Unlocking the Clustering Power of Tokyo's Geek Culture and Exploring Business Strategies to Drive the Creative Industry

Aki Nagano

Independent Researcher

1. Introduction

Geek culture is a distinct world of enthusiasts passionate about niche subcultures, such as animation, science fiction, and video games (McCain et al., 2015). It is also recognized as one of the significant economic drivers in the creative industries. Taking note of this potential for economic growth, governments have considered subculture as a growth sector. Policy documents emphasize the importance of focusing on added value, exports, and new jobs, laying the groundwork for competitiveness (Moore, 2014). Previous studies note that creative intensity in the creative industry is higher geographically than in other sectors (Freeman, 2004). Feldman and Florida (1994) state that when economic activities cluster together, it creates economies of scale, facilitates face-to-face interaction, and reduces the distance for interaction. This type of social interaction that affects the individual is effective in clustering. Then, the research question arises: What external and internal factors contribute to promoting the geographical clustering of geek culture?

In Japan, there are some areas where geeks are passionate about subcultures. These areas support a community of geeks who dedicate their time and resources to their passions. However, geeks are not socially appreciated despite having technological knowledge, coding skills, and creative abilities (McCain et al., 2015). Azuma (2001) also points out that geeks have played a significant role in laying the groundwork for internet culture, but their contributions have yet to be acknowledged. It is fascinating to investigate how the abilities of geeks influence subculture clustering in the information and communication technology (ICT) and vice versa. Advancements in emerging technology also stimulate the creativity of geeks. This is because blending creative resources from subcultures and technological expertise within the consumer electronics industry has boosted an innovative sector such as the gaming industry (Aoyama & Izushi, 2003). It is essential to address the type of subculture clustering, driven by geeks, that is strategically desirable for businesses. These considerations raise other research questions: What drives the mechanisms behind subculture clustering? What are the key business strategies for subculture clustering in creative industries?

To investigate the research questions, this study utilizes the historical framework of the spatial clustering approach proposed by Malmberg and Maskell (2001). The research focuses on the Akihabara district in Tokyo, which is renowned for its clustering of subcultures and has a history of independent development spanning over a century. Although the Akihabara area is a popular research

objective among social science scholars, limited research has been conducted from a business strategy perspective. This study makes three main contributions. It identifies the factors and mechanisms that foster subculture clustering, thereby contributing to the cluster theory. It examines the relationships between subculture clustering and the progression of digital technology. Additionally, this study formulates a business strategy focused on enterprises relevant to specific subcultures. Hence, the study aims to develop business strategies by analyzing the trajectory of the subculture clustering and its alignment with enhancing creative industries.

2. Theoretical background

(1) Spatial cluster theory

Porter (2000) defines a spatial cluster as a concentrated group of interconnected companies and institutions in a region that are linked by shared traits and complementarities. Industry concentration in specific areas is standard globally (Porter, 1990). Previous research examines the factors driving industrial agglomeration and regional development. For instance, Weber's foundational location theory is considered one of the earliest studies analyzing the distribution of economic activities (Coe et al., 2007). Meanwhile, Marshall (1925) was the first to identify the primary reasons for agglomeration, including the formation of a specialized labor pool, enhanced industry inputs, and improved information flow (Krugman, 1991). Firms in related industries nearby create knowledge spillovers that benefit all through informal exchanges and movement of people, impacting regional performance (Ryu et al., 2018; Tallman et al., 2004). Scott (1992) viewed production agglomeration as a collective order of flexibility, noting the shift to post-Fordist structures emphasizing flexible technologies, organization, and complex networks. Pouder and John (1996) refer to the geographically concentrated firms within industries as "hot spots." They proposed that hot-spot firms undergo three evolutionary phases: origination, convergence, and environmental jolts. For each phase, they explain how resource economies, institutional forces, and cognitive frameworks influence competitive behavior and levels of innovation. For instance, location theory explains the importance of resources such as human capital, capital markets, technology, and infrastructure (Porter, 2001). Furthermore, organizational legitimacy, microculture, and inertia are also considered influences of industrial clustering. Participating in interfirm relationships and networking within the cluster is a primary approach for enhancing legitimacy (Scott, 1989). In the cognitive framework, Pounder and John (1996) suggest that managers and employees in the same industry are likely to share similar experiences, educational backgrounds, affiliations, technical training, and age cohorts. Camagni (1995) considered the cognitive impact of the industrial environment in global cities to encompass both functional and symbolic elements. These include shared values, standard codes, a sense of belonging, patriotism, trust, expertise, and economic spatialization (Camagni, 1995).

