sides of the shirt he wears underneath, and the black shirt also exposes part of his chest. We can also see a belt at the bottom of his shirt, also black colored. In addition, the man possesses a very thin collar surrounding his neck, with a golden circular object in the middle of it. His hair is dark brown and flows towards the back of his head. While he is facing towards the screen, his face is seen from the side, looking at the woman on the right side of the screen.



Image 59 – A shot of the *Yakuza 4* commercial, featuring a man and a woman sitting on a couch.

The woman sitting beside him, occupying most of the left side of the screen, has light brown hair tied into a bun. She's wearing a white dress and has her hands clamped together. There are also many hearts that surround her, constantly appearing and disappearing. They are colored pink, and their sizes differ slightly between each other. She moves slightly back from the man on the right.

On the top left of the screen, we see ten small hearts separated into two groups of five that are distanced slightly apart from each other. Out of the ten hearts present, six of them are bright pink colored, while the last four are colored grey. The sixth heart, and the first of the second group is seen growing bigger and smaller, in a pounding-like motion.

On the bottom of the screen, we see text divided into two sections. The top section is smaller and reads "R i o". The bottom section of the text is larger and roughly translates to: "Haha, so cute! I want to see cream in your mouth, Akiyama-san!".

In the background of the shot, we see two other couples in the distance sitting in their own couches, and we see a piano on the right side of the screen. Some blue lights emanate in the background, separated by rocky black pillars.

The video transitions to a sequence of another man and another woman with microphones in their hands. Due to the microphones being in their right and left hands

respectively, their opposing hands are open. The sides of those hands connect and rise towards the top part of the screen.

The man, who is on the right side, is wearing a silver suit, and a red shirt with white buttons. He has little facial hair on his jaw and has his hair pointed up. The woman on his left side is seen wearing a strapless dress. The part covering her chest is colored black, while the section below has a leopard-like pattern. The woman is smaller than the man and possesses a bracelet on her left hand (from her point of view) and a small collar around her neck. Both accessories are golden. Her hair is tied up in the form of a ponytail, but towards her right side.

The background possesses multiple buildings and has multi-colored lights flashing slowly. A bridge can also be seen on the left side of the screen.

Following that is a sequence of the same man in the silver suit from earlier walking in the middle of a path, where both sides are filled with various *pachinko* machines. We see the man's back this time and see that he also possesses silver pants. Some of the machines are empty while others have people interacting with them.

From the sequence of the girl in the bikini up until this sequence, we saw black text on the bottom that read "Zeebra, RYO the SKYWALKER, Mummy-D, DJ Hasebe", with a music note at the beginning of the text, if read from left to right.

The next sequence of the commercial sees us watching the same man as before, but now with a light-blue robe-like outfit, jumping up and using a table tennis racket to strike a ball. In the next shot, we see the ball bouncing on top of a woman's chest. That woman is wearing a similar robe to the man's but is colored pink instead. She is also using a table tennis racket but does not strike the ball back. We also see a pink glow surrounding the screen when the ball strikes on top of the woman's chest.



Image 60 – An image from the *Yakuza 4* commercial depicting the woman in the pink garb having a ball bounce off from her chest.

In the following sequence, we see the same man, now back in the same silver outfit as previously, performing a reverse body slam on a man in a dark brown suit and with sunshades. The two men are inside a giant building, with multiple floors, surrounded by some metal construction bars and escalators. The sequence is divided by two shots: one with the silver-suit man picking up the other man, and the second one with the brown-suit man being slammed against the ground. The second shot has the camera focusing more on the man being slammed, with blood coming out of his mouth.

Afterwards, we see a different man, who is located on the right side of the screen, clapping his hands together, while he faces up and then down. The man is wearing a dark brown suit and a red tie, with a white shirt underneath. The woman on the left side is also clapping hands with him, although in a calmer manner. She's wearing a white dress with a black belt, and around her neck, she has a choker. Her hair is tied up, but her ponytail is curlier than the other women shown in the ad. Both are sitting in a pink couch, and the screen has many white glows surrounding the man and the woman.

In the next shot, we see a man with long black hair and a green jacket using a fishing rod. In the background, we see a huge body of water, and on the right side, we see some red

and white vertical structures, and some smaller buildings in front of them. After that shot, we see another shot of the same location, but now with a different camera perspective, seeing a sword fish being caught by the fishing rod. In the background, we can now see some colored containers to the left side of the screen, and we can see a building and some construction materials on the right side. On the bottom part of the screen, we see a portion of the body of water from earlier, and a brown wall with a horizontal line on top, divided by black and yellow coloring.

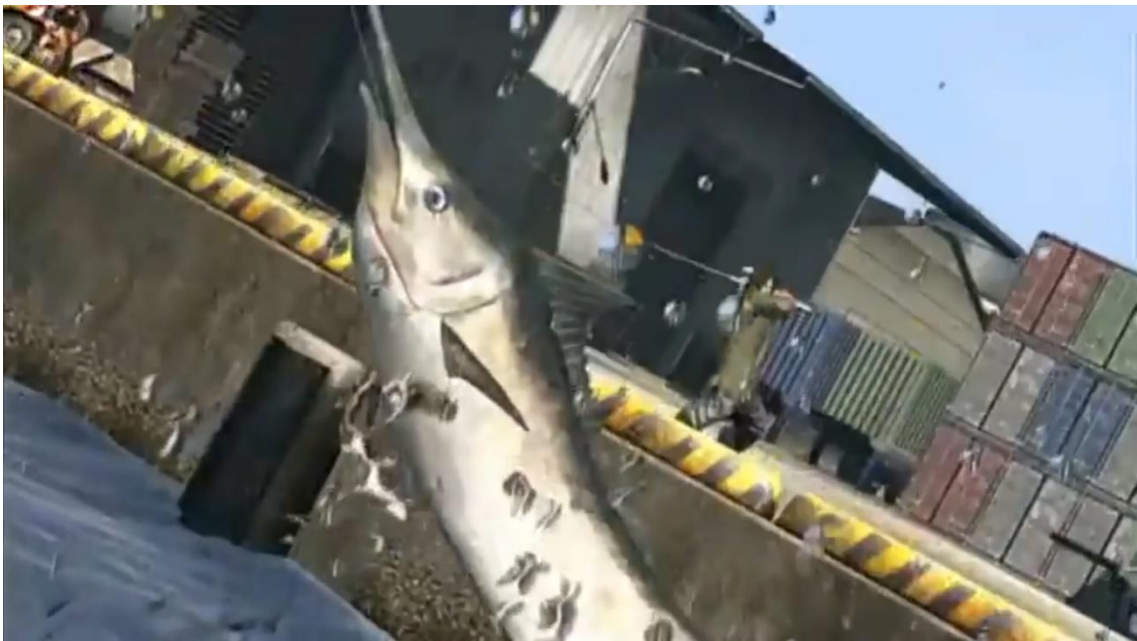


Image 61 – A screenshot from the *Yakuza 4* commercial, depicting a man wearing a green jacket catching a sword fish with a fishing rod.

In the penultimate sequence of this commercial, we see a young girl wearing a blue skirt and a white shirt jumping. She's wearing a red tie and has long black hair. While jumping, she is doing a pose that involves one of her legs and one of her arms sticking out, while she's holding a microphone with her other hand. We see a blue background on the top, and on the bottom and the sides, we see many lights of differing shades of yellow. On the very top of the background, we see some bigger lights pointing down at the stage the girl is jumping from.

