

# Anger and Internet in Japan

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## INTRODUCTION

The world has changed a lot due to the Internet. Japan is no exception and has become a society where people can freely share their opinions, thoughts, experiences, and personal emotions to a large number of people all over the world. It is reported that 94.6% of people in Japan use a cellphone or smart phone (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2015), and the spread of mobile devices which allow easy access to the Internet no matter the time or location is fueling people's active sharing of opinions and expression of emotion.

However, this has given rise to a new problem unlike anything seen before. An unspecified large number of people's anger, complaints, criticisms, and offensive language not like anything seen in the real world is spreading on the Internet and continuing to cause uproar.

First off, this chapter will first focus on anger expression on the Internet in Japan by presenting a few examples. It will also highlight the results of large-scale studies relating to anger expression in Japan. Second, it will explain in terms of "Social Sharing" what sort of psychological effect sharing one's anger with others has, as well as go over an empirical study that demonstrated where social sharing of anger on the Internet has no positive effect. Third, it will show the results of studies done in Japan which described emotional experiences to look at how we should control our anger. It will also discuss what care should be taken when expressing emotions and experiences of anger on the Internet. Finally, it

will consider what main factors are needed to prevent the problem as above by re-examining the relationship between the Internet and anger from a new perspective.

## BACKGROUND

Many readers out there likely took pleasure in watching the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics. All of us were excited by the sight of top athletes gathering at the Olympic flame and showing their inflamed passion for sports. But that excitement can also easily lead to flaming on the Internet. Such a situation had already occurred during the 2000 Sydney Olympics. There was an incident where the athlete Shinichi Shinohara from Japan was judged to have been defeated in the final match for Men's Judo in the over 100Kg class. Shinohara had countered his opponent with an Uchi-mata-sukashi at one minute and 35 seconds from the start of the match and taken a victory pose, but judges did not award the Ippon victory that he had deserved and instead judged in favor for his opponent. Immediately afterward people took to the Internet in Japan and there was an outpour of rage against the chief judge for what was referred to as the "greatest misjudgment of the century". But the flaming did not stop there and spread to other places that were not involved in any way. Since the chief judge for the match was from New Zealand, people ended up targeting the Embassy of Japan in a fit of rage and caused the site to become inaccessible (Tashiro & Orita, 2012).

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One person's opinion can be shared between others who share the same opinion or thoughts and lead to an increase of supporters, which can garner much attention. This phenomenon has been likened to a waterfall by Sunstein (2011) and referred to as a "cyber cascade". In Japan this is more likened to that of a small spark suddenly erupting and causing an inextinguishable fire and is generally referred to as "flaming". Aside from the difference between water and fire, either one is an extremely appropriate metaphor for anger that should have been constricted to the emotions of individual suddenly transforming into the anger of a group or whole society.

## ANGER EXPRESSION ON THE INTERNET IN JAPAN

There are many other examples of flaming on the Internet that also cover a range of other topics. One dramatic example in particular was for the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake. The unprecedented major earthquake and tsunami on March 11 as well as the damage incurred from the continuing aftershocks brought much shock and grief to the whole nation. The damage was not confined to natural disaster and also caused the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster, forcing neighboring residents to evacuate to far away land. The grief and anxiety that people experienced in this earthquake was also clearly expressed on Twitter. The number of tweets on that day rose to 33 million which was an increase of 1.8 times that of a normal day, and 70% to 80% of all tweets within the country for the following week after March 11 were related to the earthquake (NEC BIGLOBE, 2011). Many of the tweets showed people's concerns for the earthquake and tsunami and fluctuated to a constant cycle that reached a peak at late hours of the night (Miura, Komori, Matsumura, & Maeda, 2015). In short, it is surmised that people affected by the disaster were sharing their concerns with one another through Twitter whenever the night came.

What also deserves attention is that fact that a characteristic fluctuating pattern was observed in relation to people's anger regarding this disaster. This pattern matched with the timing of news reports concerning the nuclear power plant accident (Miura et al., 2015). The number of angry tweets was increasing whenever the mass media exposed the worsening of the situation with the nuclear accident, the government's delayed response, and unclear reports of the situation from the power company. From these examples we see that even when, or indeed because of being in the midst of a large-scale disaster, people's anger reaches massive levels through the Internet and can have various effects on society.

In recent years, a large-scale web survey study was conducted based on the present condition of flaming on the Internet. The study, conducted by Tanaka & Yamaguchi (2016), surveyed 19,992 participants regarding their awareness of flaming on the Internet and their experience participating in such. Only 7.09% of respondents said they had not heard of flaming, while a majority said that while they had heard of it, they had never seen it (71.35%). We therefore find that the issue of flaming is being recognized as a serious problem in society even by those who have never seen it for themselves. Meanwhile, it was reported that only 1.52% of respondents said that they had either flamed once or more (Tanaka & Yamaguchi, 2016). When considering the bias of being a web survey, that number is assumed to not surpass 1.11%. In other words, contrary to the general image that may exist, only an extremely small amount of participants in flaming intimidate others online.

When we look at it this way, it would seem that flaming is not that serious of a problem. However, focus should be brought to a follow-up study done by Tanaka & Yamaguchi (2016) concerning the attributes and psychological factors behind the participants in flaming. Results showed that men were significantly more like than women to participate in flaming, the younger they were, and the more frequently they used social media (see Table 1). What is notable here is that it was also

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