

How People Watched and Perceived *Ama-chan*, an NHK Morning Drama Serial:

Examining the Viewers' Passion and Behavior through Four Surveys*

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Full text in Japanese may be accessed at

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Introduction

Asadora (Serial Televised Novels)

Asadora is the abbreviated Japanese term used to refer to televised morning dramas that are broadcast as a part of NHK's daily morning schedule (from *asa* "morning" + *dora[ma]* "drama"). They are officially known as "serial televised novels" (*renzoku terebi shōsetsu*), so-called by analogy with the serialized format of novels printed in daily installments in newspapers, and are also sometimes positioned as the television edition of the serialized radio dramas of an earlier era. The "novel" nomenclature also derives from the fact that these series heavily rely on narration so that viewers could follow the story even without watching the screen continuously during the busy morning routine.

Since the broadcast of the first production *Musume to Watashi* [My Daughter and I] in 1961, new series have been produced and broadcast every year or every 6 months. March 2014 marked the broadcast of the 89th *asadora* series. The first production was broadcast on weekdays, five times a week in 20-minute installments, whereas a six-day (weekdays and Saturdays), 15-minute format has continued since the second series. Episodes are frequently rebroadcast, which allows viewers to keep up with the story even when they miss an episode, and these many viewing opportunities are a feature of the format. Currently, in addition to the main broadcast at 8:00 on the General Television (*sogo terebi*) channel, there is an advance broadcast from 7:30 on the BS Premium channel, and rebroadcasts at 12:45 on General Television and at 23:00 on BS Premium. It is thus possible to watch an episode up to four times daily.

Because the main target is viewers who can watch the 8:00 morning broadcast at home, namely housewives, the programs in many cases comprise biographical portrayals of their female main characters, and there are no more than approximately five series with main characters who are men. The theme constantly reflects the period in which it was aired, which portrays the various family, community, and social issues facing the main characters. Early series often featured "biographical" narratives exemplifying the ideal of the "woman who endures," which depicts the lives of main characters born in the early 20th century, lose their husbands in the Pacific War, and happily live out the balance of their years as old women in the present day. In step with social advances made by women in the real world, the ideal symbolized by the main character considerably transformed, which evolves from the "pioneering woman" venturing for the first time into professional roles traditionally dominated by men, through the "career woman" active in society on an equal basis with their male counterparts, to the "everyday woman" whose experiences realistically portrayed the everyday lives of women in an era where gender equality has become commonplace.

In addition, the series also have significance for many viewers across the nation. One of the features of the programs is how the locale providing the setting changes with each new drama, and by 2009 had extended to include all of Japan's prefectures. However, in practice, other than a small number of location shoots, most filming takes place in NHK studios in Tokyo or Osaka.

The heroines of the dramas are often selected by auditioning actresses approximately 20 years of age. Since the programs often end up featuring novice actresses with little acting experience surrounded by veteran actors, the programs also in that sense become an apprenticeship in acting for their stars, and audiences can also enjoy watching the development of the star's experience in parallel with the personal growth of the heroine they portray on screen. That said, there has been a trend in recent years toward casting actresses who, although still young, have already established strong acting abilities and careers.

Ama-chan

Broadcast over 156 episodes lasting from April 1 through September 28, 2013, *Ama-chan* represented NHK's 88th morning serial drama production. The story was principally set in the fictional town of Kitasanriku in Iwate Prefecture, which is located in Japan's Tohoku region. In the summer vacation of 2008, the heroine, a Tokyo-born high-school student named Aki Amano (Rena Nonen), pays her first visit to Kitasanriku, which is the hometown of her mother, Haruko (Kyoko Koizumi). Aki's grandmother Natsu (Nobuko Miyamoto) is a working *ama*, as the Japanese women who dive for sea urchins and shellfish are known, and Aki is enthralled by the sight of her grandmother fearlessly diving into the sea. When Aki resolves to follow in her grandmother's footsteps, in a remarkable turn of events, she gains popularity and, as a local celebrity, becomes a symbol of the revitalization of the town. Aki struggles after she is scouted as a member of a pop idol group made up of local celebrities and returns to Tokyo to become a pop idol on her own. As events unfold, it is revealed that Haruko had herself left home to become an idol in the 1980s, which was the reason behind the long silence between Natsu and Haruko, and the tension between mother and daughter eventually finds a resolution. When it seems as though Aki's career as an idol is about to take off, the Great East Japan Earthquake occurs, mirroring the real-life tragedy. Aki returns once again to Kitasanriku, searching for a path in life, where she becomes involved in the post-disaster reconstruction as a local pop idol.

With an original story written by popular scriptwriter Kankuro Kudo, the series marks the first time that Kudo has composed a script for NHK. The title, *Ama-chan*, conveys two meanings, simultaneously referring to *ama*, the sea urchin divers of Japan, and to the personal development of a "sweet" (*amai*) and "spoiled" (*amaenbo*) heroine.

The three generations of women in the Amano family and their existence as local celebrities can also be regarded as a cross-generational relay drawing on the biographical themes of womanhood, which have endured as a proven formula for serial morning dramas. In contrast, one of the characteristics of this particular series, in addition to referencing many real-world celebrities and performers in the drama as themselves, is its incorporation of a wealth of references, parodies of, and tributes to the celebrity pop idols, television programs, and hit songs of the past. Kudo's intimate familiarity with the nuances of *koneta* (small jokes referring to pop subculture) and the casting of former pop idol and movie star from the 1980s, such as Kyoko Koizumi and Hiroko Yakushimaru (who plays the actress Hiromi Suzuka in the series), in roles reminiscent of their actual selves evoked a sense of parallel reality that met with considerable acclaim.

Koneta

As opposed to its normal sense of “a minor, trivial topic,” the term *koneta* was used in the online discussion about *Ama-chan* to refer to nuggets of knowledge and related information or else homages and tributes that alluded to old television programs and music. At a glance, these were irrelevant to the main thread of the drama. While many such references were written in the screenplay by the screenwriters, several other references came about as a result of a playful spirit on the part of the directors and art staff and their nomenclature as “*koneta*” emerged more or less naturally as they became a topic of online discussion among perceptive viewers.

We can also take the example of an episode mentioned in this article. When the *ama* women were meeting at a café to plan their performance for a summer event and everyone suggested Lady Gaga, it seemed that the performances might overlap. However, one diver, who was dressed as Freddie Mercury from the rock band Queen, said “I’ll perform ‘Radio Ga Ga’—those who get it will know what I mean.” In fact, the event that being discussed in this scene was not itself depicted in the program, which means that the actors and staff also put considerable time into costumes and make-up for Lady Gaga and Freddy Mercury that had nothing to do with the costumes for the regular drama, but simply for the scene with this meeting.

The message “those who get it will know what I mean” can be seen as another way of challenging viewers with the question “Do you get it?,” a ploy that roped in more and more fans.

In 2013, *Ama-chan* attracted considerable public attention, as exemplified in the choice of the term “*jejeje*,” which is an exclamation of surprise in the Tohoku dialect, as one of Japan’s Buzzwords of the Year for 2013. However, compared to *Hanzawa Naoki*,¹ which is another serial drama produced by the Tokyo Broadcasting System (TBS) that attracted similar attention and garnered extremely high audience ratings of over 40% of households, *Ama-chan*’s ratings remained at approximately 20% of households, which is more or less the same level as *Doctor Ume*,² which is a serial drama broadcast the previous year.

What explains this gap between *Ama-chan*’s considerable acclaim and its audience ratings? To clarify how *Ama-chan* was watched and perceived, we conducted the following four surveys:

- (1) Audience ratings analysis: To compare *Ama-chan* with recent morning dramas, thereby to identify their respective features in terms of audience ratings. This section was written by Kensaku Saito.
- (2) Public opinion survey: To clarify how *Ama-chan* was watched and perceived from an overall, nationwide perspective. This section was written by Keiko Mitsuya.
- (3) Internet questionnaire survey: Since *Ama-chan* is said to have become a major topic of discussion online, we identify the characteristics of the viewers among Internet users who have watched frequently. This section was written by Wataru Nihei.
- (4) Social listening survey: We shall analyze the actual conditions of how *Ama-chan* was discussed online through comments made on blogs and Twitter. This section was written by Satoshi Sekiguchi.

¹ *Hanzawa Naoki* was a drama created by TBS and broadcast from July to September of 2013. The drama featured a screenplay written by Hiroyuki Yatsu based on the novel by Jun Ikeido and starred Masato Sakai in the main role. Set against the backdrop of a large banking corporation, the series followed the exploits of a sympathetic main character Hanzawa, valiantly and freely slashing his way through the factional rivalries. The program maintained soaring viewing figures, with the final household viewing ratings (Video Research Kanto Area) reaching a record figure of 42.2%. Additionally, Hanzawa’s catchphrase “double payback” (*bai-gaeshi*) also won the title of Buzzword of the Year. *Ama-chan*’s catchphrase “*jejeje*” was a co-winner of the same prize.

² *Doctor Ume* was broadcast over 156 episodes from April 2 to September 29, 2012, becoming NHK’s 86th morning serial drama. Set against the charred ruins of Tokyo’s Kamata neighborhood in the aftermath of the destructive air raids of the Pacific War, the series follows the heroine Umeko (Maki Horikita), the youngest of three siblings who, despite constant feelings of inferiority toward her gifted brother and sister, is deeply impressed by her physician father’s medical career at a university hospital and aspires to become a doctor herself. To care for the lives of local citizens full of vitality and determined to rebuild and revive after the destruction of war, Umeko devotes herself to community medical practice. She grows to eventually become known affectionately as “Doctor Ume,” the community doctor. Original screenplay by Masaya Ozaki.

I. Audience Ratings Analysis

1. No Improvement in Audience Ratings over the Previous Year

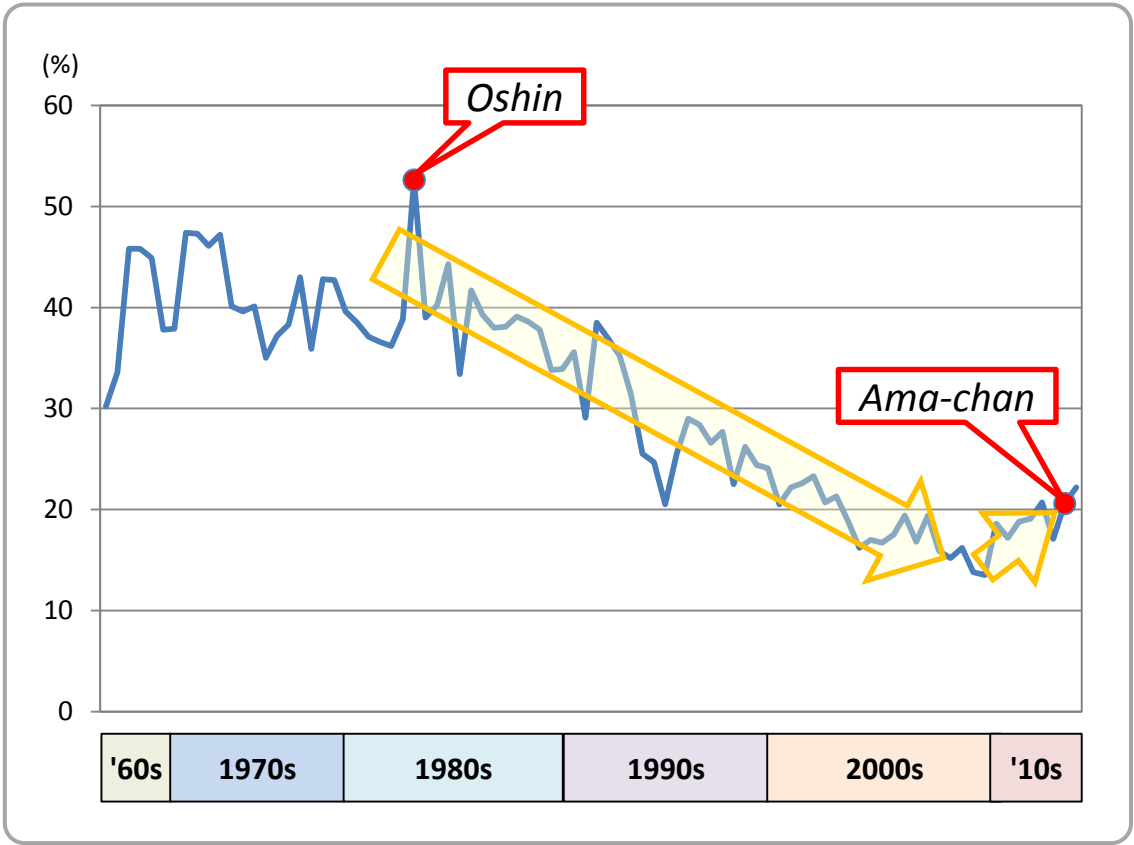
Although *Ama-chan* was invariably described as a hit series across various types of media, average audience ratings remained consistent with those for *Doctor Ume*, which was broadcast the previous year. How might we interpret the apparent contradiction wherein audience ratings remained constant despite the fact that *Ama-chan* was a hit? To answer this puzzle, we have been forced to conduct an investigation using a variety of research methods.

Although the average household audience ratings did not exceed that of *Doctor Ume* (Video Research Kanto Area), a detailed analysis of the audience ratings can probably identify the elements that are proof of a “hit” status. At least, this is what we initially believed. However, our findings indicate that regardless of the approach adopted concerning audience ratings, *Ama-chan*’s performance remains more or less on a par with that of other *asadora* serials in recent years.

2. Signs of a Recovery in *Asadora* Audience Ratings

As shown in Figure 1, there was long-term decline in audience ratings for morning serial dramas from the mid-1980s to the end of the first decade of the 2000s. This trend can be seen to begin to recover somewhat in 2010 with the move of the broadcast schedule to 15 minutes earlier of ‘*My Husband is a Cartoonist*.’ During this period, *Doctor Ume* achieved an audience rating for a morning serial drama of over 20% for the first time in nine years, followed by *Ama-chan*, which also exceeded 20%. In other words, it might even be possible to interpret *Ama-chan*’s favorable reception as the manifestation of a larger trend toward the overall recovery of morning serial drama ratings. As of this article’s writing, this interpretation is further supported by the audience rating achieved by the latest series, ‘*Bon Appetit!*’ (the value on the graph representing average ratings for the initial three months of the series).

Figure 1: Serial Televised Novels – Trends in Household Audience Ratings



	year	title	audience rate
4	1964	<i>Uzushio</i>	30
5	1965	<i>Tamayura</i>	34
6	1966	<i>Ohanahan</i>	46
7	1967	<i>Tabiji</i>	46
8	1968	<i>Ashita koso</i>	45
9	1969	<i>Nobuko to Obaa-chan</i>	38
10	1970	<i>Niji</i>	38
11	1971	<i>Mayuko hitori</i>	47
12	1972	<i>Ai yori aoku</i>	47
13	1973	<i>Kita no kazoku</i>	46
14	1974	<i>Hatoko no umi</i>	47
15	1975	<i>Mizuiro no toki</i>	40
16	1975	<i>Ohayo san</i>	40
17	1976	<i>Kumo no jutan</i>	40
18	1976	<i>Hi no kuni ni</i>	35
19	1977	<i>Ichiban-boshi</i>	37
20	1977	<i>Kazamidori</i>	38
21	1978	<i>Oteichan</i>	43
22	1978	<i>Watashi wa umi</i>	36
23	1979	<i>Ma Nee-chan</i>	43
24	1979	<i>Ayu no uta</i>	43
25	1980	<i>Nat-chan no shashinkan</i>	40
26	1980	<i>Niji o oru</i>	39
27	1981	<i>Mansaku no hana</i>	37
28	1981	<i>Honjitsu mo seiten nari</i>	37
29	1982	<i>Haikara-san</i>	36
30	1982	<i>Yoi don</i>	39
31	1983	Oshin	53
32	1984	<i>Romansu</i>	39
33	1984	<i>Kokoro wa itsumo ramune-iro</i>	40
34	1985	<i>Mio-Tsukushi: The Channel Marker</i>	44
35	1985	<i>Ichiban-daiko</i>	33
36	1986	<i>Rin</i>	42
37	1986	<i>Miyako no kaze</i>	39
38	1987	<i>Chotchan</i>	38
39	1987	<i>Hassai Sensei</i>	38
40	1988	<i>Non-chan no yume</i>	39
41	1988	<i>Junchan no Oenka</i>	39
42	1989	<i>Seishun Kazoku</i>	38
43	1989	<i>Wakko no kin medaru</i>	34
44	1990	<i>Rinrin to</i>	34
45	1990	<i>Kyo, futari</i>	36
46	1991	<i>Kimionawa</i>	29
47	1992	<i>Woman's Spirits</i>	39
48	1992	<i>Hirari</i>	37
49	1993	<i>Ee Nyobo</i>	35
50	1993	<i>Karin</i>	31
51	1994	<i>Piano</i>	26
52	1994	<i>Longing for Spring</i>	25
53	1995	<i>Hashiranka</i>	21
54	1996	<i>Himawari</i>	26
55	1996	<i>Futarikko</i>	29
56	1997	<i>Agri</i>	28
57	1997	<i>For the Sake of Sake</i>	27
58	1998	<i>Ulala!</i>	28
59	1998	<i>Yancha Kure</i>	23
60	1999	<i>Suzuran: Return of Happiness</i>	26
61	1999	<i>Asuka</i>	24
62	2000	<i>My Blue Sky</i>	24
63	2000	<i>O'DORI</i>	21
64	2001	<i>The Promise to the Chura Sea</i>	22
65	2001	<i>She's the Real Thing</i>	23
66	2002	<i>Sakura</i>	23
67	2002	<i>Reach for the Stars!</i>	21
68	2003	<i>Kokoro: The Strength of the Heart</i>	21
69	2003	<i>Teruteru Kazoku</i>	19
70	2004	<i>Tenka</i>	16
71	2004	<i>Wakaba</i>	17
72	2005	<i>No One Like Yu</i>	17
73	2005	<i>Haruka</i>	18
74	2006	<i>A Symphony of Us</i>	19
75	2006	<i>Imo Tako Nankin</i>	17
76	2007	<i>All Is Fine</i>	19
77	2007	<i>Life's Like a Comedy</i>	16
78	2008	<i>Step Forward</i>	15
79	2008	<i>Twins</i>	16
80	2009	<i>The Voice of Hope</i>	14
81	2009	<i>Welcome!</i>	14
82	2010	<i>My Husband is a Cartoonist</i>	19
83	2010	<i>Teppan</i>	17
84	2011	<i>Sunshine</i>	19
85	2011	<i>Carnation</i>	19
86	2012	<i>Doctor Ume</i>	21
87	2012	<i>Jun + Ai</i>	17
88	2013	Ama-chan	21
89	2013	<i>Bon Appetit!</i>	22