(2) Geek culture in creative industry

Dick Hebdige refers to subculture as a form of expression and a resistance response to the

dominant culture. Subculture includes individuals with distinct values and norms that oppose mainstream society. Examples like punks, goths, mods, and hippies resist class structure and form social tribes on the streets (Kawamura, 2012). Geekism, once favored by anti-mainstream culture, has become a global phenomenon in consumer society and a key economic driver in creative industries. Government agencies have begun to focus on the monetary aspects of subcultural activity and have taken steps to support creative industries through cultural and financial policies, providing reassurance and optimism about the future of this sector. The business sector is also keen on geek culture, which has significantly boosted the consumer market, including video games, comic books, card games, and e-sports. The global video game market is particularly significant. According to Statista, the video games market is projected to reach a revenue of US$282.30 billion in 2024. It is expected to grow at an annual rate of 8.76% between 2024 and 2027, resulting in a projected market volume of US$363.30 billion by 2027. In-game advertising holds the largest share, with a market volume of US$109.60 billion in 2024. Additionally, the film industry is often related to a video game franchise. Creative foundations in subculture and cross-industry links to consumer electronics have been crucial underpinnings for this sector (Aoyama & Izushi, 2003).

In Japan, geeks are also referred to as "Otaku." The Nomura Research Institute (2005) refers to four aspects of Otaku: "people who have a particular obsession with something," "who spend their time and money on that particular obsession with an extremely concentrated level of focus," "who have deep knowledge and imagination," and "who are also involved in activities such as disseminating information and creating things." Otaku includes more than just anime, games, and cosplay. It also encompasses hobbies such as cars, travel, fashion, music, the arts, science fiction, photography, model trains, and collecting stamps, coins, and antiques. Otaku's creative works are called "Doujin Products." The Otaku's innovative creations have value not only in terms of culture but also in terms of monetary worth. Azuma (2001) observed that the market for derivative works, reinterpreting original manga, anime, and games, is significantly growing. They are sold online, and the comic market is increasing in quantity and quality.

(3) Semiotic consumption and geek culture

Baudrillard (2008) asserted that for an object to be considered a commodity, it must function as a sign. Consumption is not just about interacting with objects; it is an active way of engaging with societies and the world, forming the foundation of our entire cultural framework (Baudrillard, 2008). McArthur (2009) noted that conspicuous consumption is also a defining characteristic of geeks. Geeks do not merely consume objects but attribute special significance to them as signs. Geeks not only consume items like anime, games, and music, but also the signs of being geeks that demonstrate their identity.

McCain et al. (2015) note that geeks join geek culture for three reasons: to maintain narcissistic self-views, fulfill their need for belonging, and satisfy their creative urges. First, narcissism can foster

charismatic leadership but may also create cognitive dissonance due to a self-perception mismatch. Second, embracing geek culture fulfills the need for a sense of belonging. It offers a community where individuals can connect, and geeks satisfy this need by immersing themselves in specific media (McCain et al., 2015). Third, geeks express their creativity. Their motivation stems from creative expression, a key aspect of their media interaction. Those with high creativity are more likely to engage in geek culture, which often emphasizes fantasy stories (McCain et al., 2015). The stereotype of geeks being highly intelligent relates to their preference for fantasy, openness to new experiences, and their adaptive levels of schizotypal personality and dissociation (McCain et al., 2015).

3．Methods

This research employs the historical framework of the spatial clustering approach proposed by Malmberg and Maskell (2001) to examine geek subcultures in Akihabara. However, this study replaces one of their frameworks because the redevelopment plan by the metropolitan government plays a significant role in Akihabara. Therefore, this study explores four evolutionary processes: (1) the event or action that led to initial development, (2) the subsequent development of clustering, (3) the government redevelopment plan, and (4) approaches for restructuring technical and organizational structures when issues arise. The research area for this study is the Akihabara district in Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo. The data is collected from fieldwork, literature reviews, videos, and websites. The following section presents the findings of an analysis that follows the historical frameworks of subculture clustering in Akihabara.