Following that, we see the man in the silver suit from earlier walking alongside a woman in a trench coat in the middle of a street. We only see their backs, as they're walking forward, from the perspective shown in the commercial. Additionally, we also see other

people walking on the street, whether in the same direction or the opposite one. While that's happening, the game's logo appears on the left side of the screen, translated as "*Like a Dragon 4: Successor of the Legend*". On the right side, we see text that, from top to bottom, translates as: "Releasing on March 18<sup>th</sup>", "Price: 7,800 yen (Tax included)", "ryu-gotoku.com", and on the bottom of all of that, we see an icon saying *CERO D*. On the top right corner of the screen, we see some smaller text that translates as "Software for PlayStation 3".

While the camera is zooming out on the street, we see a sign of the location of the street, and all the text seen on the foreground of that sequence gets replaced by the *Sega* logo, thus ending the advertisement.

## 2) Visual & Verbal Register – Connotation

The multi-colored symbols at the beginning are the four main symbols that represent the *PlayStation* brand, and they are the four face buttons seen on every *PlayStation* controller. And in relation with the text at the bottom that says, "SOFTWARE FOR **PS3**", it means that the product the advertisement is promoting is playable on a *PlayStation* system, that being the *PlayStation 3*, since "PS3" are the initials of the console's name.

Considering the slow motion of the woman in the yellow bikini, and how she is facing and moving towards the screen, one can suspect that the scene is being seen in a first-person perspective. This means that it is being viewed from the eyes of someone else. The multi-colored bar and the score present on the right-side of the screen help give the audience an idea that this might be part of an activity present in a video game, also known as a minigame. Scores are a quantifiable way for video games to keep track of a player's skill. Since the number grows from "13000" to "13100" and the yellow horizontal line on the bar rises, the audience can conclude that the player is succeeding in the minigame.

Additionally, the way the woman is dressed and looks at the screen gives the audience the impression that this minigame is about a woman giving pleasure to the player, via an interactive way. The pink background and the pink glow surrounding the score also help cement this notion, since pink is normally related to the idea of love and happiness (Sakurai, 2021).

The following sequence also expresses similar ideas of love, but in a different way. Due to featuring a man and woman looking at each other and the woman talking, one can suspect that both are having a conversation. The woman is seen having hearts around her and considering the number of hearts on the top left corner of the screen, with the sixth one pounding, the audience can conclude that she's feeling love, or at very least, happiness during the conversation. Hearts as a symbol are symbolically related to the idea of love. The hostess also exclaims how she wants to see Akiyama-san with cream in his mouth. Considering the person she is talking to, the audience can deduce that the man in the red suit is Akiyama. In that same text box, we also see the name of who's talking. That name is Rio, and the audience can infer that the woman's name is Rio. The background shows other couples having conversations with each other, so the audience can infer that the place these people are in is a location where people can talk to each other.

With the next scene, we see a man and a woman holding microphones, and seeing as how they're also moving their mouths, it is implied that they're singing. Considering the facial and body expressions of the scene, the audience can also infer that the couple is enjoying it. With the city in the background, it seems like they might be singing in the middle of a street, close to a river, considering the bridge we see in the top left corner.

Just like the woman in the previous scene, this woman is also very well dressed for the occasion, as seen by her complex dress. Considering that many of the women seen throughout the commercial are generally well dressed, many of the Japanese people watching the commercial can conclude that they may be a hostess from a hostess club.

During the following sequence, we see the same man in the silver suit walking through a path with *pachinko* machines on each side. The audience can infer that, due to the amount of machines present, this is a *pachinko* parlor, or at the very least, a location where you can gamble. We also see people occupying some machines on both sides. While they are not all occupied, considering that many of the people present are wearing suits, the audience can conclude that the game's world has working people who like to gamble as a side-activity. People in suits are normally associated with people who work for companies, and this is no different in Japan.



Image 62 – The sequence of the *Yakuza 4* commercial where the man in the silver suit is seen walking through a path filled with slot machines on both sides.

In the next section of the commercial, the audience can conclude that the man with the table tennis ball is hitting it with extreme force, due to the camera angles provided that emphasize the pose the man is performing. The blurry background of the scene also gives the perception of a fast move. With the presence of both the ball and the racket, in addition to the small table, the audience can infer that the man is playing table tennis.

In the next scene, the video shows a woman on the receiving end since the ball that the man hit with his racket lands on top of the woman's chest. Since they're playing table tennis and the woman did not hit the ball back, the people watching the commercial can see that the man's strike was so powerful that the woman couldn't hit it back. The woman's pose with her elbows being pulled back gives the audience the perception that she was defenseless against the man's ball strike. The pink glow surrounding her could communicate a similar meaning as previously, the one of love. But due to the woman's reaction to the event, the audience could infer that this feeling is closer to pleasure than standard love.

Both the man and the woman present in the sequence are wearing very similar robes, with the man wearing a blue one and the woman wearing a pink one. Blue and pink are normally associated by people as the colors related to men and women, respectively (Raevskiy et al, 2022). With the robes they're wearing, in contrast to the suits and dresses

seen previously, the audience can conclude that they're in a different environment than the ones viewed before. Since they're wearing only robes, the audience can speculate that they may have come out of a shower or another activity that involved them wearing robes afterwards.

In the next sequence, with the man doing a backwards body slam on another man, it gives the audience an idea that this game also contains a certain amount of violence and combat in it. The blood that is briefly shown coming out of the man is also indicative of the level of violence seen in the game. This also gives the notion to the audience that in this game, you'll be able to fight other people and perform similar moves. The man of the silver suit is present in most scenes, therefore the audience can conclude that he's one of the playable characters, if not the only one, in this product. With both men being inside of a large building, it can be concluded that this building will be one of the locations the player can fight in, and the escalators seen on the side allow for transportation to an upper level of the building, like the ones seen in many shopping malls.

Afterwards, we see another man clapping his hands alongside another woman, who is dressed similarly to other women seen in the commercial, giving the audience the idea that she's another hostess. The pink couches seen in the background and the happiness seen on the faces of both characters give the audience the idea that they're in a similar location to the red-suited man and the hostess seen earlier in the commercial. The many white glows filling the screen give the audience the idea that the couple is feeling positive emotions, like happiness or love. Both clapping also further cements this notion.

In the following scene, we see a man in a green jacket using a fishing rod to catch a swordfish, giving the audience the idea that fishing may be available in the game. The man's green winter coat is distinct amongst the other characters seen in the commercial, as it does not give the notion of the same type of class the others had. Since it's a brief sequence, it's hard for the audience to focus on the man. Since the commercial puts a heavy emphasis on the fish he caught, and that the fish occupies a good portion of the screen, it's clear that the fish is of a large size. In the background, the audience can briefly see the man's pose as he's catching the fish. Both of his legs are separated from each other and slightly kneeling. His arms are holding the fishing rod and pulling it back to get the fish out of the water. The pose the man is doing gives the audience the idea that the man is strong enough to catch a

fish of that size. The background of the scene also gives the audience the location the man is catching the fish. The location contains objects found in construction sites such as the stone tablets seen on the top left corner of the screen. The red and white poles and the multi-colored containers further cement to the audience that the man is catching fish at a port.

Following that, we see a girl jumping up while holding a microphone in one of her hands. Since her outfit consists of a blue skirt, and white shirt with a red tie, the audience can conclude that the girl is in middle school, since this outfit is the same as the ones worn by Japanese female middle-school students. This also gives the audience the idea that the girl is much younger than anyone else seen in the commercial. Since she's holding a microphone just like the man and woman seen earlier in the ad, the people watching it can infer that this girl can also sing in the game. The stage in the background is full of bright lights focusing on her. This gives the notion that she might be singing in a dedicated stage, due to its visual similarity to the ones seen in real life.