(Source: Household Audience Ratings, Video Research Kanto Area)

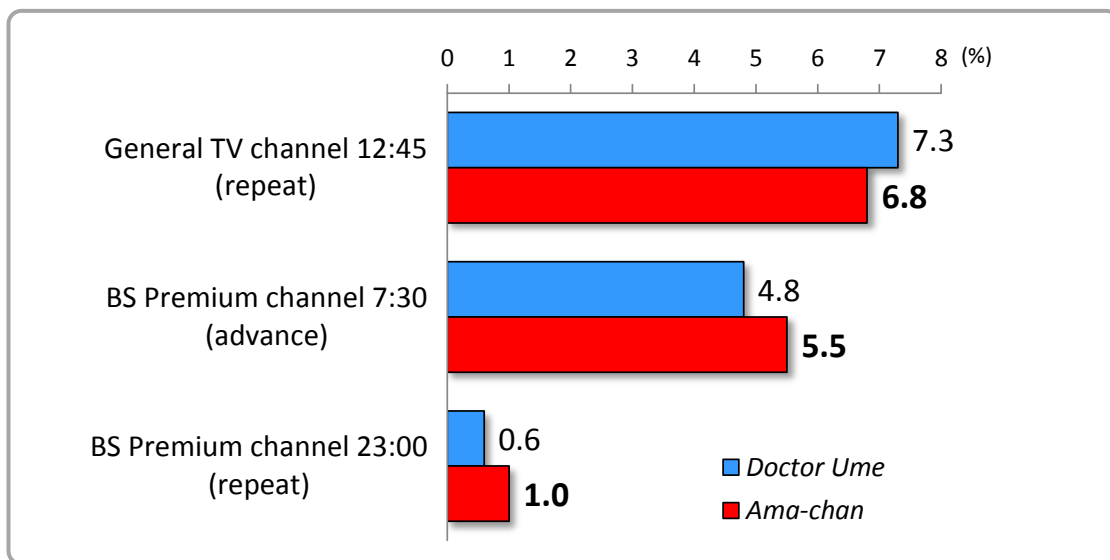
Italicized text reflects the series' original Japanese titles, while non-italicized text indicates translated English or transliterated titles adopted for selling programs overseas.

3. No Evidence for a “Hit”

a. Slight Increase among BS Viewers

There was some expectation that even if there were no large increase in audience ratings for the 8:00 morning General Television broadcast, there might be some increases for the other broadcast time slots on other services such as the Broadcasting Satellite (BS) channels. Comparing the audience rating for *Doctor Ume* for additional broadcasts (Figure 2), we find that the ratings for the General Television noon-hour broadcast of *Doctor Ume* are indeed higher. Conversely, *Ama-chan* is slightly higher for all other broadcasts on the BS channels.

Figure 2: Average Audience Ratings for Additional Broadcasts



(Source: Video Research Kanto Area)

While morning and noon-hour broadcasts on General Television are well suited to senior citizens and housewives, the BS broadcasts are easier for workers and students who have to commute. It was expected that since *Ama-chan* was watched by an even wider audience than the traditional *asadora* viewership, its ratings on the BS services should be relatively higher. The summary of results shown above to some extent confirms this prediction. However, the difference is not of a scale that would justify calling the drama a “hit.”

b. A “Slight Increase” among the Social Media Generation

Examining the audience ratings by age cohort from the results of NHK’s Nationwide Survey on Individual Audience Ratings (Table 1), we find that while there was a slight decrease among older viewers compared to other series in recent years, there were some increases in the younger generation, particularly among girls aged 7–12 and women in their 30s. It may be possible to regard this as a partial shift from older to younger viewers.

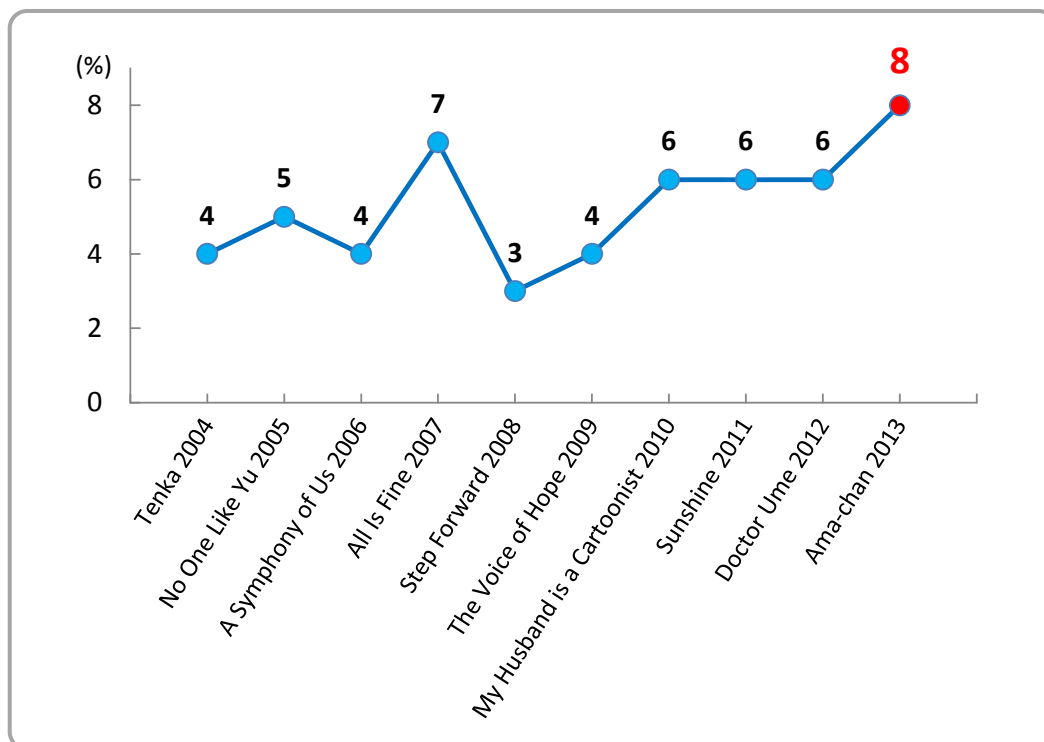
Table 1: Audience Ratings for Men and Women by Age Cohort
(NHK Nationwide Survey on Individual Audience Rating, Conducted Annually in June)
Average Values from Monday to Saturday for the Period of the Survey

(%)

Year	Title	Men								Women							
		Age 7-12	13-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70+	7-12	13-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70+
2010	<i>My Husband is a Cartoonist</i>	0	1	4	2	2	4	12	35	0	2	3	6	12	21	26	34
2011	<i>Sunshine</i>	2	1	1	2	4	9	20	28	1	1	2	6	12	25	30	43
2012	<i>Doctor Ume</i>	1	3	2	2	4	7	21	29	1	2	4	6	14	20	27	41
2013	<i>Ama-chan</i>	2	1	3	2	6	9	17	29	3	1	2	8	11	17	25	36

However, while it was anticipated that “since *Ama-chan* was so well received on so-called social media, it was heavily watched by those core users,” there was no corresponding growth of audience ratings in these cohorts. Figure 3 shows that the results are not as high as to stand out markedly from the data from the last decade. Rather, it seems more natural to regard this more as an expression of the overall trend toward recovery indicated earlier.

Figure 3: Viewing Trends for Women in their 30s
(NHK’s Nationwide Survey on Individual Audience Ratings: First Half of Broadcast Content for Each Year)



c. A Shift in Audience?

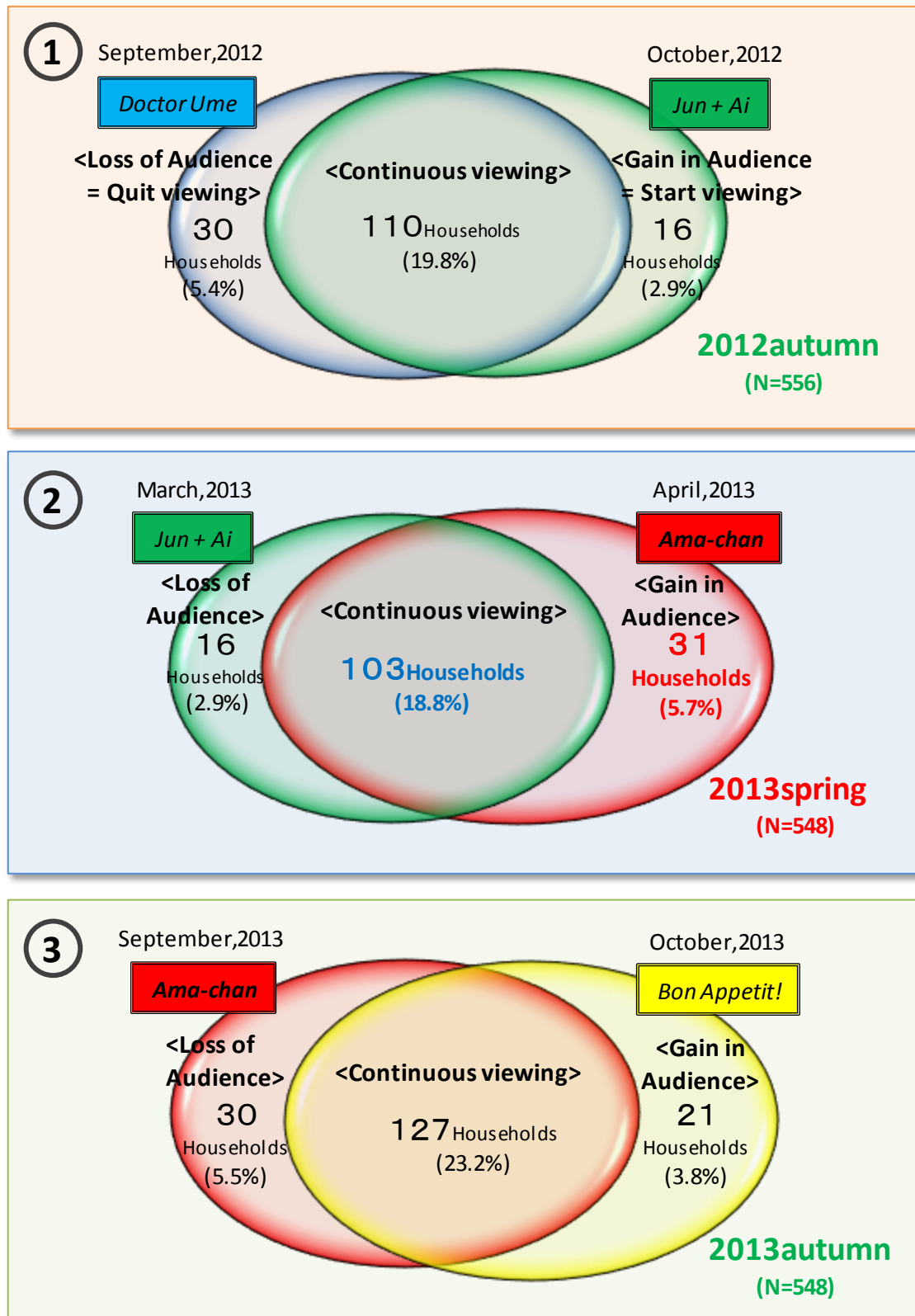
Judging from the overlap between households who watched NHK *asadora* more than once per week (“watched” meaning having viewed a program for more than five minutes) during the final four weeks of *Jun + Ai* and the first four weeks of *Ama-chan* (cf. Figure 4 ②), compared to those who watched the previous or next season’s *asadora* (cf. Figure 4 ①③), there was a slight increase among first-time viewers. Conversely, comparatively few viewers continued to watch the new series. In this sense, there may have been a shift among viewers to some degree.

While in most cases *asadora* viewership is generally performed as “habitual viewing,” which is situated as a part of viewers’ daily morning routines, it was expected that “a shift in viewership might cause a change in the moods and motivations associated with viewing the program.” Accordingly, there is a possibility that it is not only the routine nature of viewing habits, but also viewing practice motivated by a stronger interest in the particular program itself that could be a factor in making a program a “hit.”

However, it is also true that among the three programs shown in the figure, *Ama-chan* has the lowest figures for viewers who stopped watching when the new series began. Despite a shift in viewership, it seems unlikely that this is sufficient to explain the program’s “hit” status. In contrast, the large proportion of continued viewership during the switch from *Ama-chan* to *Bon Appetit!* also serves to complicate the above interpretation.

Figure 4: Viewership Retention and Shift

: Households That Watch Once a Week or More during the Last and First Four Weeks of Broadcast of Successive Morning Serial Dramas



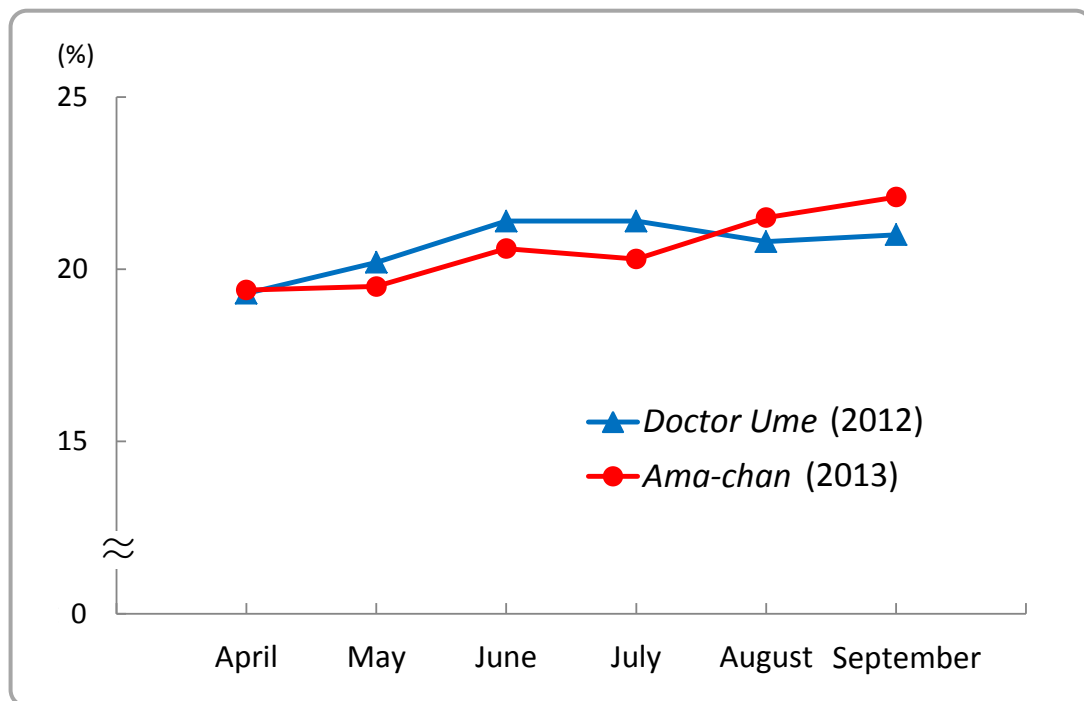
(Source: Household viewing data, Video Research Kanto Area)

d. Cumulative Viewership

As shown in Figure 5, *Doctor Ume* maintained consistently high ratings until the end of the series in the previous year. Conversely, audience ratings for *Ama-chan* showed a slight but consistent increase as the series moved toward its finale. Even if this did not result in any change in the overall average ratings over *Doctor Ume*, it might be possible to see this as an expression of *Ama-chan*'s "hit" status.