4．Trajectory of the Akihabara district

### (1) The event or action that led to initial development

Akihabara's origin can be traced back to the 1920s, when radio broadcasting and the legalization of amateur radio were on the rise (Miyake, 2010). In those days, radios were simple devices composed of parts such as vacuum tubes and transformers. Anyone who could understand a circuit diagram could make a radio, so the wholesale of radio parts began as a new business (Miyake, 2010). However, there were only a few retailers in Akihabara at that time. The formation of subculture clustering in Akihabara began after World War II. The radio parts industry grew because students from Tokyo Denki University started making radios to earn a living, and people wanted entertainment after the war. This led to a boom in street vendors selling radio parts in Akihabara. Scott (2001) emphasizes that the speed of starting up businesses is essential due to the clustering of firms. In the chaos that followed the war, large quantities of used vacuum tubes released by the US military were sold as parts for assembled radios. Eventually, the group of street vendors evolved into a specialized store for electronic appliances in Akihabara. Rauch (1993) posits that each firm selects a location based on the existing number of firms at the time of entry, representing the firm's preferences for each potential location. A case of Akihabara suggests that historical factors have a significant impact on the choice of location, with decisions often influenced by the location preferences of early entrants and frequently determined by

historical coincidences. Moreover, Akihabara illustrates Pouder and John (1996)'s theory that firms cluster in a particular area after startups to leverage resources for a specific business community.

(2) The subsequent development of Akihabara

Since the 1960s, Japan's electrical machinery industry has experienced significant development. As shown in Figure 1, the television penetration rate increased from 0.3% in 1966 to 93.7% in 1976, indicating that televisions had reached over 90% of households within a decade. For air conditioners, the penetration rate rose slowly from 0.4% in 1961 to 5.9% in 1970, 39.2% in 1980, 63.7% in 1990, and 86.2% in 2000. As the demand for these home appliances grew, Akihabara transformed from a radio town to a home appliance wholesaler town and eventually to a retail city. Computer penetration into households grew rapidly from the 1990s, reaching 70% in the 2000s. During this period, approximately 60 million computers were shipped to Akihabara, with many of them sold there (Miyake, 2010).

Figure 1. Home appliance ownership rate (%)
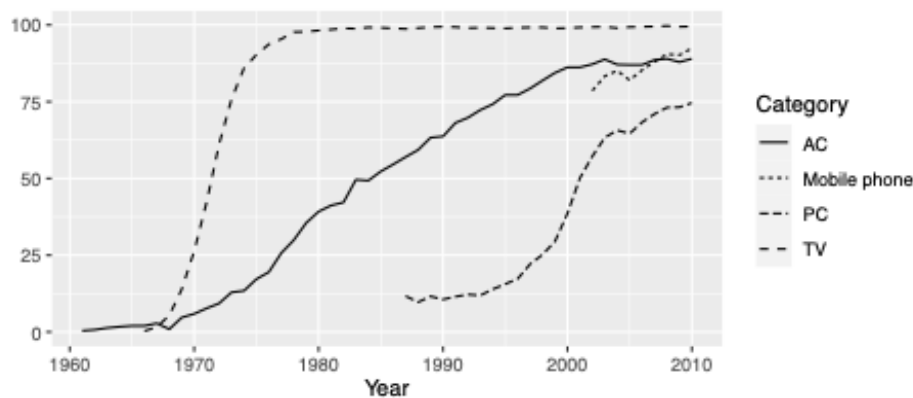
Yamashita (1998) noted that Akihabara serves as a hub for creating new markets through collaborative innovation. Consumers in Akihabara are early adopters, and electronics manufacturing companies conduct marketing that investigates the reactions of retailers and consumers in Akihabara before introducing products to the rest of the country. The report from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Machine Industry (JSPMI) states that Matsushita Electric, now known as Panasonic, developed the 'Alpha' TV in the 1980s after consulting store managers and salespeople in Akihabara. Sanyo released a radio cassette player, and Aiwa's mini speaker with an amplifier became popular among young people in Akihabara and nationwide (JSPMI, 2007). NEC released the training kit "TK-80" in 1976 and opened the "Bit-INN" support center in Radio Kaikan, Akihabara. The center attracted engineers, computer enthusiasts, including students, teachers, businessmen, and medical doctors (JSPMI, 2007). In response to user needs, NEC launched Japan's first commercially available personal computer, the PC-8001, in 1979. Mobile phones started in the 1970s with analog car services in Japan. They evolved from pagers in the 1980s and 1990s, transitioning from analog to digital and PHS phones in the 1990s and 2000s. Smartphones emerged in the late 2000s, rapidly increasing their user base.