In the final shot of the commercial, we see the man in the silver suit walking alongside a woman in a trench coat in the middle of a street. Once again, due to the silver-suited man's constant presence in the video, the audience can infer the character's importance in the game being sold. Since the audience only sees the woman from the back, it's hard for the audience to pay much attention to her presence, especially because this is where the commercial concludes and gives the viewer text to describe the product in the question. The logo on the left side is of the game being sold. The translated title of the game is *Like a Dragon 4: Successor of the Legend*. With the title, the audience can conclude a few things: the game is a sequel to the 3<sup>rd</sup> game in the *Like a Dragon* series; and the game follows a successor of the legend seen in previous titles. Players familiar with the series can conclude that the "legend" is most likely the protagonist of the previous games, *Kazuma Kiryu*, due to his many achievements seen in those titles.

On the right side, we see text that gives the audience some additional information: the game is releasing on March 18<sup>th</sup>; the game will cost 7,980 yen; the website "ryu-ga-gotoku.com" is available for those who want to find out more information about the title; and that the game's age rating is *CERO D*, which is the age rating used for Japanese games that are appropriate for people aged 17 and up.

As the camera of the background pans up, the audience can see a sign above the street. This sign tells the viewers what place this street belongs to, being from *Kamurocho*. As that happens, the text in front is replaced with the *Sega* logo, who is recognized in the country as a video game developer and the creator of the *Yakuza* series. This confirms to the audience that the company is once again involved with this title.



Image 63 – The final shot seen in the *Yakuza 4* commercial, detailing the game’s name, release date, price, website, and age rating.

### 3) Audio Register

At the start of the commercial, there is a sound effect that is being played when the colored symbols appear. It plays like a short melody, creating a jingle of sorts. Afterwards, we start the commercial proper, with an excerpt of the song “Butterfly City”, the theme that plays during in the Japanese version of the opening of *Yakuza 4*. The song is best described as a rap that mixes both English and Japanese lyrics, with a bigger focus on the latter. The song is played throughout the rest of the commercial.

Being that this commercial shows gameplay from the game, multiple sound effects that can be heard in *Yakuza 4* are also heard here. During the first sequence, we hear a woman

giggling, and in the second sequence, we hear another giggle, but the laughs louder and more noticeable.

In the sequence where the man in the silver-suit is seen walking by *pachinko* machines, the viewer can also barely make out the noises heard during it. The song that plays during the commercial drowns out these sound effects, but we can barely hear sounds representative of the ones heard in *pachinko* machines.

Following that, in the sequence where a man and a woman are playing table tennis, the man can be heard yelling a battle cry of sorts when hitting the ball back at the woman. When the woman bounces off her chest, a little moan can be heard. And after that, when the man is performing a backwards body slam on another man, he is also heard yelling a similar battle cry.

Afterwards, during the sequence where a man in a brown-suit is clapping alongside another woman, we can hear a woman giggling. And in the next sequence, where we see a man in the green jacket fishing, we once again hear a battle cry.

We hear a chime sound effect when we see the little girl with the microphone jumping, and to conclude the commercial, we see a dramatic sound effect when the game's logo appears on-screen.

Just like the previous analyzed commercial, we also hear a man talking in the background, throughout the video. The same third party from earlier also helped translate what the man is saying. In order, what he says roughly translates to: "Noisy drinking party!", "Let's madly enjoy this moment now!" and "Let's go, gorgeous! Let's go, happy!". It should be noted that the words "happy" and "gorgeous" were said in English contrary to the rest. Finally, when the game's logo appears on-screen, the man reads out its title, in this case roughly translating to "*Like a Dragon 4: Successor of the Legend*".

#### 4) Relationship between the registers

Many of the sequences shown in the commercial showcase an interaction between a man and a woman, with many of them being shown either with beautiful dresses or in perverse situations. Most of the women present are shown to be part of hostess clubs which, as mentioned earlier in this thesis, are locations where a man can receive romantic or sexual pleasure from a woman. The first sequence of the commercial alone is enough to set the tone of the rest of the commercial.

This commercial also, if indirectly, continues one of the themes talked about in the last commercial analyzed, which is the representation of women in Japanese television commercials. It expands on this theme exponentially, by constantly putting women in a role that fits a man's dream, as a romantic or sexual companion. The one exception to the role is that last girl focused in the commercial, the schoolgirl jumping with the microphone in her hand. They would recognize that this girl does not transmit the same message as previously, mainly due to her looks and the perceived age of the character.

The commercial showcases a wide variety of activities. Interacting with women at hostess clubs is one of them, but the ad also shows fishing, fighting, karaoke, table tennis and *pachinko* machines. Although the lines that the narrator speaks throughout the ad seem to be more focused on the first activity. Lines such as "Let's go gorgeous, let's go happy!" transmit the audience the message that these gorgeous ladies will give you a happy time. Of course, considering the amount of content that is shown on-screen, the narrator could have been saying that the many activities offered in the game will give you a fun time and that you should "madly enjoy this moment now". However, due to the higher number of sequences focusing on the interaction with women, it feels like the narrator's messages tend to follow under the pleasure of interacting with beautiful women.

During the commercial, many sound effects heard during different sequences are drown out by the main song present in the commercial. The black text on the bottom that appears during the first few sequences of the advertisement is related to the current song, due to the music note present at the beginning of the text. That text is supposed to present the artists behind the song present in the commercial. Many other Japanese commercials contain a similar way of crediting musicians. Additionally, the song itself is a mixture of Japanese and English words, despite being sung by Japanese singers.

The narrator of the commercial also uses two English words in the middle of his sentences, “happy” and “gorgeous”. With the context of the commercial, it’s most likely that he’s using these words to describe the various hostesses that are seen in the video. The shift from speaking Japanese to describing someone with an English word makes the word stand out to native Japanese speakers.

In Douglas Goldstein’s thesis “The Use of English in Japanese Advertising” (2011), he argues that the use of English in the Japanese language can have both a decorative and a communicative function. If it only has the first function, then it isn’t meant to be understood, only functioning visually or in this case, audibly. If it has the second function, then it’s supposed to be understood and there exist English words that have this function in the Japanese language. In this case, the song played in the background only has a decorative function, since it only adds texture to the commercial and isn’t supposed to be understood. The use of sound effects and the narrator in the background further cement this notion. However, the use of the English words “happy” and “gorgeous” used by the narrator to also have a communicative function, as they are used as adjective to describe someone.

Unlike the last commercial analyzed, due to how it looks, most people could conclude that this is part of a video game. Elements such as text-boxes, the user-interface and the overall look of the characters present give this indication. The beginning and final elements of the commercial firmly cement this, with it being a piece of software for PS3 (short for *PlayStation 3*), and that it’s called *Like a Dragon 4: Successor of the Legend*, and that it was made by the company *Sega*, known for its video games.