Even so, with respect to which of the two programs ultimately had a larger audience, aggregating those households that watched at least one episode of the 156 series broadcasts (cumulative reach), we find that while *Doctor Ume* finished with a 70.0% viewership, *Ama-chan* finished at 66.7%, which lags well behind its predecessor. The extent of the "hit" thus did not exceed the range of expectations in this sense either.

Figure 5: Monthly Average Household Audience Ratings



(Source: Video Research Kanto Area)

II. Public Opinion Surveys (According to Area Sampling)

To establish a quantitative grasp of how well *Ama-chan* was known and the extent to which it was watched at a nationwide level, we have conducted a survey using area sampling.³ The survey was performed immediately after the broadcast of the final episode of *Ama-chan*, between October 4 (Fri) and 14 (Mon), 2013. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with a sample of 4,092 men and women across Japan aged 16 and older who were selected using area sampling (a method in which respondents are selected from households randomly chosen from neighborhood maps in a manner that prevents any bias caused by age or gender). A total of 1,298 valid responses (31.7%) were obtained. The sample composition of survey respondents is as follows.

Sample composition

	Overall	Sex		Age groups (Men)						Age groups (Women)					
		Men	Women	16-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70+	16-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70+
Actual number	1,298	627	671	113	108	108	80	109	109	102	86	110	100	115	158
Ratio	100 %	48.3	51.7	8.7	8.3	8.3	6.2	8.4	8.4	7.9	6.6	8.5	7.7	8.9	12.2

³ Owing to the utmost priority given to timing the survey to be implemented immediately following the series finale—when it is still fresh in people’s minds and unlikely to have been influenced by subsequent experience—the survey was conducted by extracting participants through area sampling (using the omnibus survey from Central Research Services, Inc.). While a public opinion survey was also conducted previously with regard to the morning serial drama *Oshin* (cf. “*Hoso Kenkyu to Chosa* [The NHK Monthly Report on Broadcast Research]” in the December 1983 issue), this earlier survey extracted participants at random from the Basic Resident Register. Since surveys that rely on regional sampling have several drawbacks, such as a lower efficacy, it is necessary to be careful when interpreting their results or performing a value comparison with past survey results.

1. An Overview of Program Awareness and Viewing Behaviors

a. Awareness and Viewing Experience

To begin with, we asked “Are you aware that a drama entitled *Ama-chan* has been broadcast as a morning drama series?” Then, we followed up by asking those who indicated that they were aware of the program “Have you ever watched *Ama-chan*?” This included those who had watched the program on recordings, video websites, or video-on-demand services in addition to on-air broadcasts. Among those who indicated that they had watched the program, we asked about the frequency with which they had watched the program (e.g., “almost every episode” or “occasionally”). Figure 6 represents a summary of these responses. Moreover, the gender and age breakdown of the awareness rate (i.e., the rate of people who said they knew the program), viewing experience rate (i.e., the rate of people who said they had watched the program), and the rate of people who eagerly watched “almost every episode” are shown in Figure 7.

Figure 6: Awareness and Viewing Frequency

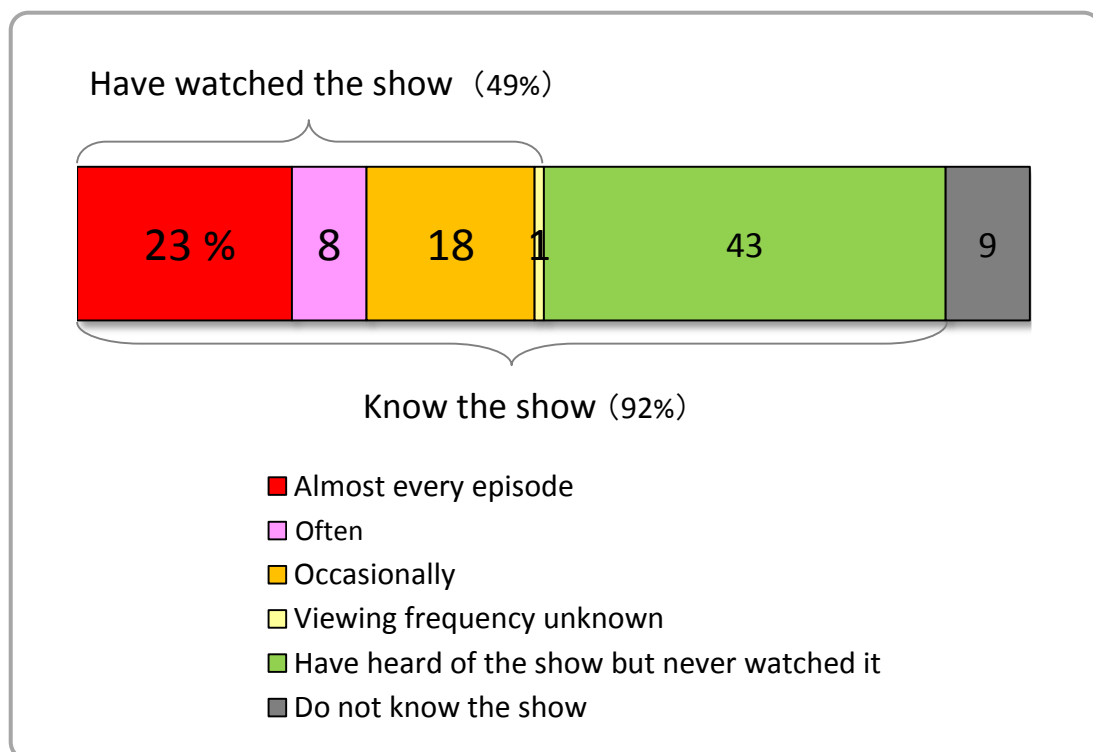
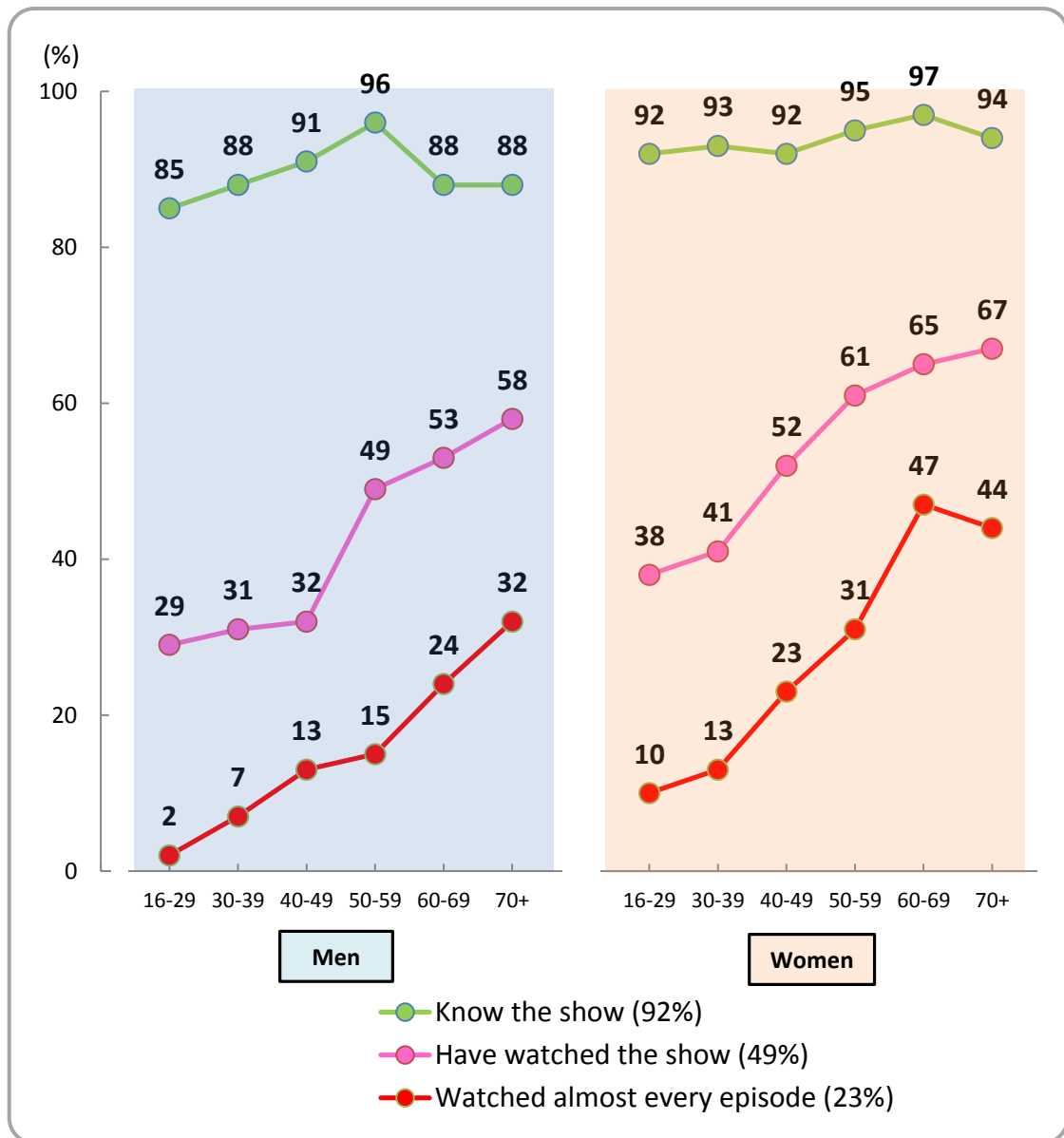


Figure 7: Ama-chan-related Awareness and Viewing Experience (by Age and Gender)



As clearly observed from these figures, most people (92%) are aware of *Ama-chan*, whereas approximately half (49%) have watched the series. This also means that close to half of respondents (43%) have heard of the show even though they have never watched it. There is not much of a difference in terms of either age or gender in the awareness rate. As compared with the overall rate (49%), viewing experience rates were higher among women aged 50 and older and men aged 70 and older, and lower among men under 50 and women under 30.

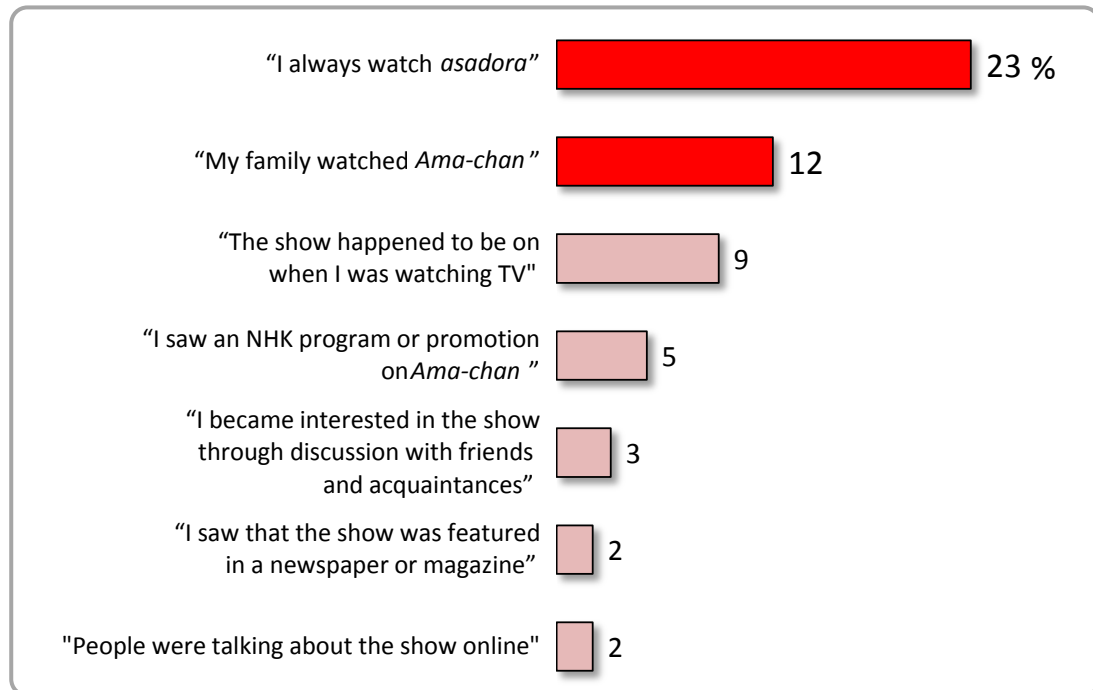
b. Viewing Motivation and Reasons for Not Watching

Respondents who had watched *Ama-chan* were asked to answer a multiple-choice question about their motivations (the figures below assume that 100% represents all citizens, including those who have not watched the show). The most frequent response was “Because I always watch [*asadora*]” (23%), followed by “Because my family watched” (12%) and “Since it happened to be on when I was watching television” (9%) (Figure 8). Overall, “Because I always watch [*asadora*]” was most frequent among men aged 70 and over (34%) and women in their 50s (37%), 60s (48%), and 70 and over (53%), whereas “Because my family watches” was most frequent among men in their 30s (18%), 50s (19%), and 60s (17%) and women 16-29 (18%).

Although we assumed that there could be some people who were motivated to watch the show because it had become a subject for discussion among their peers and online, those who offered reasons such as “Because I was interested through discussion with friends and acquaintances” (3%) and “Because I read about it online” (2%) were relatively fewer compared to the other three reasons indicated above. What is striking from the age and gender breakdown is that “Because I became interested through discussion with friends and acquaintances” was most frequently given as a reason by women in their 30s (7%).

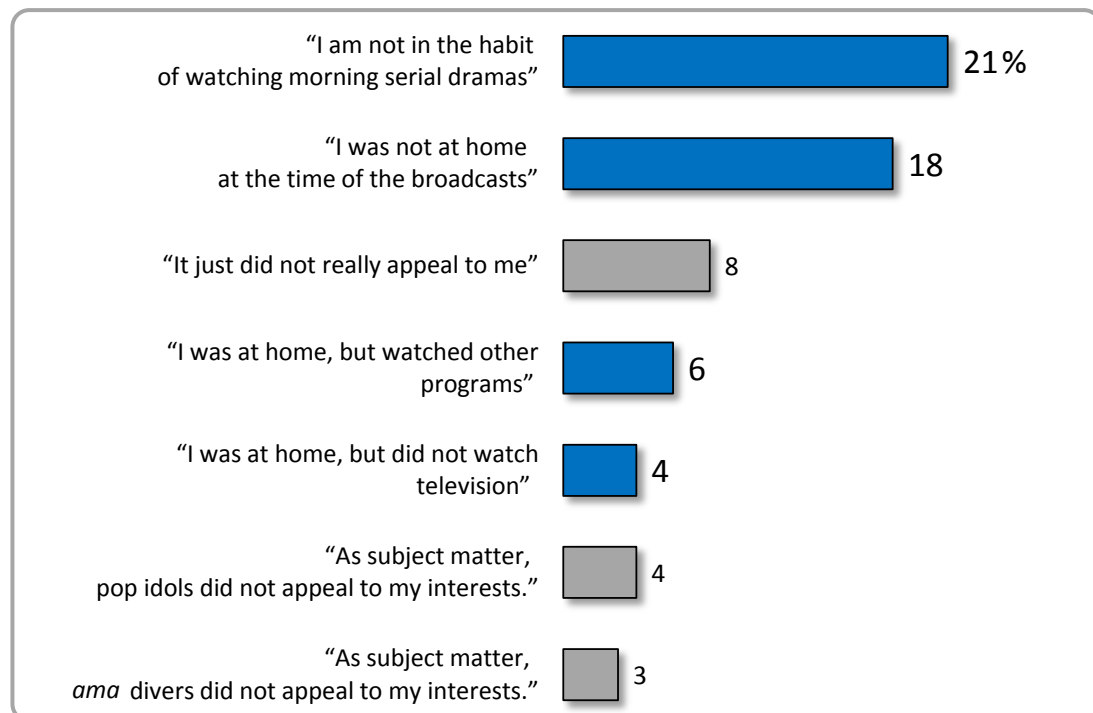
Respondents who had not seen *Ama-chan* were asked to answer a multiple-choice question about why they had not watched the show (the figures below assume that 100% represents all citizens, including existing viewers and those who did not know about the show). While respondents were asked separately about content-related reasons, such as indifference to the subject matter, and other reasons, such as not being at home during air time, to similar extents, the most frequent responses were “Because I am not in the habit of watching morning serial dramas” (21%) and “Because I was not at home at the time of the broadcasts” (18%). In terms of content-related reasons, “Because it just did not really appeal to me” (8%) was offered most frequently, but such responses were few overall (Figure 9).