The overall advancement of digital technology has influenced the products in Akihabara, and the business model has changed in line with technological innovation.

(3) Akihabara redevelopment plant for ICT districts

Akihabara's redevelopment project started in the 1980s and was fully underway by 2000. The project involved redeveloping the freight station located to the east of Akihabara Station, as well as the fruit and vegetable market situated to the west. The Akihabara redevelopment plan was undertaken by two large organizations: the Tokyo Metropolitan Government (TMG) and Japan Railways (JR). In 2000, the TMG Industrial Promotion Vision was announced to redevelop the Fruits and Vegetable Market site and integrate it with Akihabara's electric industries, creating a global ICT hub. The project has three core businesses: content creation (including production, presentation, marketing, monitoring, and training talent in video, games, and animation), new technology and system business (advanced tech, development of models, industry-academia collaboration, research institute, satellite campus), and Application and Service Provider /Internet Service Provide development. On the other hand, JR planned to develop a profitable office district on the former freight station site to reduce the massive deficit from the national railroad era (Miyake, 2010). As part of the redevelopment plan, it had been decided to construct a new underground station, including a large electronics flagship store, 2.5 times larger than the largest electronics store in Akihabara (Miyake, 2010).

Figure 2 compares the number and density of ICT companies within a 0.8 km radius of Akihabara, Shibuya, and Shinjuku Station in Tokyo. According to JR, the number of passengers per day in fiscal 2023 is expected to be around 650,000 in Shinjuku, 310,000 in Shibuya, and 210,000 in Akihabara. Each station is a commercial and business district, serving as a hub that connects multiple transportation networks. Akihabara has a total of 369 ICT companies with a density of 183.62. In Shibuya, there are 162 ICT companies with a density of 80.61. In Shinjuku, there are 110 ICT companies with a density of 54.74. Although Shibuya gained fame for its ICT center after Google relocated there, Akihabara has more ICT businesses, both in terms of number and density. Whether government influence plays a role is unclear, but many ICT companies are present in Akihabara.

Figure 2. Comparison of the number and density (Data source, NTT i-townpage)
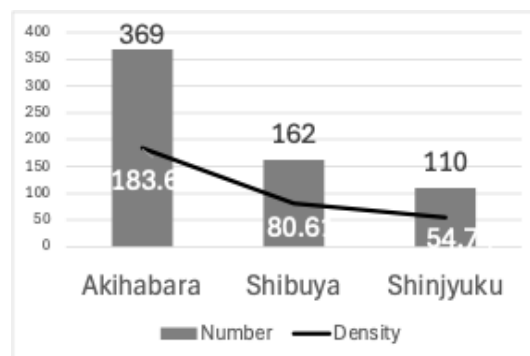
(4) Approaches for restructuring technical and organizational structures

The release of Microsoft Windows 95 and subsequent sales of personal computers in Akihabara flatlined within about ten years. The low-margin, high-volume business model has reached a turning point. Major home appliance retailers need to adapt their strategies in response to the growth of e-commerce. Additionally, the end of the dot-com bubble caused a substantial drop in investments in personal computers and communication devices. To adapt to these changes, Akihabara's business owners restructured their operations by becoming a subsidiary of a major electronics retailer, merging multiple stores into one location, forming new partnerships with other companies, closing or relocating stores, and shifting to different industries (Akiba Keizai Shimbun, 2007). Some retailers have moved their business models to align with geeks' preferences. These changes have been happening since the mid-2000s. Akihabara has gradually become the hub of geek culture, not only for electrical appliances and gadgets, but also for animations, figures, Manga, cards, and arcade games. For example, the last PC shop in Radio Kaikan closed in 2006, even though the location was a symbol of personal computers in Japan. Hobby shops, anime stores, figures, and others have replaced all the previous tenants. In 2001, "Animate," a specialty shop for Japanese animation, previously located in a back alley of Akihabara, relocated to Chuo Street, Akihabara's main thoroughfare. The large hobby shop "Mandarake" relocated to the Kanda Building in 2007, which had previously housed a PC parts store.