## Chapter 4: Survey results

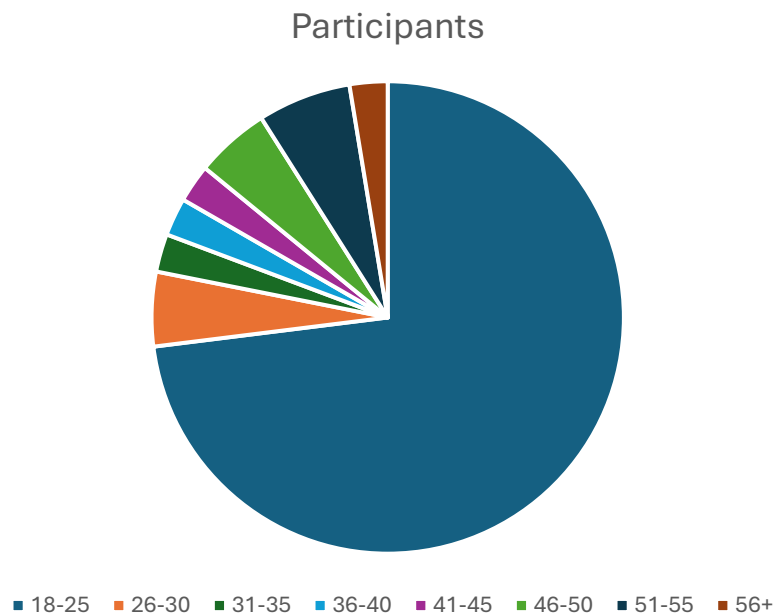
### 4.1. Method

#### *Participants*

The sample consists of 78 participants, with the majority indicating an age between 18 and 25 years (N = 57; 73.1%). In addition, 4 (5.1%) of them reported an age between 26 and 30 years, 2 (2.6%) between 31 and 35 years, 2 (2.6%) between 36 and 40 years, 2 (2.6%) between 41 and 45, 4 (5.1%) between 46 and 50 years, 5 (6.4%) between 51 and 55 and 2 (2.6%) an age of 56 and above. As for the gender of the participants, the sample comprised 42 (53.8%) women, 35 (44.9%) men and 1 (1.3%) non-binary person. All the respondents were also of Japanese origin, even if some were residing outside of Japan, as seen below in Table 1.

Figure 1.

Graph demonstrating the ratio of participants in the survey by age.



In terms of the prefecture of Japan they were currently residing in (from a total of 47 prefectures), most participants reside in the Akita prefecture (N = 22; 28.2%). In addition, 11 (14.1%) participants reside in the Tokyo prefecture and 9 (11.5%) in the Kanagawa prefecture. The number of participants per prefecture can be seen in the table below.

Table 1.

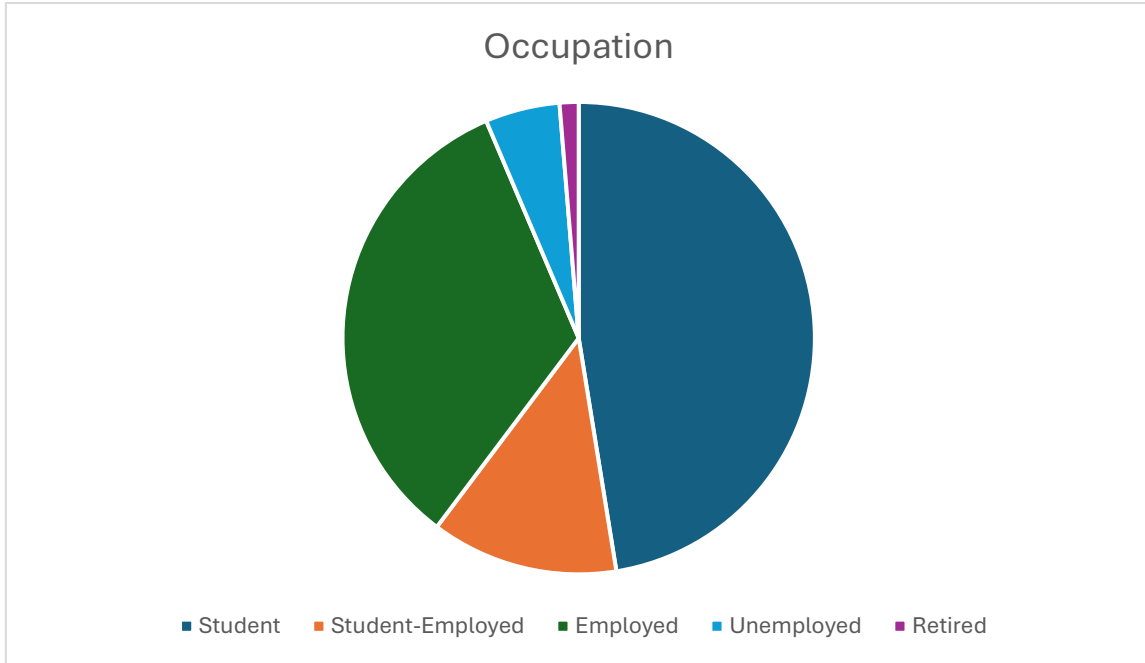
Number of participants per prefecture.

Japanese Prefecture	N (%)
Akita	22 (28,2%)
Tokyo	11 (14,1%)
Kanagawa	9 (11,5%)
Chiba	5 (6,4%)
Saitama	5 (6,4%)
Hokkaido	5 (6,4%)
Aichi	4 (5,1%)
Osaka	3 (3,8%)
Okinawa	3 (3,8%)
Ishikawa	1 (1,3%)
Gifu	1 (1,3%)
Kyoto	1 (1,3%)
Hiroshima	1 (1,3%)
Kagawa	1 (1,3%)
Aomori	1 (1,3%)
Tochigi	1 (1,3%)
Gunma	1 (1,3%)
Living Abroad (i.e. outside of Japan)	3 (3,8%)

Regarding the participants' occupations, most reported to be students (N = 37; 47.4%). 26 (33.3%) participants reported being employed, 10 (12.8%) being students who were also employed, 4 (5.1%) were unemployed and 1 (1.3%) to be retired.

Figure 2.

Graph representing the ratio of participants in the survey by occupation.



### *Instruments*

To provide this thesis with a quantitative study, a survey was carried out to be answered by Japanese people over the age of 18. The survey covered aspects related to the previous three chapters of this work. Each of these topics was separated into its own sections.

The first section was related to the red-light district of Kabukicho, and it had two questions. The first question asked: “Have you ever been to Kabukicho?”. The participants answered by selecting the option “Yes” or “No”. The second question asked: “What elements stuck out to you in Kabukicho?”. This question had six default answers and the option for participants to write out their answers. The default answers presented were: “Kabukicho Tower”, “Karaoke”, “Hostess Clubs”, “Slot machines and Pachinkos”, “Arcades” and “The many restaurants”. These answers were chosen as the default due to their prevalence in the fieldwork conducted in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

The second section was related to the *Yakuza* series. For the survey, the series was named *Like a Dragon*, corresponding to its original Japanese title. The first question asked:

“Have you heard of the “Like a Dragon” video game series?”. The participants answered by selecting the option “Yes” or “No”. The second question was presented in the same style and asked: “Have you played any of the “Like a Dragon” games?”. The third question asked the participants who had answered “Yes” to the previous question what *Yakuza* games they had played and was presented in the form of a long form answer. The final question of this section asked:” What sticks out to you the most about the red-light district of Kamurocho?”. Similarly to the last question in the previous section, there were seven default answers and the option for participants to write out their answers. The default answers were “Millenium Tower”, “Club Sega”, “The Pachinko and Slot Machines”, “The Bars”, “The Restaurants”, “The Story Surrounding It” and “Don Quijote”. These answers were chosen as the default due to their prominence during the analysis presented in Chapter 1. Additionally, the bars and the restaurants were separated due to their difference in presentation and how the player interacts with them.

