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Platforms, Portable Consumer Electronics, and the Making of Sony's PSP

In an effort to account for the impact that portable technologies and informal economies (Keogh 2023; Swalwell 2021; Svelch 2018) have had on the development of gaming platforms, this paper will provide a critical, historiographical analysis of the Sony PlayStation Portable's (2004) relationship with the legacy of consumer electronics on the one hand and the development of platform business models on the other. The paper will begin with a discussion of the political economic (Fairclough & Graham 2002), media archeologic (Huhtamo & Parikka 2011), and digital ethnographic (Barratt & Maddox 2016) theories and methods being used. Then, it will provide a political economic analysis of Sony's relationship with the emergence of portable consumer electronics in general, focusing specifically on the role that postwar discourses of tinkering and international discourses of travel have played in imagining, mythologizing, and branding of the companies Japaneseness (Du Gay et.al 2013; Iwabuchi 1998) to western consumers and investors.

Following the political economic reading, the paper will draw on media archaeology theories and methods to describe how Sony's entry into the gaming industry extends and complicates the 'Japaneseness discourse', with the PlayStation Portable occupying a space in-between portable consumer electronics, platform business models (Poell, Nieborg and Duffy 2021; Van Dijck, Poell and De Waal 2018; Gillespie 2010), and an iterative approach to product design that integrated a file format (PSX) originally designed for the PlayStation One into a new 'universal' multimedia format. Finally, the paper will use multi-cited digital ethnography (Barratt & Maddox 2016) methods describe how the new 'universal' multimedia format failed when the platform's security system was cracked, and how this failure triggered the formation of a homebrew software production scene which impacted how devices to the connected to the internet are managed and how the business models surrounding gaming platforms are conceived.

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