Figure 3. Current Akihabara's business category
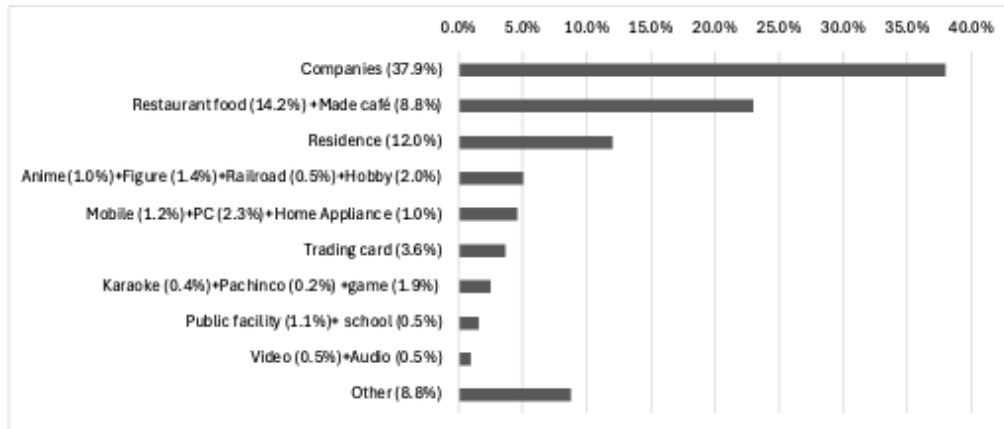
This study investigates the current business landscape in the Akihabara area, including 1, 2, and 4 Choume, Sotokanda, and Chuo Wards in Tokyo, to gain insight into its present state. In Figure 3, the 38% category includes software development, electronic parts, radio parts, electricity, precision equipment, trading companies, and banking and transportation. The following categories were restaurant, food, and beverage businesses at 14%, and maid cafes at 9%. Residences accounted for 12% of the total, ranking fourth. The fifth most common category was anime, figure, railroad, and hobby stores. The sixth was digital gadget buying and selling businesses, which make up 5.1%. Trading card stores, accounting for 3.6%, ranked seventh. Overall, notable categories included the number of maid cafés (9%) and trading card stores (3.6%). Notably, the number of trading card stores

was significant compared to the past dominance of businesses such as home appliances, PCs, and smartphones. Additionally, compared with other specialty stores, such as anime (1%), figure (1.4%), Railroad models (0.5%), and other hobby stores (2.1%), the number was notable. These suggest that the electric town of Akihabara is transforming into a prominent hub for geek culture.

How is Akihabara formed?

(1) Factors contributing to the clustering of the subculture in Akihabara

Based on the analysis results, this study identified five factors that encourage subculture clustering: speed of start-ups and resources, co-creation, institutional forces, flexibility, and cognitive factors. First, Akihabara initially possessed resources like vacuum tubes, student technological knowledge, and a vacant lot under the overpass. These resources supported the area's rapid growth in startups. Resources accumulated from the success of initial startups continue to support the Akihabara cluster today. The second is the co-creation. Akihabara had consistently catered to a specific group of people - geeks. Various products were developed through the collaboration. This indicates that Akihabara's main strength was the strong connection between companies and users. The third factor is institutional forces. The government's future vision for the redevelopment of Akihabara is to attract ICT industries that are unique to Akihabara, and through this clustering, create a new information and cultural hub." The fourth driver is flexibility. Co-location enables closer monitoring of competitors, allowing a business to respond to specific competitor moves (Canina & Enz, 2005). During the 2000s, companies in Akihabara faced economic difficulties and underwent restructuring of their operations. During this period, anime and figure stores began to open in vacant electronics store locations, resulting in increased sales. Some stores abandoned their original businesses, keeping only their names, and replaced all floors with tenants related to subcultures. This demonstrates that organizations' ability to adapt to change and modify their business strategies is contributing to the growth of subcultures in Akihabara. The last driver is a cognitive factor that encourages geographical clustering. The cognitive traits of geeks, including a sense of belonging, creativity, and comfort, acted as a magnet, drawing geeks to Akihabara. Akihabara's influence in stimulating geeks stemmed from its unique spatial features and image, which resonate with the cyber sphere and fantasy—the collective image of geek culture. Spending in the special place of Akihabara did not mean reflecting on relationships with objects; it signified the self-affirming act of forming bonds with and belonging to the geek community.