The third section was dedicated to questions surrounding the two advertisements discussed in Chapter 3. The participants were asked to watch the first advertisement, 30 seconds long, through a link to its YouTube video (provided in the survey). The first question asked: “Do you think the commercial presented the game well?”. The participants answered by selecting the option “Yes” or “No”. The second question was presented in the same style and asked: “Do you think the commercial presented the main location of the game well?”. The third question asked:” What was the thing that stuck out to you the most in this ad?”. This question had six default answers and the option for participants to write out their answer. The default answers were “The main group of people”, “The person at the end”, “The game’s title”, “The man with the women on his side”, “The glass shattering” and “The buildings”. These answers were chosen as the default due to their prominence in the advertisement, as seen in Chapter 3.

In the fourth section, the participants were asked to watch a second advertisement, 15 seconds long, also through a link to its YouTube video (provided in the survey). The first question asked: “Do you think the commercial presented the game well?”. The participants answered by selecting “Yes” or “No”. The second question was presented in the same style: “Do you think the commercial presented the activities in the game well?”. The third and last question asked: “What stuck out to you the most in this commercial?”. This question had six default answers and the option for participants to write out their answers. The default

answers were “The hostess”, “The woman in the bikini”, “The man and the woman singing karaoke”, “The man going through the slot machines”, “The fishing” and “The little girl singing”. These answers were chosen as the default ones due to their prominence in the advertisement, as seen in Chapter 3.

At the end of the survey, it was asked, in the style of an optional long-form answer, if the participants wished to add any further comments about the survey’s topics.

### *Data gathering*

About data gathering, the answers presented here were gathered through a survey conducted in *Google Forms*. The survey was distributed through four social media platforms (Instagram, Discord, Twitter/X and Reddit) and through distant messages sent to the investigator’s contacts, of people that were either Japanese or had Japanese acquaintances.

### *Data analysis*

To analyze the survey’s results, a descriptive analysis was conducted, presenting the number of answers per question and their respective percentage. In terms of the answers’ use, it is to be noted that one answer from the third question (i.e., “What was the thing that stuck out to you the most in this ad?”) of the second section (about the *Yakuza* video game series) of the survey was not considered, as only a “.” being was written on it. Additionally, in the “yes” or “no” questions of the advertisement sections, there was a focus on distinguishing between the people who had heard and played the *Yakuza* series and the people who had only heard about it.

For 2 of the 4 questions that had the option for a long-form open answer, their content was subjected to an inductive thematic analysis (Busch et al., 2012; Corbin & Strauss, 1990). It involved a segmentation of all of the written responses into units of meaning (i.e., singular propositions or categories) and a subsequent inductive categorization of each unit, with each category being given its description. The details of each category can be found in the annexes. This analysis resulted in two category systems, one for each question. These systems were validated independently, through the categorization of 14.3% (first question)

and 16.6% (second question) of the units by an independent analyst (with an agreement of 100%).

The other two long-form open questions of the survey didn't contain enough written answers that were related to the question at hand. Therefore, they were not subjected to thematic analysis.

At the end, many of the answers gathered were analyzed, by connecting them to Japanese society and customs, using many of the articles used throughout this thesis.

## 4.2. Results

### *First section – Red-light district of Kabukicho*

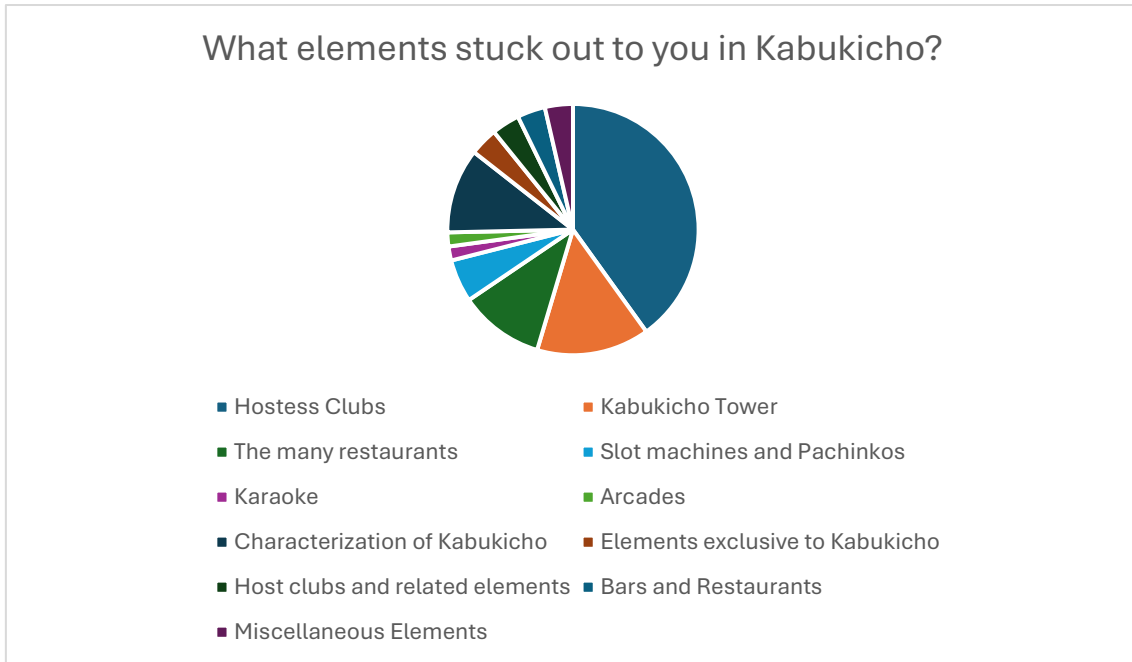
About the first section of the survey, when asked if they had ever been to the red-light district of Kabukicho (city of Shinjuku), in its first question, 47 (60.3%) participants answered "Yes", while the remaining 31 (39.7%) answered "No".

With regards to the second question of the section (i.e., "What elements stuck out to you in Kabukicho?"), only 55 (70.5%) participants answered this question. The most chosen from the default answers was "Hostess Clubs" (N = 22, 40%). Besides this, 8 (14.5%) participants answered "Kabukicho Tower", 6 (10.9%) answered "The many restaurants", 3 (5.5%) answered "Slot machines and Pachinkos", 1 (1.8%) answered "Karaoke" and another (1.8%) answered "Arcades".

Through the thematic analysis that was applied to the long-form open answers to this question, its 14 written responses were divided into 5 categories. The first category was named "Characterization of *Kabukicho*" (N = 6; 10.9%) (e.g. "Unsafe area", "Poor security"), the second category was named "Elements exclusive to *Kabukicho*" (N = 2; 3.6%) (e.g. "Kabukicho Entrance Sign"), the third "Host clubs and related elements" (N = 2; 3.6%) (e.g. "Host, Yakuza"), the fourth "Bars and Restaurants" (N = 2; 3.6%) (e.g. "Chinese Restaurant"), and the fifth was named "Miscellaneous Elements" (N = 2; 3.6%) (e.g. "Toho Cinemas"). The graph for all of the answers of this question can be seen below.

Figure 3.

Answers to the question “What elements stuck out to you in Kabukicho?”



*The second section – Yakuza video game series*

In the following section of the survey, which pertained to questions regarding the *Yakuza* video game series, when asked if they had ever heard of the series in question, 56 (71.8%) participants answered “Yes” and 22 (28.2%) answered “No”.