Figure 8: Motivations for Watching (Multiple Choice)



(N= 1,298, overall)
(2% or more, rounded to the nearest percentage point)

Figure 9: Reasons for not Watching *Ama-chan* (Multiple Choice)



(N= 1,298, overall)
(2% or more, rounded to the nearest percentage point)

c. Timing and Media Format

Respondents were presented with a list of times, channels and media formats for viewing and asked to indicate any that they had experience with. Among these, they were asked to indicate one that represented their most frequent viewing practice. As summarized in Table 2 (where 100% is assumed to include all Japanese citizens), both the most common and most frequently watched medium was the principal 8:00 broadcast on the General Television channel. Regarding the most frequently watched media, the results for the 7:30 advance broadcast on BS Premium were comparable to those for the 12:45 repeat broadcast on General Television and recordings.

Looking at the age and gender viewing breakdown, recordings were most frequently watched by men in their 50s (15%) and women in their 40s (13%), whereas the 7:30 broadcast on BS Premium was most frequently watched by women in their 50s (12%) and 60s (13%).

Table 2: Timing and Media Format of Viewing Practice

(%)

Channels and Time Slots	Have Watched (Multiple choice)	Most Frequently Watched
General TV channel 8:00	33	28
General TV channel 12:45 (repeat)	13	6
BS Premium channel 7:30 (advance)	7	5
Recording	6	5
BS Premium channel Saturday 9:30 (weekly omnibus)	3	2

(N= 1,298, overall)

(Table includes responses totaling 2% or more, rounded to the nearest percentage point)

[Q] From the following, please indicate all that you have watched at least once.

In addition, please indicate one that represents your most frequent viewing experience.

1. 7:30–7:45 (BS Premium)
2. 8:00–8:15 (General TV)
3. 12:45–13:00 (General TV repeat)
4. 23:00–23:15 (BS Premium)
5. Saturdays 9:30–11:00 (BS Premium Weekly Omnibus)
6. Sundays 5:45–5:50 / Mondays 0:05–0:10 (General TV) “Ama-chan 5-minute weekly recap”
7. Sundays 11:00– (segment on General TV’s “NHK Totteoki Sunday”) “This week on Ama-chan”
8. 7/14 13:05–14:33 (General TV) “Ama-chan Omnibus Part 1”
9. 7/21 15:30–16:58 (BS Premium) “Ama-chan Omnibus Part 1” (rebroadcast of no. 8)
10. Late night 8/15–17 (General TV) “Ama TV Overnight”
11. Recordings
12. Internet video site (e.g., YouTube, Niconico Dōga)
13. NHK Video on Demand
14. Other (please specify:_____)

2. Viewer Attitude and Behavior

a. Viewer Impressions

We prepared over 20 possible choices of aspects thought to represent the appeal of *Ama-chan*, including the screenplay, direction, characters, cast, music, and thematic content, and asked respondents to select any that they felt to be applicable (Table 3) (Values below represent percentages of the total of those who have watched *Ama-chan*, with 100% accounting for all viewers). The most frequent response was that “It was a cheerful, lively production” (64%). Other frequent response included “the dialect was interesting” (39%), followed by “hilarious scenes,” “the cast,” “music and song scenes,” and “the scriptwriter” each in the neighborhood of 30%.

Table 3: *Ama-chan's* Appeal (Multiple Choice)

	(%)
It was a cheerful, lively production	64
The use of vernacular expressions such as "jejeje" was interesting	39
There were many hilarious scenes	38
The actors were well cast	34
The characters (and supporting roles) were fascinating and unique	32
The music and song scenes were good	31
The scriptwriter (Kankuro Kudo) was good	30
The conversation and exchanges between characters was interesting	29
An attractive, distinctive heroine	27
Many impressive scenes	25
The development of the story and the pace of the conversations were good	25
The primary setting in Iwate (Kitasanriku) was impressive	22
The background story of the 1980s pop idol scene was interesting	19
The scenes showing the activities of the <i>ama</i> divers was interesting	19
It was interesting that the earthquake was incorporated into the story	18
Many sympathetic scenes	16
It was good to see the heroine accomplish her dreams even while changing her goals	15
It was good to see the depth and complexity of the characters	13
The training of a contemporary pop idol and the behind-the-scenes aspect of the story were interesting	13
There were many <i>koneta</i> and gags that I wanted to work into daily conversation	13
The main setting in Tokyo (Ameya-Yokocho) was impressive	8

(N= 633 people who watched *Ama-chan*)

Table 4: Associated Behavior (Multiple Choice)

	(%)
I discussed the program with my family	39
I discussed the program with friends and acquaintances	30
I watched television programs featuring <i>Ama-chan</i>	13
I also used catchy dialog and vernacular expressions such as "Jejeje"	11
I read magazines and books that featured <i>Ama-chan</i>	5
I looked at NHK's official website for <i>Ama-chan</i>	5
I read about <i>Ama-chan</i> online	4
I recommended the program to family	4
I recommended the program to friends and acquaintances	4
I discussed the program by e-mail with friends and acquaintances	3
I purchased or rented the CD, or else download the songs	2
I visited places or regions featured in the program	2
I wrote about the program on social media (e.g., Twitter, LINE, blogs, etc.)	1
I read about the program on social media (e.g., Twitter, LINE, blogs, etc.)	1
I watched the program on "NHK On-demand Service"	1
I watched related videos on video websites	1
I bought books and magazines featuring <i>Ama-chan</i>	1
I purchased other related goods	1
I have reserved, purchased or rented the DVD and Blu-ray (or plan to in future)	1
I went to a related concert or other event	0.3
I visited an <i>Ama-chan</i> -related exhibit like the one at "NHK Broadcasting Theme Park"	0.2

(N= 633 people who watched *Ama-chan*)

b. Induced Behavior and Attitudes

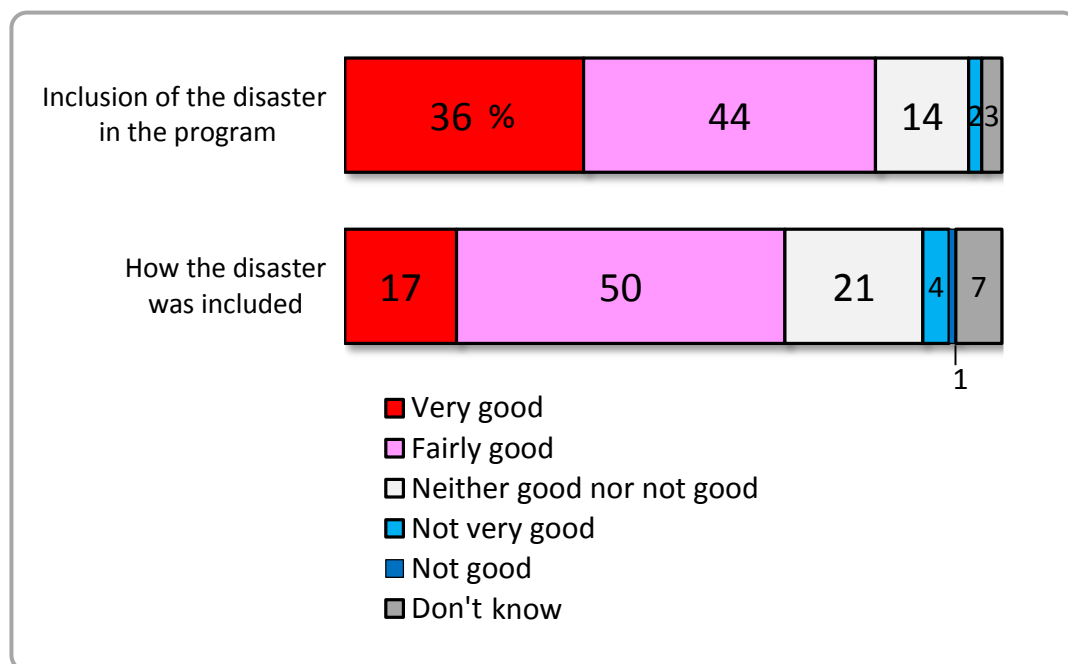
Respondents were asked to answer a multiple-choice question if they had engaged in activities prompted by or on the subject of *Ama-chan* such as conversations, online communications, media contact, or purchasing associated goods. As shown in Table 4, “I discussed the program with my family” and “I discussed the program with friends and acquaintances” were the most frequent responses, which were at the level of 30% of those who watched *Ama-chan*. These were followed by “I watched television programs featuring *Ama-chan*” and “I also used catchy dialog and vernacular expressions such as ‘Jejeje’” at the 10% level, and “I read magazines and books that featured *Ama-chan*” and 5% responded “I looked at NHK’s official website for *Ama-chan*.” Aside from these, other responses such as “Watching videos,” “Purchasing Goods,” and “Writing about the show on social media” were all below 4%, which in a nationwide survey is not a high proportion of respondents.

In addition, with responses indicating that “I felt that NHK has become more flexible now as compared to previous years” (35%), it seems that, overall, many people who watched *Ama-chan* embraced positive feelings toward NHK.

c. About The Great East Japan Earthquake

The fact that the occurrence of the Great East Japan Earthquake was depicted in *Ama-chan* became a topic of much discussion. We asked respondents to evaluate both the fact of the portrayal itself and of the manner in which it was portrayed. The results indicated that those who felt that these were “Good” (including both “Very good” and “Fairly good”) accounted for 80% and 67% of viewers, respectively, whereas those who felt that these were “Not good” (including “Not very good”) were fewer, not exceeding 5% in either case (Figure 10).

Figure 10: The Earthquake Disaster

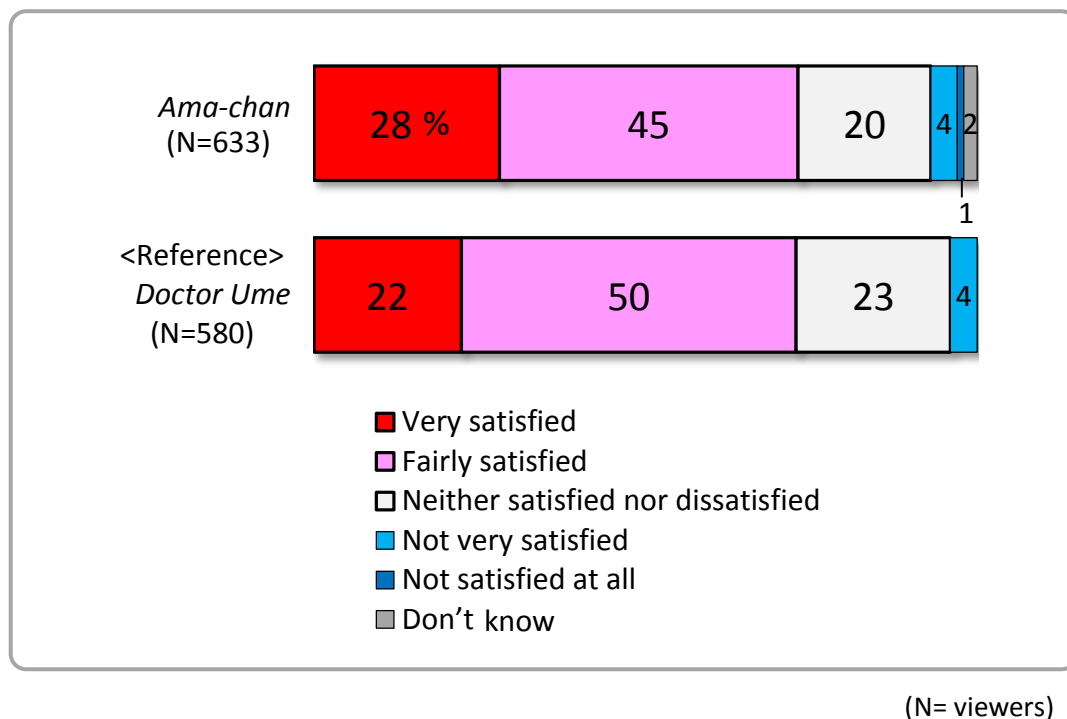


(N= 633 people who watched *Ama-chan*)

d. Emotions and Satisfaction

In terms of emotion, the most frequent response was from those who felt that “I couldn’t wait for the next episode” (34%), followed closely by those who felt “Sometimes, I couldn’t get the theme music or other songs in the show out of my head” (27%). When viewers were asked about their overall degree of satisfaction with *Ama-chan*, 73% of viewers indicated that they were satisfied with the program, including those that were “Very satisfied” (28%) and “Fairly Satisfied” (45%). To provide a reference, viewers were asked about their degree of satisfaction with the previous year’s broadcast of *Doctor Ume*. Although this is a result of being asked to recall the previous year’s program, comparing the two, while there is no real change among the proportion of those who were satisfied (as a total of “Fairly Satisfied” and “Very satisfied,” it was found that more viewers were “Very satisfied” with *Ama-chan* (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Satisfaction (Comparison with *Doctor Ume*)



3. Attitude and Behavior among Highly Satisfied Viewers

As far as can be seen from the above results, the majority of viewers who watched *Ama-chan* were people who began watching the series as a continuation of their daily habit of watching morning serial dramas rather than being influenced by public acclaim; moreover, there do not seem to have been many viewers who engaged eagerly in spreading or collecting information related to the program. However, it may be that the program did not rank as a social phenomenon only amongst those people who watched *Ama-chan* in the context of their habitual daily practice. Perhaps viewers who became passionate about *Ama-chan* may have

caused some kind of special action.⁴ To pursue this line of thought, we focused on those people who indicated that they were “Very satisfied” (reactions by those that were satisfied to an especially high degree).

Table 5 features items with significant differences from the results of a satisfaction survey. As compared to viewers who were “Fairly Satisfied,” the characteristics of those who were “Very satisfied” can be interpreted as follows:

- More viewers were habitual watchers of morning serial drama.
- Not only did almost everyone watch the series to the end, but more than 70% watched almost every episode.
- Similar to those who were “Fairly Satisfied,” most viewers watched the 8:00 broadcast, whereas many other viewers watched the 7:30 broadcast on BS Premium or recordings.
- A prominent number of viewers responded that all aspects of the show appealed to them. Moreover, they reacted more to aspects such as “music,” “inside jokes and gags,” and “Tokyo (Ameya-Yokocho)” that did not appeal as much to “Fairly Satisfied” viewers.
- Respondents extremely frequently engaged in associated behaviors including information transmission such as discussing and recommending the program to others and writing about it online.
- Many viewers “felt passionately” about the program, with more providing the response that “I would like to watch a sequel” or “I was sad to see it end” than “fairly satisfied”

⁴ For example, it has become clear that in the case of the Korean serial drama *Fuyu no sonata* [Winter Sonata], viewers who watched the initial Japanese broadcast on BS Channel 2 accessed and then spread a variety of information (see “*Hoso Kenkyu to Chosa* [The NHK Monthly Report on Broadcast Research]” in the December 2004 issue).

Table 5: Behavior and Consciousness by Degree of Satisfaction

		All Viewers (633)	Highly Satisfied (176)	Satisfied (286)	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied (129)
Viewing Frequency*	Almost every episode	47 %	76	49	11
Viewing Continuity*	Almost to the end of the series	72	95	82	35
Viewing Motivation* (High Percentage)	Because I always watch <i>asadora</i>	47	61	52	19
	Because my family watched	24	21	26	25
	Since it happened to be on when I was watching television	18	6	15	35
Timing and Media Format* (High Percentage)	General TV channel 8:00	68	72	71	61
	General TV channel 12:45	26	27	26	27
	BS Premium channel 7:30	14	23	13	9
	Recordings	12	23	10	4
Appeal* (for responses other than "Satisfied")	The music and song scenes were good	31	52	27	21
	There were many gags and <i>koneta</i> that I wanted to work into daily conversation	13	31	8	1
	The main setting in Tokyo (Ameya-Yokocho) was impressive	8	19	5	1
Associated Behavior* (Only communication activities)	I discussed the program with my family	39	58	40	18
	I discussed the program with friends and acquaintances	30	45	28	17
	I also used catchy dialog and vernacular expressions	11	17	12	5
	I recommended the program to family	4	9	2	0
	I recommended the program to friends and acquaintances	4	9	2	0
	I discussed the program by e-mail with friends and acquaintances	3	6	2	1
	I visited places or regions featured in the program	2	4	1	0
	I wrote about the program on social media (e.g., Twitter, LINE, blogs, etc.)	1	3	0	0
Emotions	I couldn't wait for the next episode	34	67	32	4
	Sometimes, I couldn't get the theme music or other songs from the show out of my head	27	43	23	17
	I would like to watch a sequel	22	42	18	6
	I was sad to see it end	20	48	14	2
	It changed my impression of morning serial dramas	16	28	16	5
	I looked forward to commentary on the show by the hosts of <i>Asaichi</i> ⁵	16	31	13	5
	I never thought I would be so excited about a morning serial drama	12	27	8	2
	I watched it more with my family than any other morning serial drama	10	23	7	2

* Lists selected options

Pink cells are significantly higher overall

Light blue cells are significantly lower overall

The above data suggests that while *Ama-chan* began to be watched as a matter of habit by those viewers who regularly watch morning serial dramas, it also engendered a group of avid viewers (fans) who were particularly enthusiastic and emotionally invested in the program, and who engaged in a variety of associated behaviors (including information transmission). It seems that the online information and other word-of-mouth generated by these people then began to circulate; for example, capturing the attention of and being taken up by the mass media as well as spreading among the general public.