(2) The mechanisms behind the clustering of subcultures

The analysis reveals that collaboration between geeks and businesses has been ongoing since the establishment of Akihabara. This cooperation over the past century has shaped the town's subculture as it is today. This also indicates that the business sector in Akihabara has effectively leveraged geek creativity to create new products in sequence. At the same time, the history of the collaboration is also related to the advancement of technology. For instance, Akihabara began selling radio parts to meet consumer demand by collaborating with university students. The partnership between electronics

manufacturers and tech enthusiasts on product development attracted individuals interested in computers and gadgets. These were remarkable accomplishments, particularly the creation of Japan's first widely used personal computer. Akihabara developed into a new market for geek-made secondary creations, such as animation, games, and books, contributing to a constant stream of new talented creators and businesses. People used to hold a negative stereotype of Otaku due to a peculiar incident in the past. However, Otaku individuals immerse themselves in technology products and are adept at using them (Ho et al., 2019). Akihabara is a city that has developed while successfully balancing both the negative and positive images of geeks. These findings suggest that the mechanisms driving subculture clustering in Akihabara rely on collaborative efforts between businesses and geeks.

5. Strategies for enhancing subcultural clustering

This section presents four strategies derived from analyzing Akihabara's clustering trajectory, identified using historical spatial clustering frameworks.

(1) Carrying on the spirit of collaborative creation

The growing geographical proximity among economic players is crucial amid intensifying competition, emphasizing the value of knowledge and innovation (Scott et al., 2001). Concentration enables companies to better respond to challenges, making their operations more resilient and fostering innovation (Scott et al., 2001). The spirit of innovation remains alive in the Akihabara user community, a cornerstone of geek culture. The Shibuya district in Tokyo is also home to many ICT development companies; however, Akihabara's strength lies in its proximity to these companies and the gaming market. This allows game creators to visit the stores run by game manufacturers directly and quickly catch the latest trends. The proximity of businesses and geeks as users has been a defining feature of Akihabara since it was established as a hub for radio parts. Even though the objects changed with the times, the creative spirit of striving to create novel products continues to be passed down in the area known as Akihabara.

(2) Understanding and stimulating the cognitive perception of geeks

The findings of this study suggest that cognitive perception is crucial for effective business strategy in creative industries. Encouraging the geek's creativity is key to clustering subcultures. Social media has become the leading platform for geeks to share information, while computer parts stores in Akihabara remain a prominent place for information exchange, and retailers are also eager to build communities for these individuals. Other creative communities include robot parts, radio, comic markets, model railroading, audio, and doll making. Due to the advancement of ICT, global cities are increasingly becoming immaterial and digitalized (Camagni, 2001). Nowadays, people's perceptions of cities are also influenced by digital images. The state of a city can be understood through the dissemination of information and community building on social media. However, real-world communities remain essential. Despite their contributions to the digital world, geeks may need to be more highly regarded socially, so creating a comfortable space for them is necessary.

(3) Enhancing flexibilities and restructuring business models

Malmberg and Maskell (2001) observed that local clusters often face difficulties. Leading innovation hubs can eventually turn into "old industrial regions," experiencing renewal problems and being outperformed by firms elsewhere. Crisis-affected clusters can "reinvent" themselves to restore their former prominence (Malmberg and Maskell, 2001). The strength of Akihabara was its ability to restructure its business model, such as shifting from radio to home appliances, adapting to the rise of personal computers and an internet society, and the rapid penetration of mobile phones into subculture. Flexibility in local businesses is crucial for adapting to technological advancements.