With regards to the second question, when asked if they had played any of the games from the series, 66 (84.6%) participants answered that they had not played any game (“No”), while 12 (15.4%) participants said they had played some game (“Yes”).

The following question, on what games from the *Yakuza* series, had a total of 12 eligible answers. 3 people mentioned only one game (25%), 1 person played 2 games (8,3%) and 2 people played 4 games (16,6%). 2 people played 5 games (16,6%), 1 person played 9 games (8,3%), 1 person played 10 games (8,3%), 1 person played 13 games (8,3%) and another person played 14 games (8,3%). In terms of the mentioned games, the answers are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

*Yakuza* video games mentioned in the survey.

Game	N (%)
<i>Yakuza</i>	6 (50%)
<i>Yakuza 2</i>	5 (41,6%)
<i>Like a Dragon Kenzan!</i>	1 (8,3%)
<i>Yakuza 3</i>	7 (58,3%)
<i>Yakuza 4</i>	6 (50%)
<i>Yakuza Dead Souls</i>	1 (8,3%)
<i>Yakuza 5</i>	7 (58,3%)
<i>Like a Dragon Ishin!</i>	3 (25%)
<i>Yakuza 0</i>	5 (41,6%)
<i>Yakuza Kiwami</i>	3 (25%)
<i>Yakuza 6: The Song of Life</i>	5 (41,6%)
<i>Yakuza Kiwami 2</i>	4 (33,3%)
<i>Judgement</i>	1 (8,3%)
<i>Yakuza: Like a Dragon</i>	3 (25%)
<i>Lost Judgement</i>	1 (8,3%)
<i>Like a Dragon Ishin Kiwami</i>	2 (16,6%)
<i>Like a Dragon Gaiden: The Man who Erased his Name</i>	2 (16,6%)
<i>Like a Dragon: Infinite Wealth</i>	3 (25%)

Finally, the last question of this section, which asked about what were the elements that stuck out the most in *Yakuza*'s red-light district of *Kamurocho*, had a total of only 40 (51.3%) answers.

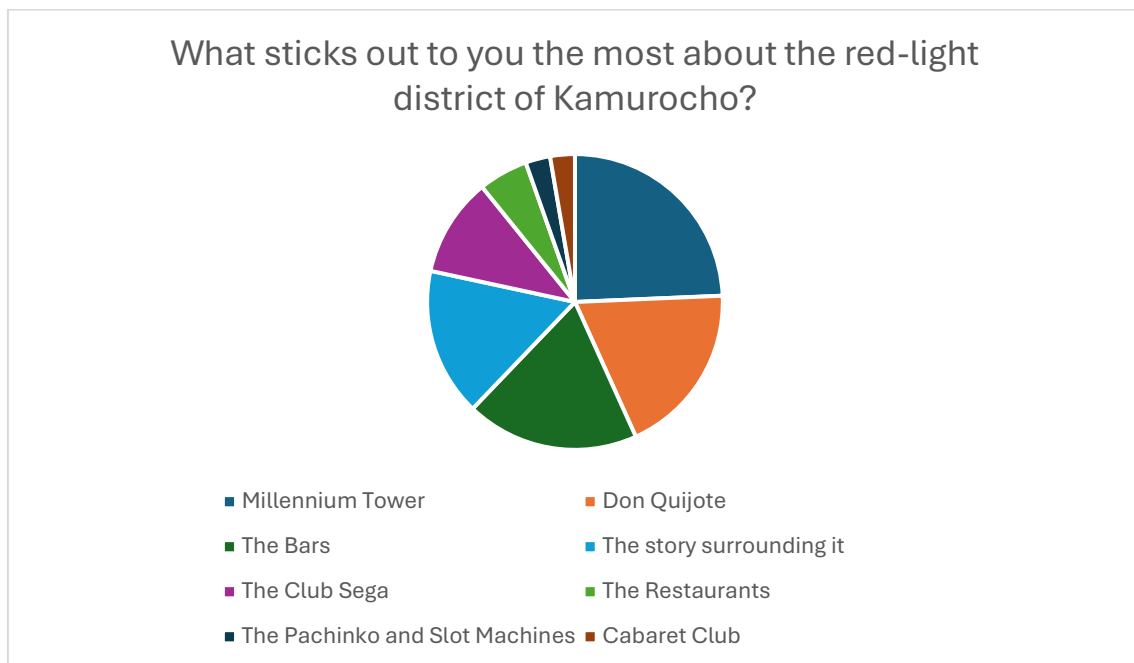
The most popular answer was "Millennium Tower" (N = 9; 22.5%). 7 participants voted for "Don Quijote" (17.5%), another 7 participants voted for "The Bars" (17.5%), and 6 participants voted for "The story surrounding it" (15%). 4 participants voted "The Club

Sega” (10%), 2 participants voted “The Restaurants” (5%) and 1 person voted “The Pachinko and Slot Machines” (2.5%).

From the four written answers gathered, three of them were discarded as they didn’t pertain to the question at hand. The remaining one was counted, “Cabaret Club” (N = 1; 2,5%).

Figure 4.

Answers to the question “What sticks out to you the most about the red-light district of Kamurocho?”



### *Third section – Commentary on two advertisements*

In the third section, which pertained to questions related to the two mentioned advertisements, when asked if the first commercial presented the game (i.e., the first *Yakuza* game) well, 41 (52.6%) participants answered “No” and 37 (47.4%) participants answer “Yes”. Of the 44 people that had only heard of the *Yakuza* series, but not played it, 23 (52,3%)

people answered “Yes” and 21 (47,7%) people answered “No”. From the 12 people who had heard and played the series, 6 (50%) people answered “Yes” and 6 (50%) people answered “No”.

In the second question, when asked if they thought the commercial presented the main location of the game well, 43 (55.1%) participants replied “Yes”, and 35 (44.9%) replied “No”. Of the 44 people that had only heard of the *Yakuza* series, but not played it, 26 (59,1%) people answered “Yes” and 18 (40,9%) people answered “No”. Of the 12 people that had heard and played the series, 5 (41,7%) people answered “Yes” and 7 (58,3%) people answered “No”.

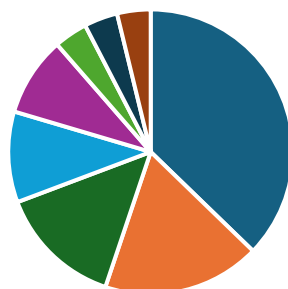
With regards to the third question, which asked what was the thing that had stuck out the most in the commercial, the most voted answer was “The main group of people” (N = 29; 37.2%). Besides this, 14 (17.9%) participants answered, “The game’s title”, 11 (14.1%) answered “The person at the end”, 8 (10.3%) answered “The glass shattering”, 7 (9%) answered “The man with the women on his side” and 3 (3.8%) answered “The buildings”.

Using the thematic analysis, a total of 6 written answers were divided into two categories. The first category was named “Elements of the setting of the commercial” (N = 3; 3.8%) (e.g. “Sparks and Dragon motif”) and the second category was named “Elements related to people” (N = 3; 3.8%) (e.g. “Actor”). The graph for all of the answers of this question can be seen below.

Figure 5.

Answers of the question “What was the thing that stuck out to you the most in this ad?”

What was the thing that stuck out to you the most in this ad?