We proceed more in-depth into the trends and content generated by these avid viewers through an Internet-based survey and the analysis of a monitoring of remarks made on social media.

⁵ *Asaichi* ("Morning Market") is a morning lifestyle and commentary program that has been broadcast live since April 2010. When *Asaichi* was launched, the broadcast slot for the NHK morning drama was moved so that the *asadora* would air immediately before *Asaichi*, without any intervening news program. At some point, the program's hosts began to open the show by discussing their impressions of the episode that had aired last. Their discussions regarding *Ama-chan* also became a topic of online discussion, which led to the program attracting more attention.

III. Internet Questionnaire Survey

1. Overview

The fact that it became something of an online sensation has been mentioned as one of the factors that sparked the *Ama-chan* boom. In the public opinion survey on *Ama-chan*, however, we saw that those who wrote or browsed about the program online on social media or Twitter were only a tiny minority (3%) even among those viewers who were avid *Ama-chan* watchers and highly satisfied with the program, which leaves us with the question of whether they could have had enough influence to spark such a boom.

Therefore, let us look in a little more detail at the results of an Internet questionnaire survey to see how *Ama-chan* was watched by comparatively frequent viewers who were also Internet users. Survey respondents consisted of men and women between the ages of 15 and 69 from the Kanto region (Tokyo and six nearby prefectures) on Internet survey monitor panels for Video Research Ltd., a marketing research firm. Among the 4,275 individuals who agreed to take the survey, there were 1,328 who selected responses between (1) and (4) on a seven-point scale regarding how they watched *Ama-chan* (i.e., who ranked their viewing frequency as “Watched occasionally” or higher, defined as “Comparatively Frequent Viewers”). The available options were (1) “Watched almost every episode,” (2) “Watched most episodes,” (3) “Watched around half of the series,” (4) “Watched occasionally,” (5) “Watched a few times,” (6) “Never watched the program,” and (7) “Never heard of the program.” The survey was conducted over two days from 28 to 29 September, 2013.

In addition, a point of caution is necessary owing to the fact that, as monitors for Video Research Ltd., many of these respondents have a relatively high affinity for television viewing.

A sample breakdown of Internet questionnaire survey respondents by age and gender

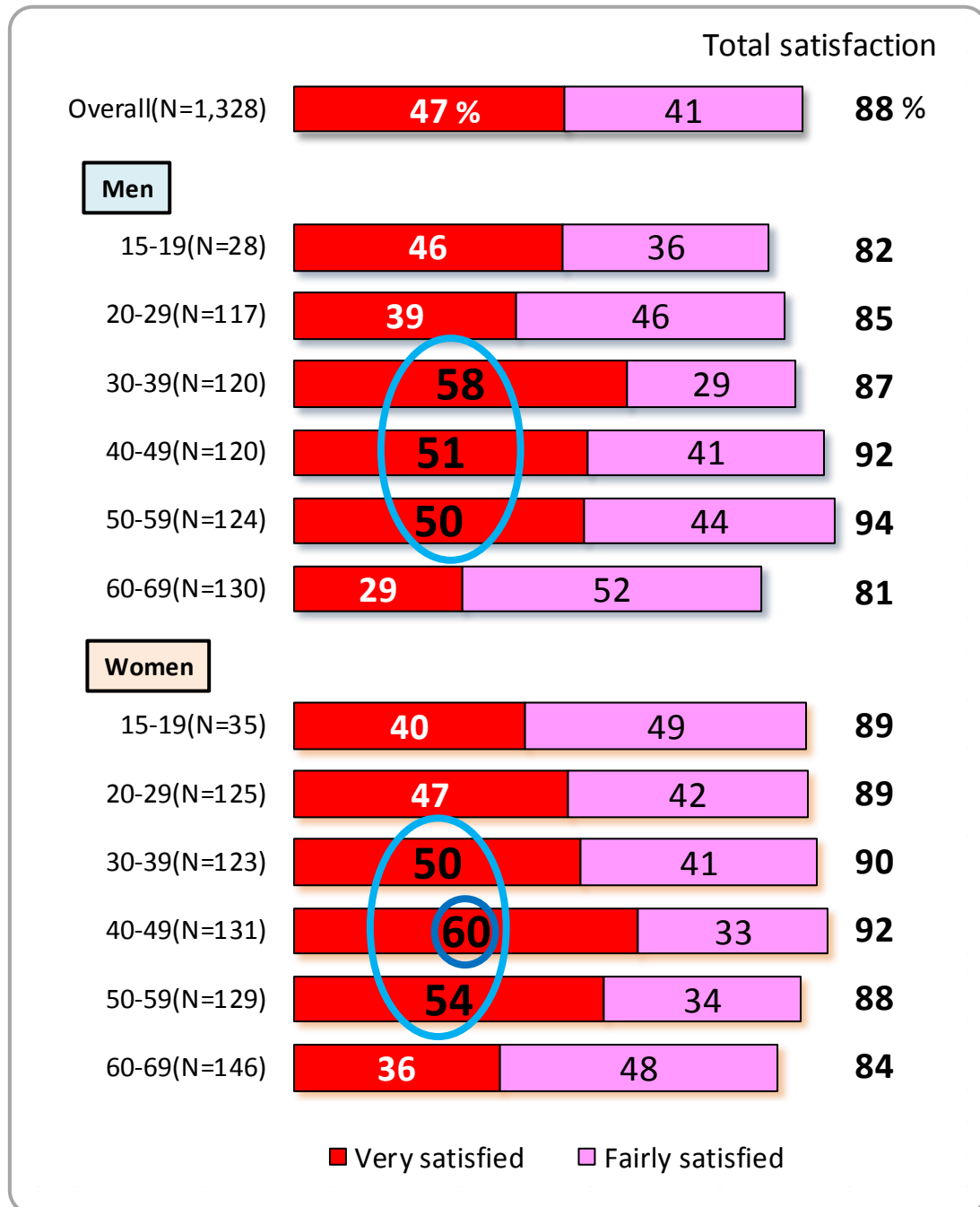
(Figures for both men and women ages 15–19 are for reference only, since the number of respondents was so low.)

	Overall	Sex		Age groups (Men)							Age groups (Women)						
		Men	Women	15–19	20–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60–69	70+	15–19	20–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60–69	70+
Actual number	1,328	639	689	28	117	120	120	124	130	Excluded	35	125	123	131	129	146	Excluded
Ratio	100 %	48.1	51.9	2.1	8.8	9.0	9.0	9.3	9.8	—	2.6	9.4	9.3	9.9	9.7	11	—

(N = 1328 individuals who watched *Ama-chan* occasionally or more frequently)

2. Extremely High Satisfaction among Men and Women Viewers between their 30s and 50s, Especially among Women in Their 40s

Figure 12: Ama-chan Viewer Satisfaction



(Internet Questionnaire Survey)

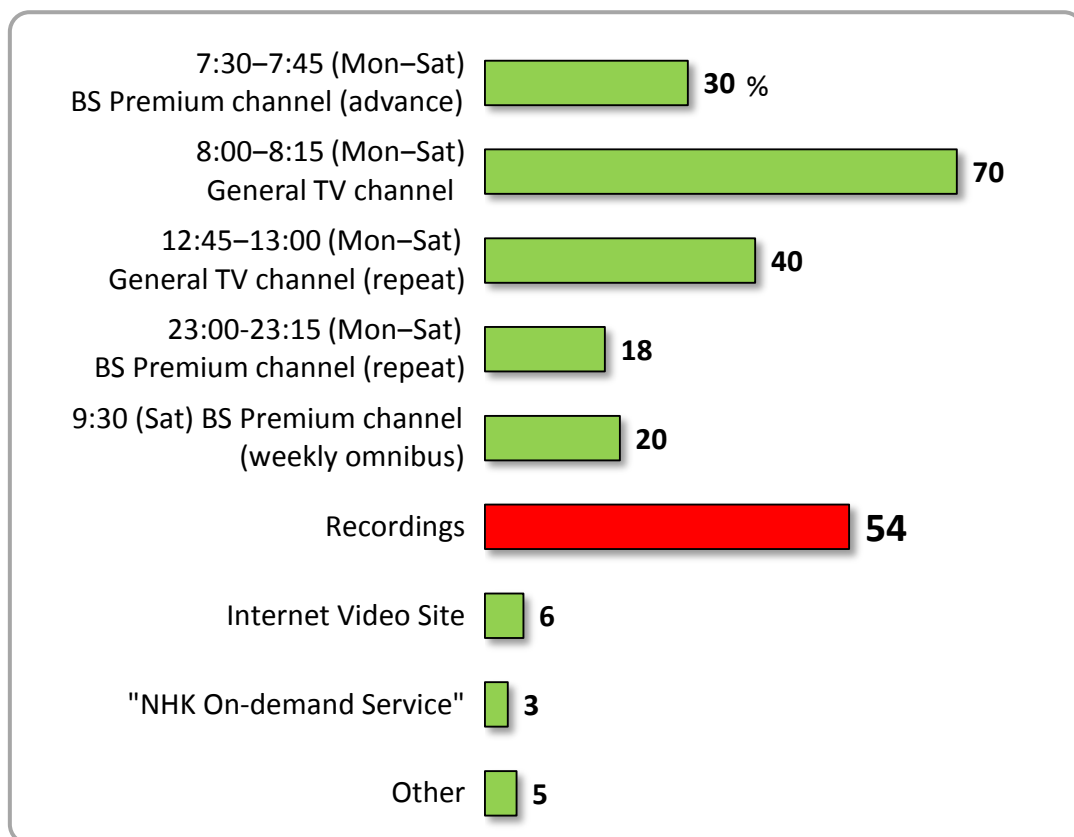
As shown in Figure 12, a considerable proportion of respondents indicated that they were “Very satisfied,” the highest evaluation available for rating viewer satisfaction. In particular, over 50% of respondents, both men and women, in their 30s, 40s, and 50s rated themselves as “Very satisfied,” with this proportion reaching 60% among women in their 40s. In comparison, this was rather lower among men and women in their 60s.

Even in other questions on this survey, women in their 40s and their adjacent cohorts as well as men of the same generation, tended overall to give higher evaluations, whereas both men and women respondents in their 60s tended to give comparatively rather lower evaluations.

3. A Variety of Means to Watch, 50% of Respondents with Experience of Watching Recordings

Respondents were asked about their viewing times and the means by which they watched the program (Figure 13). One noteworthy point is that over 50% had experience of watching recordings of the program. It appears that Internet users who watched *Ama-chan* relatively frequently were adept at employing a variety of different broadcast time slots and means of viewing to match their individual living situations.

Figure 13: Reported Times and Means of Viewing

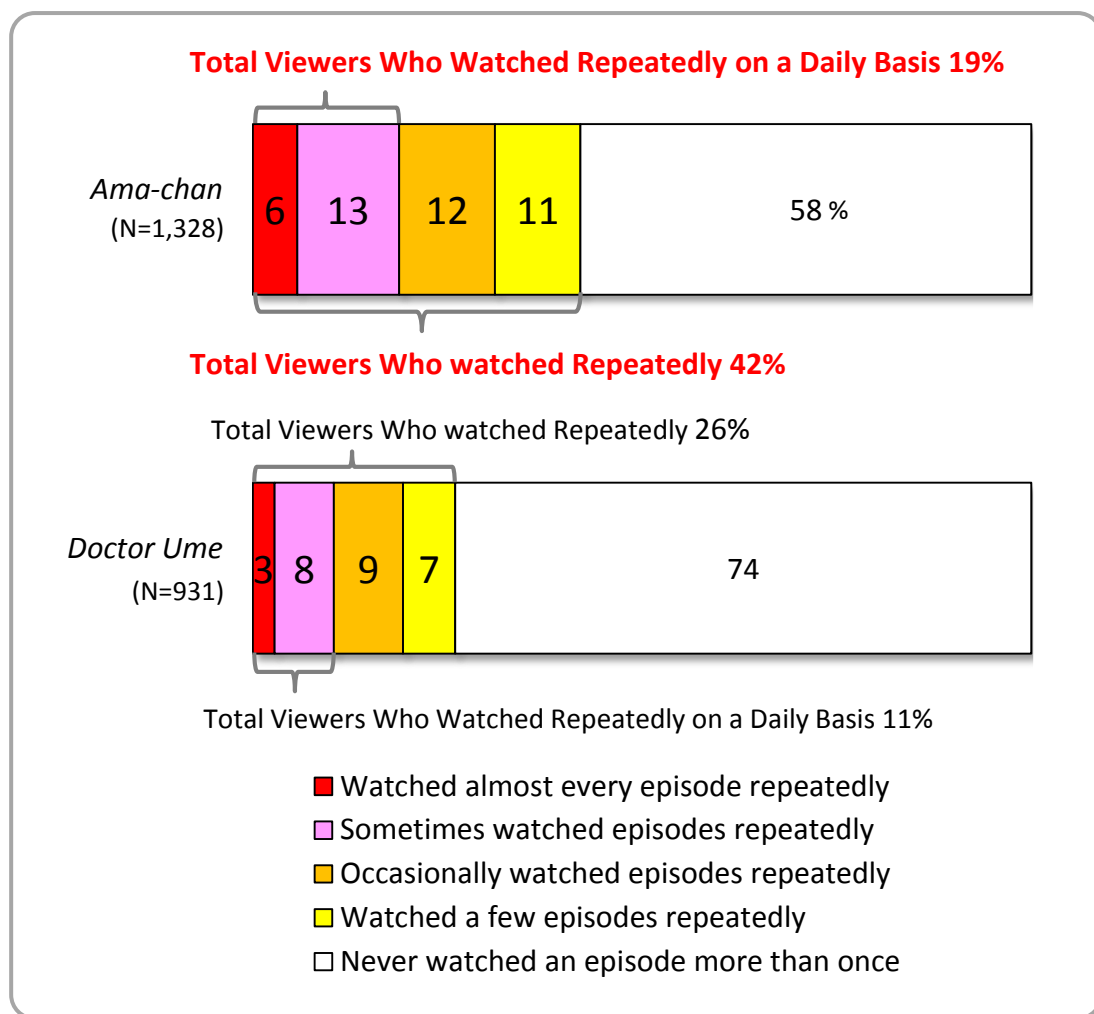


(N = 1,328)
(Internet Questionnaire Survey)

4. Repeat Viewing Experience among 40% of Respondents

Since each episode of *Ama-chan* featured a variety of *koneta*, making it impossible to fully appreciate the program after a single viewing, viewers were also asked whether they “had watched the same episode more than once.” Then, to facilitate comparison, respondents were also asked whether they had also repeatedly watched episodes of *Doctor Ume*, broadcast at the same time the previous year (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Repeat Viewing Experience (Including both Broadcasts and Recordings)