(4) Strengthening geeks' entrepreneurship and exploring talents through "Doujin Products."

There are many "Doujin Products" in Akihabara. Initially, the Doujin Product was viewed as antisocial and anti-establishment due to some containing non-social elements like pornography and violence. However, some are considered masterpieces and of professional quality. For example, Doujin games are known for featuring a wide range of original works across various genres, including experimental creations and high-quality games available at affordable prices" (Hichibe, 2011). Geeks clearly understand their identity and their interpretation of creating novel products. Through their creative activities, geeks developed unique ecosystems. For example, the geek-run Comic Market brings together around 20,000 groups twice a year in Tokyo to sell their creations, with popular items also sold in Akihabara.

6. Conclusions

This study identified internal and external factors that influence subcultural clustering and the mechanisms driving it by analyzing Akihabara's hundred-year history. Its theoretical contribution lies in identifying alternative drivers that affect cognitive factors in subculture clustering, such as a sense of belonging, creativity, and comfort—these act as magnets to attract people together in Akihabara. Furthermore, the mechanisms behind clustering are Akihabara's cumulative processes, resulting from over a century of cooperative efforts between geeks and businesses, which have promoted the clustering of subcultures. The subculture hub in Akihabara is a vibrant place where businesses proudly embrace subculture to innovate and shape the future of business. For geeks, it is also a node where the virtual and real worlds intersect, which expresses their creativity and sense of belonging. At the same time, the place overlaps with the collaboration between companies and the creativity of geeks. Akihabara symbolizes multiple-layered overlaps, including digital, physical, and antisocial elements. The noteworthy collaboration stems from over a hundred years of creative efforts by geeks and businesses that value subcultures to develop Akihabara.

References

Akiba Keizai Shinbun. (2007). *Akiba ga chikyu wo nomikomuhi: Akihabara culture shinkaron* [The day Akiba swallows the earth: The evolution of Akihabara culture]. Akiba Keizai Shinbun (in Japanese).

Aoyama, Y., & Izushi, H. (2003). Hardware gimmick or cultural innovation? Technological, cultural, and social foundations of the Japanese video game industry. *Research Policy*, 32, 423-444. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0048-7333(02)00016-1

Azuma, H. (2001). *Doubutsuka suru postmodern: Otaku karamita nihon shakai.* [Postmodernism animalized: Japanese society through the eyes of the otaku]. Kodansha Ltd. (in Japanese).

Baudrillard, J. (2008). Mono no taikei: Kigou no shouhi [*Le système des objets*]. (A. Unami, Trans.). Hosei University Press. (Original work published 1968)

Camagni, R. (1995). The concept of innovative milieu and its relevance for public policies in European lagging regions. *Papers in Regional Science,* 74(4), 317-340. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1435-5597.1995.tb00644.x

Camagni, R. (2001). The economic role and spatial contradictions of global city regions: The functional, cognitive, and evolutionary context. In A. J. Scott (Ed.), *Global city regions: Trends, theory, policy* (pp.96-118). Oxford University Press.

Canina, L., & Enz, C. (2005). Agglomeration effects and strategic orientations: Evidence from the U.S. lodging industry. *Academy of Management Journal*, 48(4), 565-581. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2005.17843938

Coe, N., Kelly, P., & Yeung, W. C. H. (2007). *Economic geography: A contemporary introduction.* Blackwell Publishing.

Feldman, M., & Florida, G. (1994). The geographic sources of innovation: Technological infrastructure and product innovation in the United States. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers,* 84(2), 210-229. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8306.1994.tb01735.x

Freeman, A. (2004). London's creative sector: 2004 update. Published in: Greater London Authority working paper No. Report (April 2004).

Hichibe, N. (2011) Dilemma between culture and economy: Sociological analysis of cultural mediator in Doujin Field. *The Journal of the Japan Association for Social and Economic Systems Studies,* 32, 175-183. https://doi.org/10.20795/jasess.32.0_175

Ho, T., Tsai, H., & Lin, P. (2019). The effects of technological innovation and network presence on Otaku identity. *Technological Forecasting & Social Change*, 144, 82-92. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2019.04.008

Japan society for the promotion of machine industry. (2007). *Akihabara karamita nihon kigyou no kyousouryoku nikansuru chousa kenkyu.* [Research on the competitiveness of Japanese companies from the perspective of Akihabara]. Kikaikougyou keizai kenkyu houkokusho [Machinery Industry

Economic Research Report] (in Japanese).