- The main group of people
- The game's title
- The person at the end
- The glass shattering
- The man with the women on his side
- The buildings
- Elements of the setting of the commercial
- Elements related to people

On the first question about the second commercial, when asked if the commercial presented the game well, 55 (70.5%) participants answered “Yes”, and 23 (29.5%) answered “No”. Of the 44 people that had only heard of the *Yakuza* series, but not played it, 33 (75%) people answered “Yes” and 11 (25%) people answered “No”. Of the 12 people that had heard and played the series, 8 (66,7%) people answered “Yes”, and 4 (33,3%) people answered “No”.

In the second question, when asked if the commercial presented the activities of the game well, 54 (69.2%) participants answered “Yes”, and 24 (30.8%) answered “No”. Of the 44 people that had only heard of the *Yakuza* series, but not played it, 35 (79,6%) people answered “Yes” and 9 (20,4%) people answered “No”. Of the 12 people who had heard and played the series, 8 (66,7%) people answered “Yes” and 4 (33,3%) people answered “No”.

Concerning the third question, which asked what was the thing that had stuck out the most in the commercial, the most voted answer was “The woman in the bikini” (N = 33; 42.3%). Besides this, 23 (29.5%) participants answered, “The hostess”, 7 (9%) answered “The man going through the slot machines”, 6 (7.7%) answered “The little girl singing”, 3 (3.8%) answered “The man and the woman singing karaoke” and 2 (2.6%) answered “The fishing”.

Of the written answers, two of them were discarded as they didn't pertain to the video, as both participants said they couldn't access the video link. The other two written answers were "Kinya Kitaoji" (N = 1; 1.3%), and "Showing off her feminine side" (N = 1; 1.3%).

#### *Last section – Comments of the participants*

For the final question of the survey, when asked if they wished to give any final comments, only 10 (12,8%) participants answered to the question. Some of the answers were wishes of good luck for the thesis (N = 4, 40%), while others were from participants expressing their lack of knowledge of the *Yakuza* series (N = 3, 30%). Additionally, there was an answer that said that the survey was a great viewpoint on the *Yakuza* series (N = 1, 10%), and another that said that it was right "putting the two together" (N = 1, 10%). I speculate that this was regarding the combination of *Yakuza* with advertisements. Furthermore, there was an additional answer from someone who expressed their dissatisfaction with Japanese advertisements (N = 1, 10%).

### 4.3. Analysis

From the results given, we can articulate a few connections to Japanese society and culture. In regard to Kabukicho, the element that stuck out the most to people were the Hostess Clubs. As said in Toru Takeoka's article "Sexworkers, Regulation, and "Right to the City": The Streets in a Red-Light District of Tokyo" (2015), Tokyo's red-light district is highly recognized by the great amount of sex-related work in it, that's made through many avenues, like massage parlors and hostess clubs. Through this survey, we can conclude that the hostess clubs are recognized as one of the main establishments for this type of work in the district.

Another aspect that this article presents is that Junichiro Koizumi, Japan's prime minister in 2005, said "I will make downtowns with high numbers of crime, such as Kabukicho, a safe and enjoyable place for all the people.". When the people in the sample

were asked what the element in Kabukicho that stuck out to them, some of them answered specific characteristics of the district. In the thematic analysis conducted earlier, these were put under the “Characteristics in Kabukicho” category, and some of those answers were “Poor security” and “Unsafe area”. Considering that Koizumi made that statement back in 2005, we can conclude that the red-light district is still considered to not be a safe place, even after almost 20 years.

In the next category, when participants were asked what was the element that stuck out the most in the fictional red-light district of the *Yakuza* series, the most voted answer was “Millennium Tower”. As analyzed in Chapter 1, the *Millennium Tower* takes center stage in *Kamurocho* and because of it, it can be easily spotted in other areas of the district. It is also the largest building in *Kamurocho*, and a building that takes great importance in the story of various *Yakuza* titles.

The other most voted answer was “Don Quijote”. As analyzed in Chapter 2, *Don Quijote* was one of the establishments that had the most faithful conversion from Kabukicho to the gamified *Kamurocho*, keeping many elements related to the store such as the products available and the theme song. The overall aesthetic of the store was also preserved in the conversion, so this familiarity made it so that the store stuck out the many when thinking about *Kamurocho*.

Afterwards, participants were asked to watch a few television commercials pertaining to the *Yakuza* series. In the question “What was the thing that stuck out to you the most in this ad?”, the most voted answer was “The main group of people”. As analyzed in Chapter 3, the group of people wearing suits were the most prevalent part of the commercial. However, the answer “The man with the woman on his side” was one of the least voted ones. In spite of the connections presented in Chapter 3, regarding the representation of women in Japanese television commercials, this shot of the commercial was briefly shown, thus it may have not had much of an impact on the participants compared to the other elements present in the advertisement.

From the thematic analysis that was conducted, one of the categories (“Elements of the setting of the commercial”) contained a written answer that said, “Sparks and Dragon motif”. As said in Chapter 3, the image of a dragon was present in certain parts of the commercial, mainly when names of people involved in the product were presented. The

meaning of the dragon has gone through many changes in Japanese culture, having origins in Chinese culture, then becoming a part of Japanese Buddhism. Nowadays, the dragon is associated with tattooing, but that presents a negative connotation to the dragon, due to it being associated with the *yakuza* (Tho, 2015). The dragon seen in the commercial is the same one found in *Kazuma Kiryu*'s back, presented as a tattoo. In the context of the game's story, *Kazuma Kiryu* was once a member of the *yakuza*, so this image of the dragon in the commercial alludes to one of the main symbols in the game.

In the second commercial that the participants were asked to view, the element that stuck out the most to them was "The woman in the bikini". As presented in Chapter 3, after the initial logos seen at the beginning of the commercial, this is the first element of the product shown that appears in the advertisement. It depicts a woman in very little clothing getting closer to the screen. Being that it's the first element seen in the commercial and that it depicts the woman in a sexual activity, or at the very least, a provocative activity, we can conclude that this part of the commercial was used as an eye-catcher, to gather more attention from the audience.

While the game's main purpose is not to commercialize female sexuality or to use it as the main activity, utilizing this specific activity as the commercial's starter can be seen to use a beautiful young woman as a way to gather more attention (Arima, 2003).

The other most voted answer was "The hostess", which falls under a similar argument to "The woman in the bikini" answer, as in a woman performing a sexual activity of sorts also captures people's attention. Although, it should be noted that, as said in Chapter 2, while hostesses are performing an activity that has the purpose to pleasure men, by giving them attention, the hostesses don't perform any direct sexual activity.

## Conclusion

The prime objective of this thesis involves the visual analysis of the fictional red-light district of the *Yakuza* series, *Kamurocho*, and comparing it to its real counterpart, Kabukicho, present in Tokyo, Japan, to understand how the real city was translated into the gamified version and how faithful it is. This was done by doing field work and researching academic articles to provide more knowledge on both districts and comparing them. Then, this thesis analyzed two television commercials of the *Yakuza* series, to understand how these were marketed to the Japanese customer, utilizing academic articles to comprehend the uses of certain elements such as colour. Additionally, there was a survey conducted via Google Forms to obtain the Japanese audience's reactions to the topics worked on in the first three chapters.

With this thesis, we can come to a few conclusions. Relating to Chapters 1 and 2, one might consider that the fictional red-light district of *Kamurocho* is a very close approximation of the design of the real district of Kabukicho. Many of the same locations, brands and activities were adapted faithfully into the *Yakuza* video game series. The extra verticality added in *Yakuza 4* further helps to cement this, even if it doesn't add that much more content.