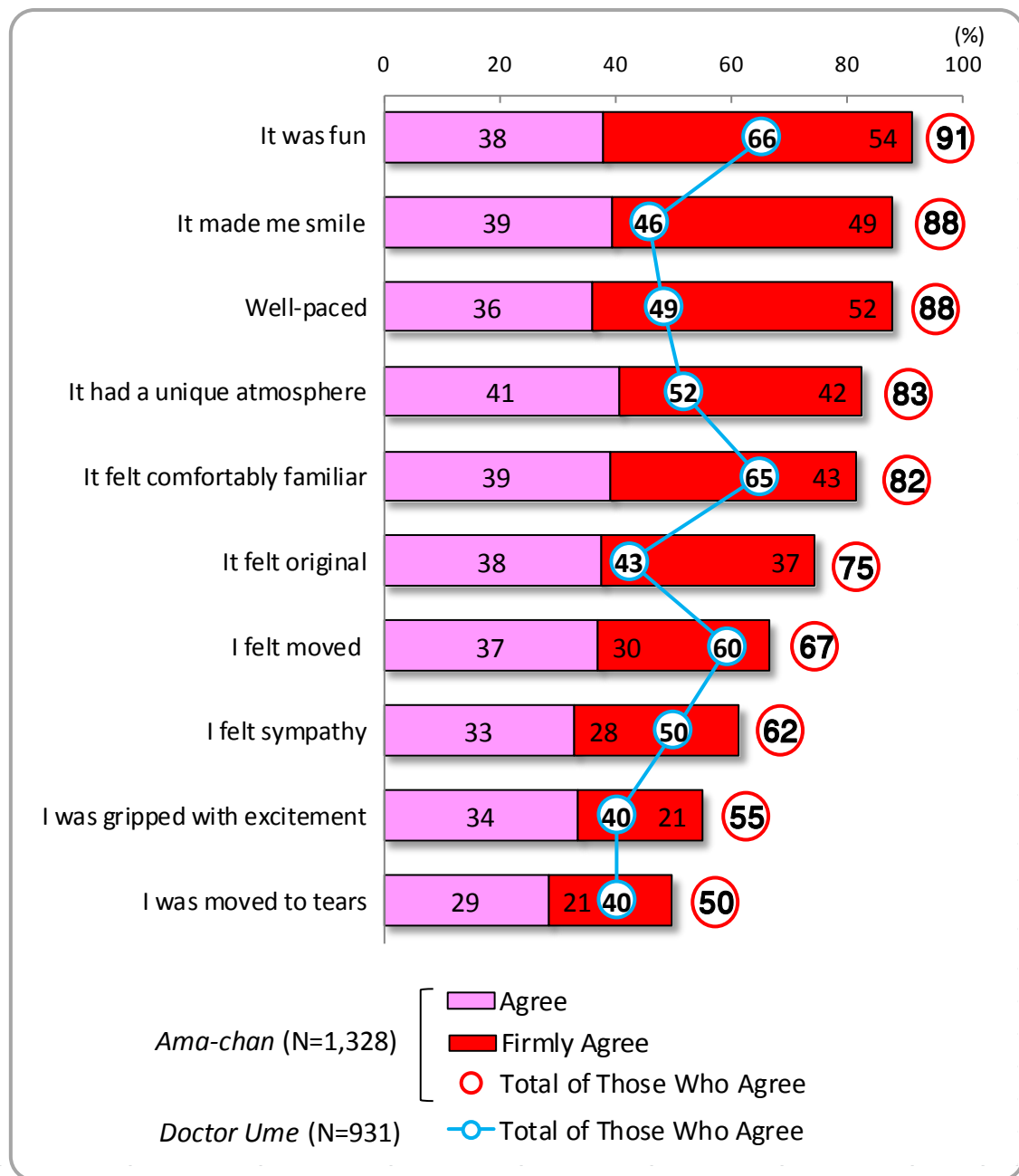
(Internet Questionnaire Survey)

The percentage of viewers who watched *Ama-chan* repeatedly was 42%, which exceeded repeat viewing for *Doctor Ume* (26%). Viewers who frequently watched episodes repeatedly (i.e. the total of those who “Watched almost every episode repeatedly” and “Sometimes watched episodes repeatedly”) also amounted to almost 20% of the total.

5. A Drama Perceived to Combine Sympathy and Emotion with Originality, Individuality, and Fun

Respondents were asked to select from among 10 options to describe their impressions of *Ama-chan*, as shown in Figure 15. For comparison purposes, the same question was also asked about *Doctor Ume*.

Figure 15: Series Impressions: A Comparison of *Ama-chan* and *Doctor Ume*



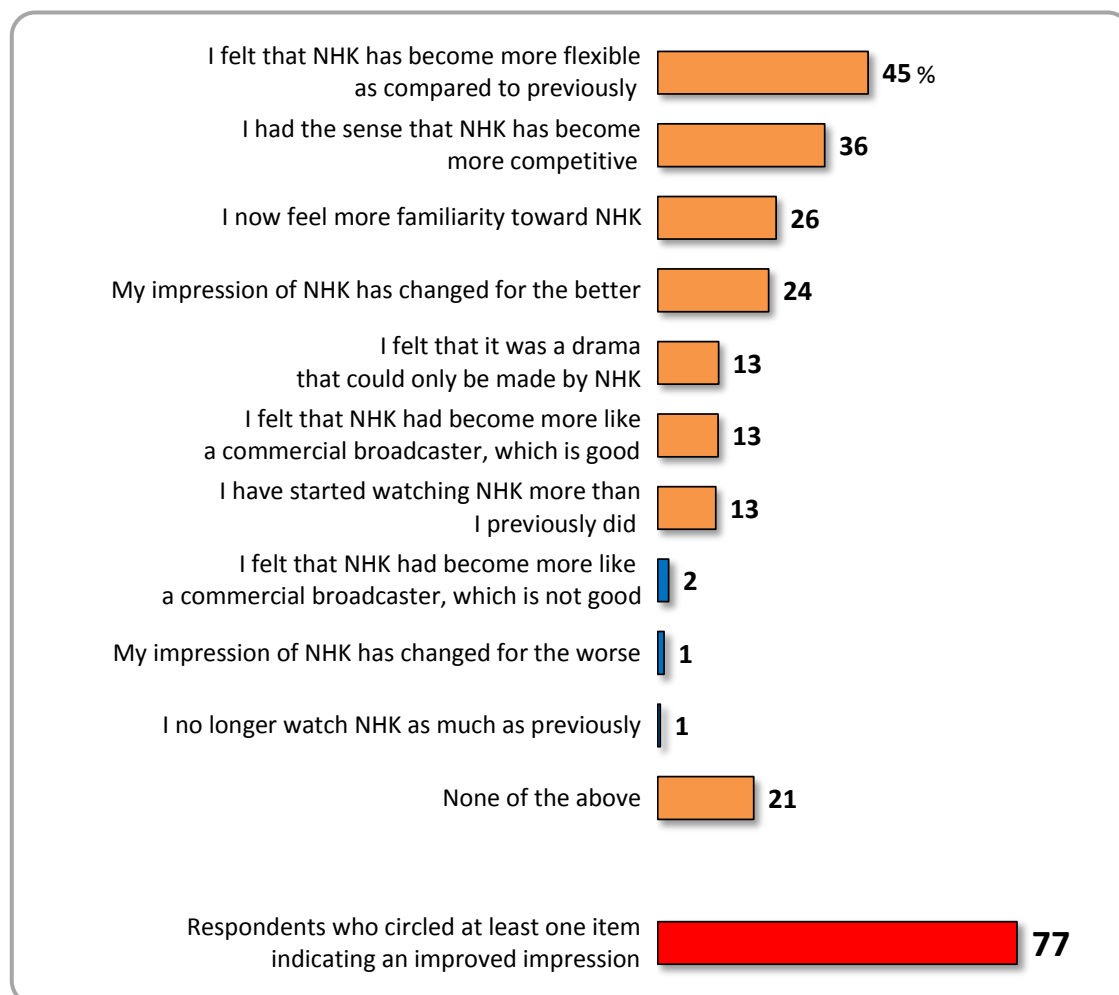
(Internet Questionnaire Survey)

Over 60% recalled “emotion” and “sympathy” that constituted the basic elements of the drama, slightly surpassing those who felt the same way about *Doctor Ume*. On the other hand, between 70% and 90% also reported feeling that the series was characterized by “fun,” “good pacing,” “a unique atmosphere,” and “originality,” which considerably exceeds the corresponding figures for *Doctor Ume*. It could be said that the series was perceived as a drama that combined sympathy and emotion with originality and individuality.

6. *Ama-chan* Improved NHK Brand Impressions among Comparatively Frequent Viewers

It may be inferred that comparatively frequent viewers of *Ama-chan* are avid viewers who feel a high degree of satisfaction with the program. What effects result from programs that evoke such a high degree of “passion” among such viewers? To catch a glimpse of such cause, respondents were presented with a question containing the 10 items listed in Figure 16 about whether *Ama-chan* had altered their impressions of NHK, the network that broadcast the series.

Figure 16: The Impact of *Ama-chan* on Impressions of NHK



(N = 1,328)
(Internet Questionnaire Survey)

With only an extreme few reporting that their impression of NHK had been adversely affected, more than a few respondents chose items suggesting that their impressions had improved; the most frequent being that NHK “has become more flexible as compared to previously” (45%). Moreover, as many as 77% respondents chose at least one item out of ten indicating an improved impression. It would seem that programs that inspire viewers to feel passionately about the series or those that may be described as “addictive” can lead to improving a broadcaster’s brand image.

7. Posting and Browsing on the Internet

As shown in Figure 17, 15% respondents had either written or posted online about *Ama-chan* (i.e. the total of those who responded that they had done so “Almost everyday,” “Sometimes,” and “Occasionally”), with 31% respondents reporting that they had encountered discussions and articles relating to *Ama-chan* while browsing the Internet. Looking at the age and gender breakdown, both posting and browsing is more prevalent in younger age cohorts, being highest among those in their 20s and extremely low among those in their 50s and 60s.

While a considerably higher proportion of respondents reported that they had posted online about or browsed sites relating to *Ama-chan* than in the results of the public opinion survey (possibly owing to a higher degree of familiarity with the Internet among respondents), the majority of respondents in the Internet survey as well reported that they had never posted to or read about the series on Twitter or other social media.

It would appear that even those viewers who are most passionate and net-savvy are not necessarily moved to the practice of posting or reading about a series online.

Figure 17: Online Behavior Relating to *Ama-chan*

Have written or posted online about *Ama-chan*

■ Almost everyday ■ Sometimes ■ Occasionally □ Never

Proportion
Engaging in Activity (%)

Overall(N=1,328) **3** **4** **8** 85 % **15**

Men

15-19(N=28) **3** **1** **1** 86 **14**

20-29(N=117) **7** **14** **12** 67 **33**

30-39(N=120) **2** **8** **17** 73 **27**

40-49(N=120) **4** **4** **9** 83 **17**

50-59(N=124) **2** **1** **6** 91 **9**

60-69(N=130) **1** **1** **2** 96 **4**

Women

15-19(N=35) **3** **6** **17** 74 **26**

20-29(N=125) **10** **7** **13** 70 **30**

30-39(N=123) **2** **7** **8** 83 **17**

40-49(N=131) **1** **4** **3** 92 **8**

50-59(N=129) **3** 97 **3**

60-69(N=146) **1** **1** **2** 96 **4**

Have viewed comments or articles online about *Ama-chan*

■ Almost everyday ■ Sometimes ■ Occasionally □ Never

Proportion
Engaging in Activity (%)

Overall(N=1,328) **4** **14** **13** 69 % **31**

Men

15-19(N=28) **11** **18** 71 **29**

20-29(N=117) **8** **20** **20** 52 **48**

30-39(N=120) **2** **23** **17** 58 **42**

40-49(N=120) **6** **18** **14** 62 **38**

50-59(N=124) **3** **12** **15** 70 **30**

60-69(N=130) **14** **8** 87 **13**

Women

15-19(N=35) **17** **23** 60 **40**

20-29(N=125) **7** **22** **18** 53 **47**

30-39(N=123) **6** **21** **11** 63 **37**

40-49(N=131) **5** **14** **11** 70 **30**

50-59(N=129) **3** **7** 83 **17**

60-69(N=146) **22** **6** 90 **10**

(Internet Questionnaire Survey)

IV. Social Media Monitoring Survey

1. Overview

A survey of social media (known in Japanese as SNS, an acronym for “social network services”) was commissioned from trans cosmos analytics Inc., a private research firm.

The target of this survey was social media including blogs and Twitter. To conduct the survey, we purchased proprietary “tweet” data from Twitter, Inc. and used the Boom Research tool as a text-mining tool for blogs. The search term used as a keyword (in Japanese) was “*Ama-chan*,” including the Twitter hashtag “#*Ama-chan*.” Data were collected during the broadcast period and for one week both before and afterward, specifically from March 25 to October 05, 2013.

2. Quantitative Analysis

a. Data Collection and Cleansing

The actual number of hits captured using the keyword “*Ama-chan*” is shown on Table 6.

As a result of cleansing the data to exclude invalid hits such as those from automatic comment generators, reblogging, spam blogging, Tweet aggregators, copy-and-paste blog posts, and adult-related posts, a final result of 6,125,055 mentions on Twitter and 207,263 mentions on blogs was obtained. This figure was taken as the aggregate target of the quantitative total. This represents an average of over 30,000 Tweets per day, which in terms of quantity alone surely positions *Ama-chan* as a program that attracted considerable attention.

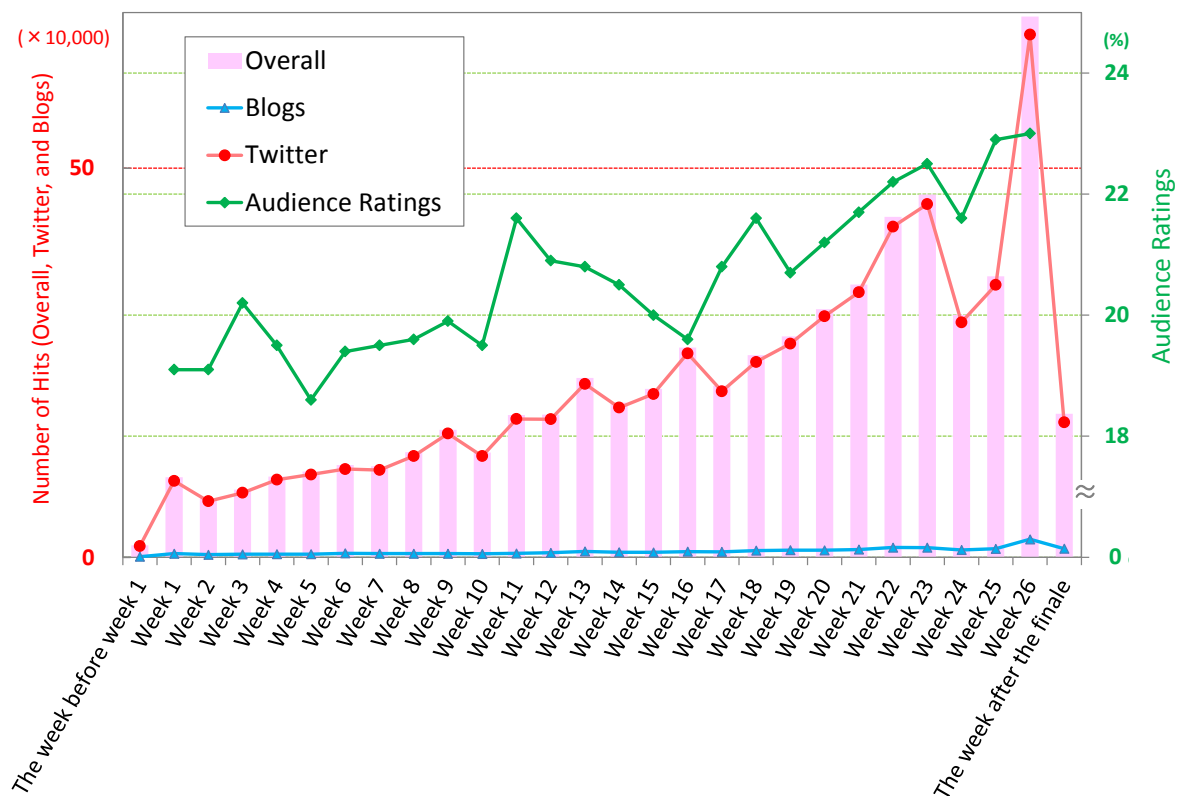
Table 6: Data Collection

	Twitter	Blogs
Data Analysis Period	March 25 – October 5 2013	
Search Keywords	“ <i>Ama-chan</i> ” “# <i>Ama-chan</i> ”	“ <i>Ama-chan</i> ”
Hits	6,500,055	365,682
Hits after Data Cleansing	6,125,055	207,263

b. Trends in the Number of Online Comments

Looking at a weekly breakdown of the number of online comments shows a generally rising trend, as shown in Figure 18. While the trend over time is generally upward, similar to the audience ratings, such social media trends continue constantly even during periods of somewhat depressed audience ratings.

Figure 18: Weekly Total of Comments Mentioning “Ama-chan” or “#Ama-chan” vs. Household Audience Ratings (Video Research Kanto Area)



The excerpt of the daily breakdown of comments and audience ratings presented in Figure 19 shows no strong correlation between the proliferation of online comments and rising audience ratings in the short term. From the data provided in these figures, though there may be some correlation between audience ratings and the number of online comments, closer examination shows that the number of comments on social media can be seen to be independent, suggesting that these comments may be an index of something other than audience ratings.