Kawamura, Y. (2012). *Fashioning Japanese subculture*. Berg.

Krugman, P. (1991). *Geography and trade.* MIT Press.

Malmberg, A., & Maskell, P. (2001). The elusive concept of localization economies: Towards a knowledge-based theory of spatial clustering. Paper for the industrial clusters revisited: Innovative places or uncharted spaces? Session, AAG Annual Conference, New York.

Marshall, A. (1925). *Principles of economics*. Macmillan.

McArthur, J. A. (2009). Digital subculture: A geek meaning of style. *Journal of Communication Inquiry,* 33(1), 58-70. https://doi.org/10.1177/0196859908324676

McCain, J., Gentile, B., & Campbell, W. (2015). A psychological exploration of engagement in geek culture. *PLoS One*, 10(11). https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0142200

Miyake, R. (2010). *Akihabara forever.* Geijyutsu Shinbunsha (in Japanese).

Moore, I. (2014). Cultural and creative industries: A historical perspective. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences.* 110, 738-746. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.12.918

Nomura Research Institute. (2005). *Otaku marketing.* Toyo Keizai Inc (in Japanese).

Porter, M. (2001). Regions and the new economics of competition. In A. J. Scott (Ed.), *Global city-regions: trends, theory, policy* (pp.139–157). Oxford University Press.

Pouder, R., & St. John, C. (1996). Hot spots and blind spots: Geographical clusters of firms and innovation. *Academy of Management Review*, 21(4), 1192-1225. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1996.9704071867

Rauch, E. J. (1993). Does history matter only when it matters little? The case of city-industry location. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 108(3), 843-867. https://doi.org/10.2307/2118410

Ryu, W., McCann, B., & Reuer, J. J. (2018). Geographic co-location of partners and rivals: Implications for the design of R&D alliances. *Academy of Management Journal,* 61(3), 945-965. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2016.0416

Statista. Market insights, digital, digital media, video games, worldwide. Retrieved 2025/09/11 from https://www.statista.com/outlook/dmo/digital-media/video-games/worldwide

Scott, A. J. (1989). *New industrial spaces: Flexible production organization and regional development in North America and Western Europe.* Pion, Ltd.

Scott, A. J. (1992). The Roepke lecture in economic geography: The collective order of flexible production agglomerations: Lessons for local economic development policy and strategic choice. *Economic Geography,* 68(3), 219-233. https://doi.org/10.2307/144183

Scott, A. J. (2001). *Global city regions.* Oxford University Press.

Tallman, S., Jenkins, M., Henry, N., & Pinch, S. (2004). Knowledge clusters and competitive advantage. *Academy of Management Review,* 29(2), 258-271.

Yamashita, Y. (1998). Shijyo kara no innovation: Akihabara to kadensangyo no daini no sangyo

bunsuirei. In H. Itami, T. Kagono, M. Miyamoto, & S. Yonekura (Eds.), *Innovation to gijyutsu chikuseki.* (pp. 211-252). Yuhikaku (in Japanese).

Unlocking the Clustering Power of Tokyo's Geek Culture and Exploring Business Strategies to Drive the Creative Industry

Aki NAGANO

Independent researcher

ngnak2017@gmail.com

Abstract: Geek culture is a distinct world of enthusiasts passionate about niche subcultures. While earlier research suggests that the creative industry is geographically centralized, the reasons behind the clustering of subcultures remain unclear. This study aims to develop business strategies by analyzing Akihabara's subculture clustering and its role in boosting creative industries. The results highlight factors that influence subcultural clustering, including resources, co-creation, institutional forces, flexibility, and cognition. The mechanisms behind subculture clustering involve cumulative efforts between geeks and businesses. This notable collaboration originates from over a century of creative efforts that have helped shape Akihabara.

Keywords: spatial clustering; geek subculture; strategy; information and communication technology; semiotic consumption; cognitive factors