Even so, it appears that not every aspect was adapted in the same way. For instance, while some stores like *Don Quijote* remained the same during their conversion to the video game world, other brands like *Lawson* and *Seven-Eleven* were not. Instead, the *Yakuza* games used similar-looking brands to adapt their concepts (e.g., the convenience store). The logos of the brands were made to look familiar, but not exact, to those who recognized the original brands, and it's most likely that the reason that was done was due to licensing issues. *Sega*, the company behind the *Yakuza* series, most likely was able to obtain the rights to use brands like *Don Quijote*, but not for brands like *Lawson*.

Regardless, it's impressive of the level of detail present in the fictional *Kamurocho*, as its overall structure remains close to the original, breathing a sense of familiarity to those who know of the original district, and a sense of "Japaneseness" to those who don't.

The results of the survey seen in Chapter 4 also give insight into people's knowledge of Kabukicho and the *Yakuza* series. Most people from the sample had been to the Japanese

red-light district, and they recognized it for the Hostess Clubs which, as it was furthered in Chapter 2, appears to be one of the most prominent aspects of the district. Despite direct sexual activity not being permitted, it's still recognized as a red-light district due to these related activities.

Most people from the sample had heard of the *Yakuza* series, but very few had played it. The ones that had played it, most of them played more than one title. It's possible that the series is of great quality and the people who play it normally come back to future titles to experience more of the world. Additionally, the most popular titles of the series are *Yakuza 5*, *Yakuza 4* and the first *Yakuza* game. The popularity of the first *Yakuza* game might be explained by it being the first game of the series, functioning as a starting point. *Yakuza 4* and *Yakuza 5*'s popularity are harder to explain. One probable aspect of that connects these 3 games, which might help one to speculate about their popularity, is the choice to play as multiple characters. However, this cannot be directly extrapolated from the survey's results.

Another thing to note is that the people who answered what element of *Yakuza*'s *Kamurocho* stuck out the most, the majority answered the Millennium Tower, which as seen in Chapter 1, resides at the center of the fictional district and is considered a big part of the story of the series.

A few hypotheses were delineated with the analysis of Chapter 3, especially when relating it to the survey results of Chapter 4. The survey in Chapter 4 gave insight into the awareness of the *Yakuza* series, in comparison to the number of people played. There's a great number of people who know of the series' existence and have some degree of knowledge about it, but the number of people who have played a *Yakuza* game is much lower.

The survey gave its respondents the advertisements analyzed in this thesis to watch, and then they answered if they thought the commercials represented their respective games well. People who had only heard of the series were split on whether the commercial for the original *Yakuza* game represented the game well but were more positive on the second commercial representing *Yakuza 4* well. The same holds true for the 12 people in the sample who had played a *Yakuza* game, but in the case of the first commercial, there were slightly more people who thought that it didn't represent the game well.

From these results, one might consider that the *Yakuza 4* commercial was more coherent to the image that the general audience and the fans have of the game. One might speculate that this is because of the use of gameplay in that commercial. The biggest difference between the original game's advertisement and the *Yakuza 4* one is that the former shows off the concept of the game via a live-action setting. It doesn't give a clear idea of what the story or gameplay looks like, and people can only conclude that the product is related to the *yakuza*, because of the men in suits and the people attached to the project. Additionally, in the survey, the main group of people in the commercial (the men in suits) were the element that stuck out the most to the participants.

For the second commercial analyzed, the element that respondents said stuck out to most to them was the woman in the bikini. This woman appears at the beginning of the commercial, being the first thing related to the game that the viewer sees. The woman's more revealing nature quite possibly made an impression on the audience, being an element that could have potentially shocked the viewer but made them curious about the product of the commercial.

Another aspect that the survey results tell us is that the elements that stuck out the most to people in Kabukicho and the ones that stuck out the most in *Kamurocho* are completely different. In Kabukicho, most people said that the Hostess Clubs were the most notable, while in *Kamurocho*, the Millennium Tower, took center-stage. Since the *Yakuza* series has a heavy focus on story, and the Millennium Tower is located at the center of the district and is important to the story of the games, it makes sense why people give that element more prominence than others.

Considering these results and reflections, this thesis has shown some practical applications that can be applied in future projects. For video game developers, it can be suggested that television commercials which focus more on showing the product (i.e., footage of the game) rather than its concept (i.e., footage that only represents what the game is trying to achieve) are seen as more positive and representative of the game being sold, as illustrated by the more positive reception to the *Yakuza 4* commercial. Additionally, provocative elements that appear at the beginning of a commercial catch the eyes of the audience more and make them curious about the commercial.

The commercials themselves represent modern Japanese culture, as denoted by how they represent the activities and look of *Kamurocho*. Being that *Kamurocho* is the fictionalized version of Kabukicho, as seen through Chapter 4's survey results, these television commercials also serve as a getaway to present potential customers to play a gamified version of the real district.

Considering the limitations that this work had, there are a few things that could be improved upon in future works that decide to take on this topic. The survey sample size should be bigger and reach a wider audience to get more accurate data. Furthermore, other television commercials of the *Yakuza* series could be analyzed, and since some of them focus more on the stories of each game, perhaps there could be more of a focus in how the story of *Yakuza* is presented in television commercials. The *Yakuza* series has also emphasized presenting fictionalized versions of various Japanese actors in the games, presenting another potential topic for future research.

Furthermore, regarding the analysis of *Kamurocho* and Kabukicho, that analysis could also be expanded in future works. In this work, the iterations of *Kamurocho* in the original *Yakuza* game and *Yakuza 4* were covered, however, the district continued to appear in future titles and spin-offs of the series, evolving over time, with new locales and activities. The same applies to the real-life district of Kabukicho. My stay in the district was small, and there were other locations that could be explored further in future works, such as the hostess clubs and other types of cafés and restaurants. An example of this is a bar I passed by that had a *Hatsune Miku* cosplayer looking out at the window. *Hatsune Miku* being a popular *Vocaloid* (virtual singer) in Japan. That could also be used for a different topic, regarding the utilization of idols and cosplayers in promoting other activities.

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## **ANNEXES**

## **Table of Contents**

Annex A: Thematic Analysis

## **Annex A: Thematic Analysis**

Question: “What elements stuck out to you in Kabukicho?”

### *Categories*

- Category #1: Characterization of *Kabukicho* (N = 6; 10.9%)  
A category pertaining to adjectives that people used to describe the district.  
  
Example: “Unsafe area”.
  
- Category #2: Elements exclusive to *Kabukicho* (N = 2; 3.6%)  
A category of answers of locales exclusive to the district (e.g., street names, monuments)  
  
Example: “Kabukicho Entrance Sign”.
  
- Category #3: Host clubs and related elements (N = 2; 3.6%)  
A category of answers that are related to Host clubs.  
  
Example: “Host, Yakuza”.
  
- Category #4: Bars and Restaurants (N = 2; 3.6%)  
A category of answers pertaining to bars and restaurants.  
  
Example: “Chinese Restaurant”.
  
- Category #5: Miscellaneous Elements (N = 2; 3.6%)  
A category of answers that other places and/or structures found in the district, non-exclusive elements (e.g. national companies).  
  
Example: “Toho Cinemas”.

Question: “What was the thing that stuck out to you the most in this ad?”

### *Categories*

- Category #1: Elements of the setting of the commercial (N = 3; 3.8%)  
A category of visual elements that can be spotted in the commercial  
  
Example: “Sparks and Dragon motif”.

- Category #2: Elements related to people (N = 3; 3.8%)  
A category pertaining to answers that are related to people connected to the advertisement (e.g. actors, company).

Example: “Actor”.