Figure 19: Daily Breakdown of Comments vs. Household Audience Ratings (Weeks 8 to 17)

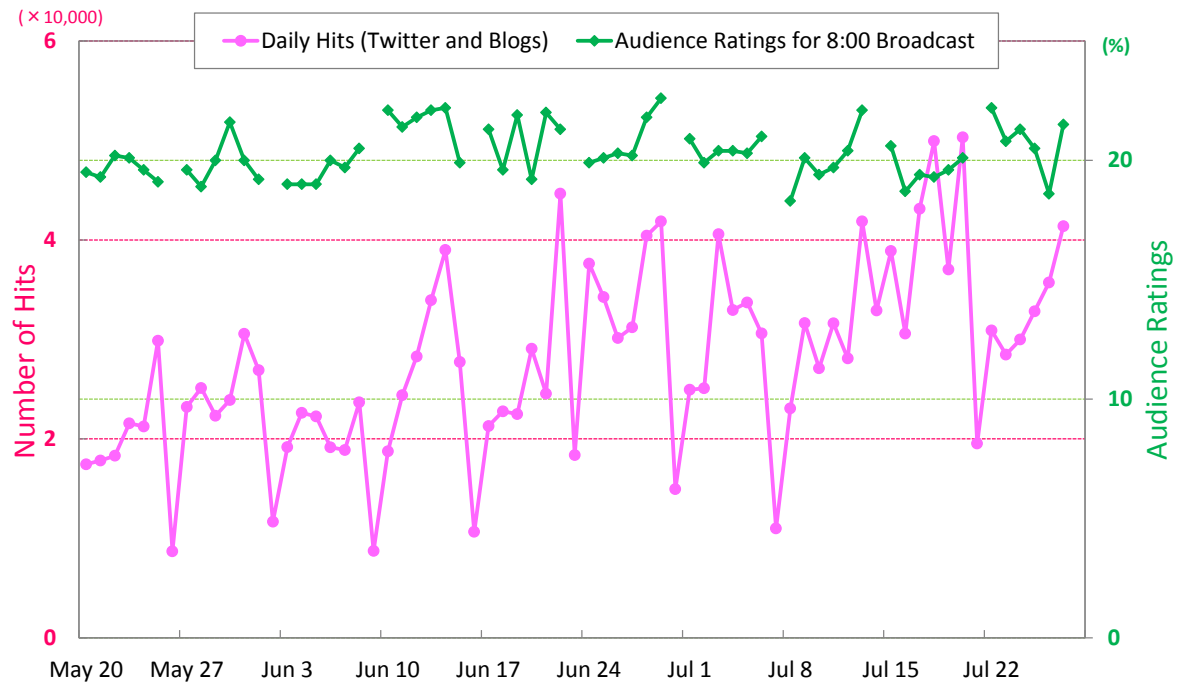
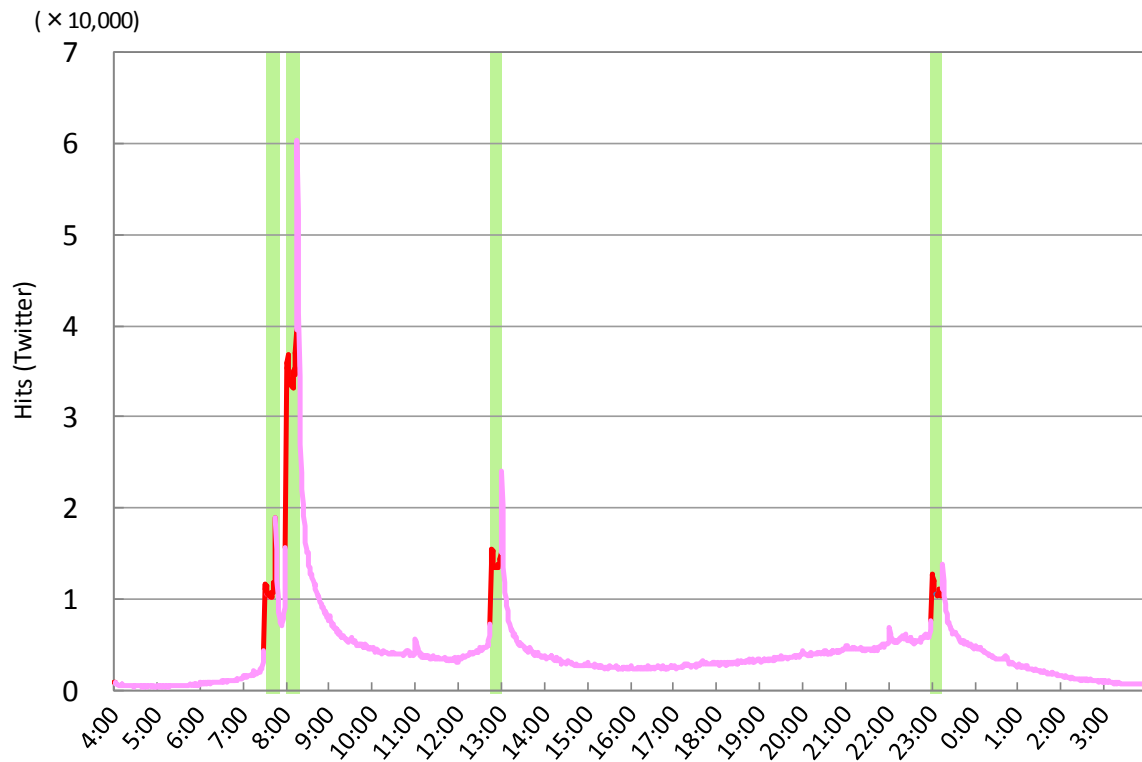


Figure 20 shows the variance between the numbers of Tweets by increments per minute throughout the day. The line represents the total number of Tweets for each minute during the data collection period. As NHK broadcasts *Ama-chan* four times a day, Tweets mentioning the program increased during each of these respective broadcast times, peaking immediately after the end of the broadcast for 30 minutes to an hour thereafter and then declining gradually. Although viewers are now said to record and watch the program on a daily basis, in the Twittersphere, there appears to be a strong trend towards viewing and commenting in real time.

In contrast, a gradual increase in activity can also be seen between 18:00 and 22:00, which might conceivably represent comments being made by those viewers who watched recorded programs during this time. There also appears to be some overlap between comments posted by viewers in real time and comments posted by those watching recordings.

Figure 20: “Ama-chan”: Aggregate Tweets per Minute

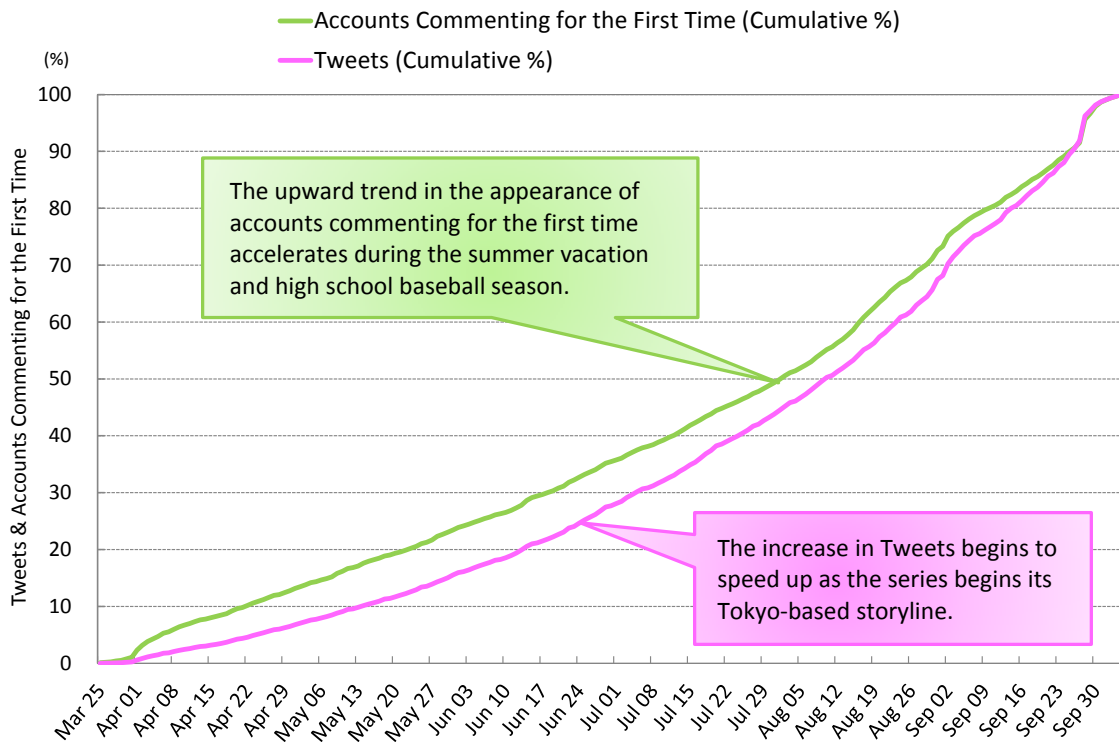


c. Number of Commenters: Avid Viewers Offered Majority of Comment

Let us now focus on the number of individuals making these comments. During the surveyed period, Tweets relating to *Ama-chan* were posted from a total of approximately 880,000 Twitter accounts. Taking this final value as 100%, the daily cumulative addition (as a percentage) of accounts newly participating in discussions about *Ama-chan* is graphed in Figure 21. Like the cumulative graph of the number of Tweets, the graph rises over time, with the slope of both graphs becoming steeper toward the latter half of the series. This indicates that both the number of commenters and the number of comments gain increased momentum from the middle toward the end of the series.

It seems that there are a variety of factors underlying this trend. One such is the increase in awareness of the series that commenced around June, as the series began to be taken up more frequently by online news media and with the spread of the “ama-e” [*Ama-chan* fan art] meme, in which social media users posted their own *Ama-chan*-related artwork online. These drew viewers’ attention to the enjoyment to be had by sharing their impressions of the drama and discoveries of its *koneta* on social media. Shortly thereafter, coinciding with the beginning of the summer vacation, the number of both comments and commenters considerably grew, as viewers who usually could not watch morning drama serials began tuning in and the brass bands of numerous high schools began to play *Ama-chan*’s opening theme to cheer their respective school’s baseball teams.

Figure 21: Cumulative Graph of Daily Tweets and Accounts Commenting for the First Time



So who was actually making these comments? Let us turn to Table 7. While a simple calculation might suggest that the approximately six million Tweets generated from over almost 880,000 accounts gives us an average of seven Tweets per account, the Tweets were in fact much more heavily weighted. For example, there were 14 accounts that generated over 5,000 Tweets each, with the Tweets generated by these 14 accounts (i.e. people) making up a total of 1.7% of all Tweets. Similarly, there were 7,261 accounts that generated over 100 Tweets each. While this figure makes up no more than slightly over 0.8% of those who Tweeted about *Ama-chan*, the 2.4 million Tweets posted by these accounts made up almost 40% of all Tweets about *Ama-chan*. In other words, it may be presumed that a small number of people who felt impassioned about *Ama-chan* posted a massive number of Tweets, which in turn powerfully contributed to all Tweets and drove the popularity of the program itself.

Table 7: Accounts by Number of Comments and Comment Distribution

	Accounts Mentioning <i>Ama-chan</i> (N = 878,799)	Total Comments (N = 6,125,055)	Share of Accounts	Share of Tweets
Over 5,000 Tweets	14	104,638	0.00 %	1.71 %
Over 3,000 Tweets	51	243,382	0.01 %	3.97 %
Over 1,000 Tweets	391	763,232	0.04 %	12.46 %
Over 500 Tweets	1,001	1,180,199	0.11 %	19.27 %
Over 300 Tweets	1,891	1,523,813	0.22 %	24.88 %
Over 100 Tweets	7,261	2,405,666	0.83 %	39.28 %

d. The Power of “Retweeting”

“Retweeting” is an element of social media that serves to amplify discussions in the Twittersphere. Indicated by the abbreviation “RT” at the beginning of a Tweet, retweeting is essentially a Tweet that cites another person’s Tweet without embellishment. This practice of reporting what another user has said is a close approximation of “word-of-mouth” in the real world.

Retweeting also seems to have played a major role among Tweets relating to *Ama-chan*. Since the aggregate data used in this survey has undergone data cleansing, it does not include actual retweets but “Tweets in which the same text appears.” The most popular retweeted Tweets are those of actors and individuals associated with the program, with the most frequent being a Tweet by Rena Nōnen, followed by the composer Yoshihide Otomo, Kyōko Koizumi (staff-maintained), and a supporting actress, Jun Miho. This might be obvious in an age in which Tweets by performers and officials serve as a means of publicity for the series. Popular retweeted Tweets other than those of people connected with the series included Tweets with *Ama-chan*-related image attachments, an independent social media culture phenomenon known as “*ama-e*” [*Ama-chan* art].

e. The Origin of *ama-e*: “Ama-chan art”

Ama-e represent an important component involved in any discussion concerning the reality of watching *Ama-chan*. Originally, this phenomenon dates to the *gege-e* [Gege art] drawn and shared on social media by both professionals and amateurs inspired after having watched broadcasts of the 2010 morning drama *Gegege no Nyōbo* (*My Husband is a Cartoonist*). *Ama-e* has included an illustrated *manga* digest providing a synopsis of the hometown storyline leading up to the Tokyo storyline that began from the 13th week of the program. Further, it has included illustrations and collages of memorable *koneta* and even tweeted photos of viewers’ attempts to reproduce latte artwork featured on the show. In addition to watching the program, viewers (i.e., social media users) found their unique way of enjoying it by creating secondary works that could be said to already be established as a work of art.

f. Quantitative Analysis of Comment Content: Performer and Character Names

Next, while comments about the characters in the series were initially made using the names of the actors portraying them, by looking for the point when this began gradually to shift in favor of comments that mentioned the names of the actual characters (as viewers were drawn into the world of the story), we performed an analysis to discover whether it was possible to visualize aspects that enticed viewer attitudes to go beyond the objective and draw them deeper into the series.

To begin with, we short-listed the names of individuals to be examined. We performed an analysis by narrowing the list down to 12 names consisting of major characters in the drama as well as the most popular characters in the earlier Internet questionnaire survey—including the screenwriter Kankurō Kudō—who are indispensable to discussions about *Ama-chan*. The number of respective occurrences of these names is summarized in Table 8.

Aside from the fact that the heroine Aki Amano (Rena Nōnen) is consistently in first place, the results are quite interesting. The second most popular character name is that of Aki’s friend Yui Adachi, who in some sense attracted considerable attention by experiencing even more dramatic circumstances than the heroine. In addition, Takuma Mizuguchi’s fourth place finish, close behind Haruko Amano in third place and well ahead of characters in fifth place and lower, could be the result of how the character appealed to women of each generation.

With respect to the names of performers, while the frequency with which Kyōko Koizumi was mentioned can be explained by her relative fame and the fact that she was a pop idol herself in real life, the name Kankurō Kudō was mentioned even more frequently and constantly during the six-month survey period, resulting in his name finishing in the second place after Rena Nōnen. The fact of the screenwriter attracting so much attention is another feature of this show.

Table 8: Number of Occurrences of Names of Individuals

Role	Total Occurrences	Performer	Total Occurrences
Aki Amano	41,105	Rena Nonen	21,705
Haruko Amano	20,375	Kyoko Koizumi	11,426
		Kasumi Arimura	2,940
Natsu Amano	7,281	Nobuko Miyamoto	1,317
Yui Adachi	23,220	Ai Hashimoto	5,508
Hiroshi Adachi	7,385	Teppei Koike	684
Koichi Taneichi	8,323	Sota Fukushi	2,560
Daikichi Omukai	4,736	Tetta Sugimoto	359
Sayuri Anbe	2,449	Hairi Katagiri	406
Hiromi Suzuka	9,826	Hiroko Yakushimaru	4,637
Taichi Aramaki	9,038	Arata Furuta	2,780
Takuma Mizuguchi	19,767	Ryuhei Matsuda	2,730
		Kankuro Kudo (Screenwriter)	18,049

Next, examining the weekly trends in the occurrence of characters' names, we find that the occurrence of the name of the main character, Aki, tended to increase more or less until the final week of the series. Conversely, the occurrence of the names of the major supporting roles, such as Haruko, Yui, Mizuguchi, and Hiromi Suzuka, were shown to peak in weeks in which these characters were of pivotal importance (Figure 22). These figures are based on a 10% data sample.

**Figure 22: Weekly Trends in the Occurrence of Characters' Names
(When Does Occurrence Peak?)**

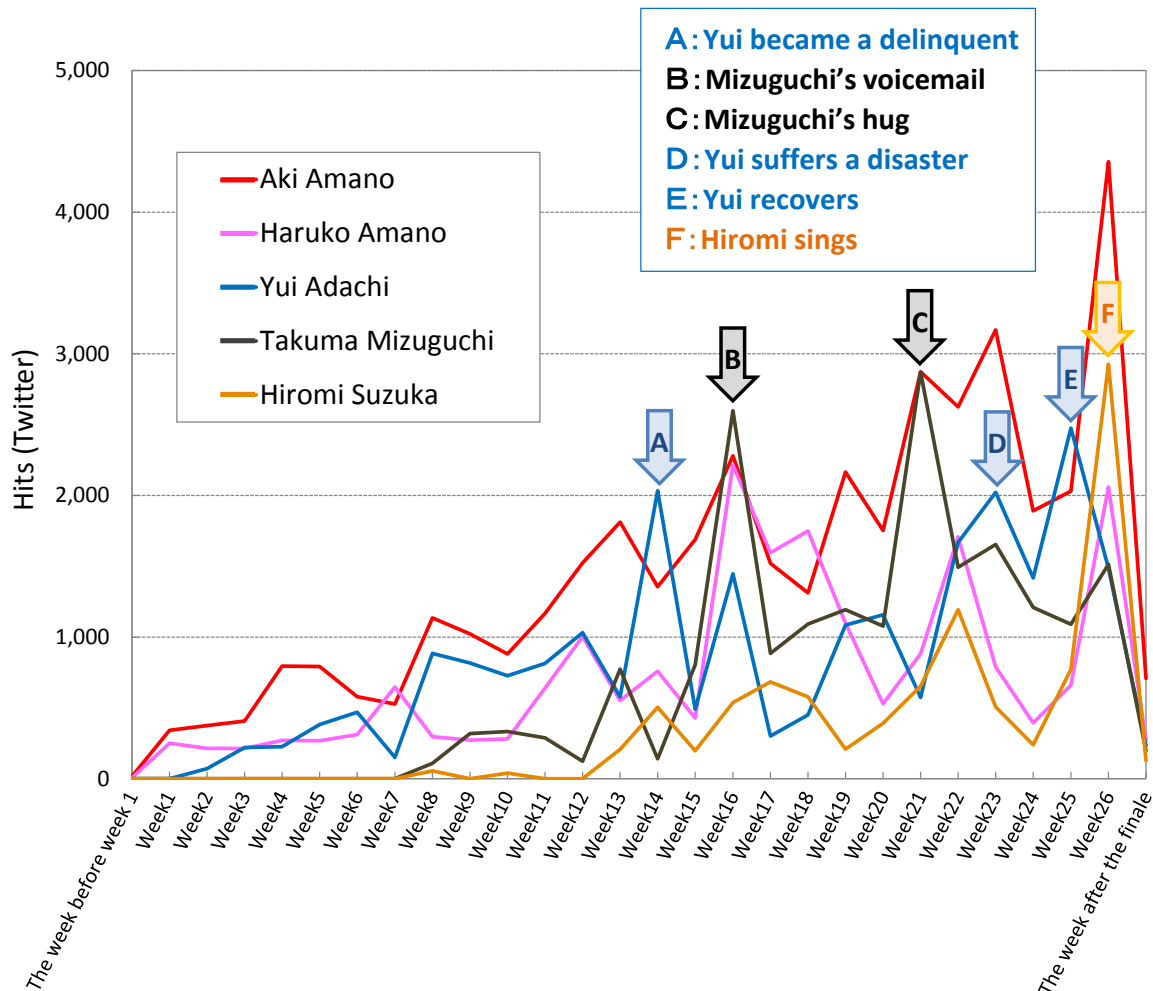
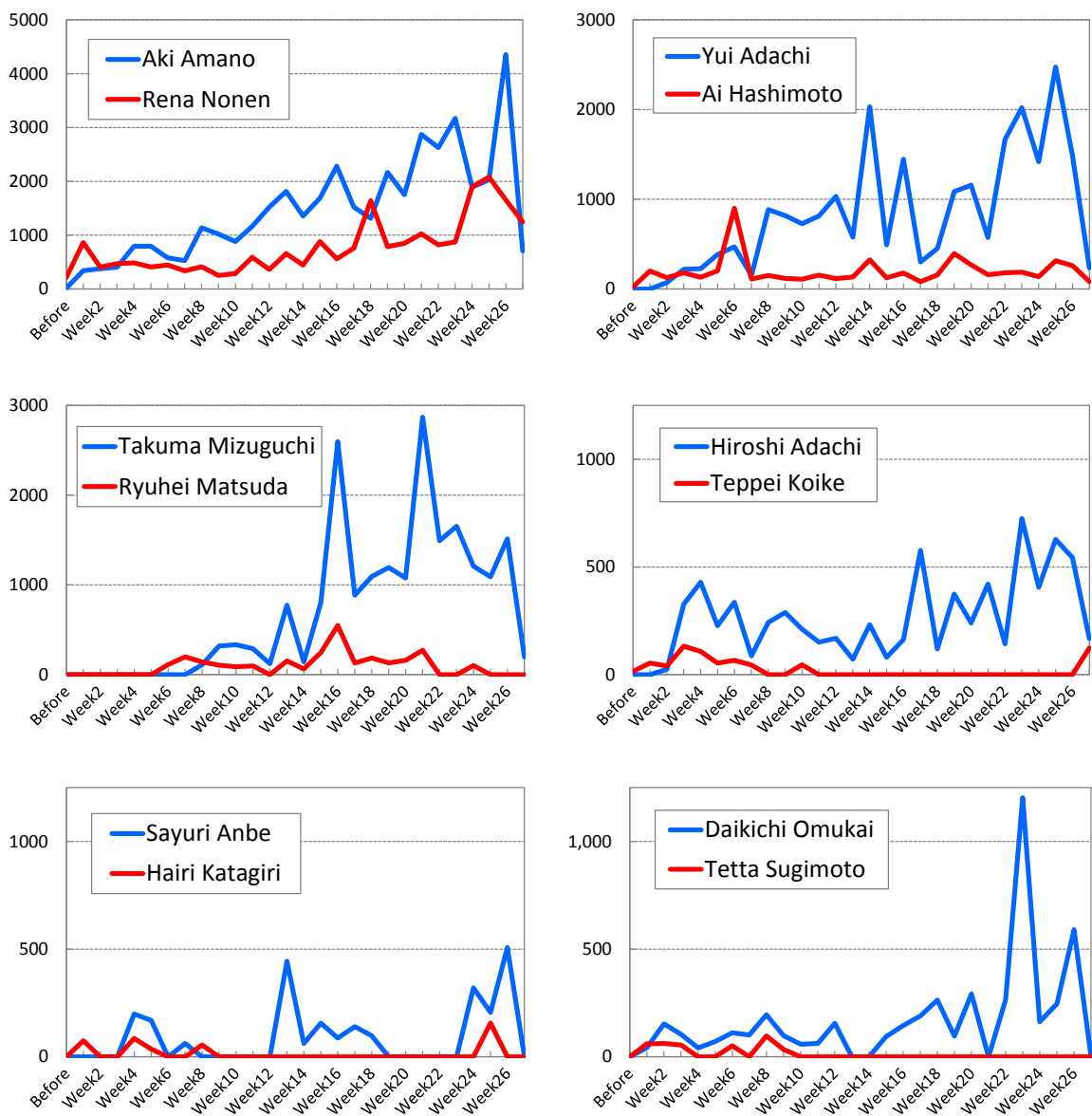


Figure 23 shows weekly changes with respect to the occurrence of both performer and character names. Individuals appearing from the first week of the series are generally referred to by their respective actors' names until the third or fourth week, when such references are overtaken by the characters' names. It appears that at this stage, commenters had become familiar with the *Ama-chan* series universe. Moreover, the fluctuations that occur among the supporting roles are noteworthy. With respect to Hiroshi Adachi (Teppei Koike), Daikichi Ōmukai (Tetta Sugimoto), and Sayuri Anbe (Hairi Katagiri), in addition to the fact that their names were rarely used from the beginning, they do not appear at all in the latter half of the series. This appears to be an aspect of the outcome of creating solid roles for veteran character actors that nevertheless have a low name recognition factor (at least among the social media generation): the commenters are immersed in the overwhelming world of the fictional drama, almost feeling like these characters exist in reality.

Figure 23: Trends in the Occurrence of Individual Names by Performer and Character



3. Qualitative Analysis

a. Association between Number of Comments and Program Content

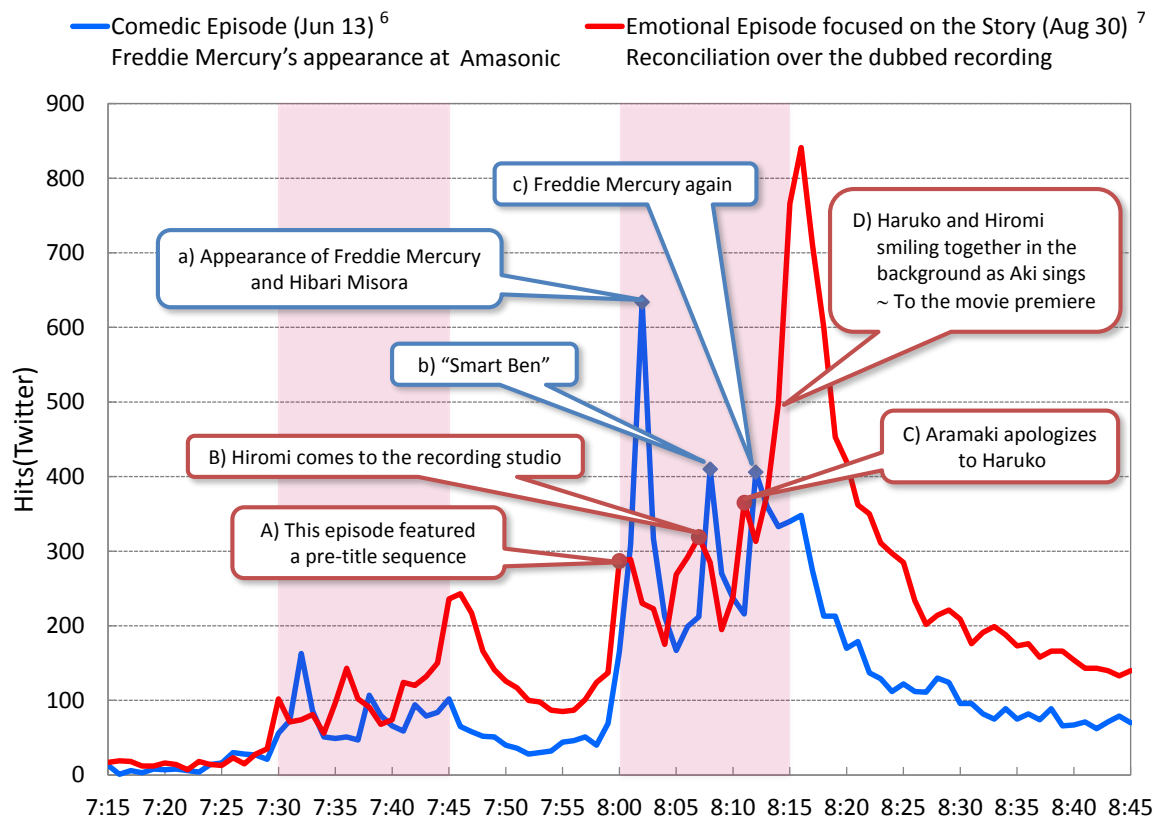
A major feature of *Ama-chan* is the scattering of *koneta* throughout the drama that have seemingly no apparent relationship to the main story. Viewers whose hearts loosened by the occasional wry laugh are more easily moved to tears as the classic drama unfolds. Eliciting laughs for some scenes and tears for others, how did Twitter users react to *Ama-chan*'s script?

Out of all the episodes broadcast, we selected typical examples of dramatic episodes that evoked powerful emotions and that provoked excitement over *koneta*. Figure 24 compares the number of Tweets over the 90 minutes leading from before the advance broadcast on BS Premium at 7:30 until after the 8:00 broadcast on General TV (7:15 to 8:45).

A number of features can be interpreted from these graphs. First, focusing on the peak in Tweets that appear during the broadcast, though the upper limit of the absolute figures varies, both BS and General TV show similar changes for the same episodes. Even among different viewing audiences, it seems that those who Tweet during the broadcast react at the same point in the episode. When we compare the timing of events during the broadcast on a time axis, the occurrence of *koneta* and the climax of the drama line up quite well.

Next, we can see that after the surge in Tweets during the broadcast of the comedic episodes peak, they also tend to fall off quickly, appearing to be easily excited and easily cooled. By contrast, Tweets during the emotional episodes are comparatively restrained, perhaps owing to the large volume of Tweets from those viewers who write about their emotional responses after the end of the broadcast, which results in a long-tail decline in the number of Tweets. There also appears to be a relatively large number of people who Tweet during the 15 minutes between the BS Premium and General TV morning broadcasts.

Figure 24: Timing and Volume of Comments for Emotional and *Koneta*-driven Episodes



- While determining the musical program for the event, the diver woman appear on stage dressed as celebrities such as Freddie Mercury and Hibari Misora.
- Ben, the amber digger, is a regular at the snack bar, where he can always be found polishing amber at the counter. Today, he is polishing a smartphone. When the story was set, in 2009, this was still unusual, and he receives the nickname "Smart Ben-san" for being the first person in town to own a smartphone.
- On the day of the event, the diver woman playing Freddie Mercury makes a brief appearance in Aki's dressing room after finishing her spot.
- For some episodes, like this one, *asadora* features a pre-credit sequence before the opening credits.
- While Aki is in the studio singing the theme song of the movie, Haruko and Hiromi share a grin in the control room. The song segues directly into a scene at a test screening of the film, playing as the film's final credits roll.

⁶ The episode in which the "Amasonic" event is held at the Ama Café that Aki had a key part in creating. The name of the festival is a pun for the well-known Summer Sonic festival. While the diver women appear to be made up as various characters such as Lady Gaga, the most unusual of these is Freddie Mercury's "Radio Ga Ga." A typical example of a comedic episode.

⁷ Hiromi Suzuka appears in the studio where the theme song for the movie starring Aki is being recorded. In fact, 25 years earlier, Aki's mother Haruko had sung a vocal track to cover for Hiromi (an appalling singer) behind the scenes, and this prevented Haruko from becoming a singing idol. In addition, Aramaki had never told Hiromi about replacing her voice with Haruko's. In this crucial episode, Hiromi and Aramaki confess everything in front of Haruko, and the three are reconciled.

b. Examining Comment Trends

What sorts of things about *Ama-chan* are remarked upon in the world of social media? Let us begin with a glance at the changes over time. The selections in bold text below are quotes from actual Tweets.

<The first couple of months> From the early attention given to superficial aspects of the story, such as the fascinating story line scripted by Kankurō Kudō, the charm of the main characters Aki and Yui, and romantic episodes, people gradually come to enjoy online discussions that delve into depictions of eccentric characters and *koneta* hidden here and there. **“The clever screenplay deliberately leaves open a space for viewers to jump in and fill with their own ideas and then completes the narrative without a moment’s delay.”**

<From June to mid-July> From early June, the *ama-e* meme appears. Write-ups on online news sites also begin to proliferate and the dramatic storyline peaks with the Amasonic festival as the climax of the hometown story arc. By the point when interpersonal relationships are thrown into confusion as the setting shifts to Tokyo and Aki begins struggling to pay her dues as a pop idol, commenters have become immersed in the world of the story and begin exchanging opinions on the pros and cons of both characters and the plot. Some viewers also express opposition to the depiction of pop idols itself. Audience ratings remain static until around Week 16 of the series in mid-July. **“When you wish that the storyline would move back to hometown Iwate, you are falling for Kankurō Kudō’s tricks!”**

<From late-July to mid-August> When Aki returns once again to Tokyo in hope of becoming a pop idol, commenters recognize that the roots of the story lie in the antagonistic structure of the long-standing quarrel between Aki’s mother Haruko and the producer Taichi Aramaki. Here, the visuals and performances of the manager Mizuguchi contribute some added presence that serves to captivate women viewers, the traditional targets of morning dramas. Around the same time, mid-August marks the beginning of the summer vacation, and the series attracts further interest as new viewers who could not previously watch morning dramas begin watching and high school brass bands begin playing the theme song of the show to cheer on their baseball teams. The pace of the increase in both the number of Tweets and commenters begins to rise. **“I’m beginning to think that the real heroine is not Aki, but Haruko.”**

<From late August to September> On one hand the drama charts the development of Aki and the favorable reconciliation of Haruko and Suzuka with Aramaki, uneasiness begins to spread among commenters over the impending occurrence in the storyline of the Great East Japan Earthquake. Plausible speculation circulates over the possibility that a number of characters may lose their lives, and many commenters are forced to overlay the depiction of the disaster in the drama with their personal real-life experience. Leaving aside the final episode, the comment peaks on social media occur during the episode leading up to the disaster (Aug 31) and the episode in which the disaster occurs (Sep.2). **“I’m feeling depressed knowing that we will be getting into the disaster storyline next week” and “I was already about to cry even after today’s broadcast.”**

While September's "Reconstruction Storyline" drew accusations that the depiction of the disaster had been only lukewarm from commenters who had quit watching, and there were some who opined that it had been premature even to portray the disaster at all; furthermore, many had expressed appreciation and praise for the thoughtful representation of the disaster. Commenters focused on the emotional uplift that had characterized the move toward the climactic resolution, including the settlement of the dubbed singing issue.⁸ Others bemoaned the end of the program and expressing confused feelings caused by a sense of loss (abbreviated as *amarosu*) after the final broadcast. Comment after comment included words of tribute conveying that they were glad they watched the show. **"The series was an inspiration for revitalization not only for the disaster-stricken areas, but to all of Japan." "It might truly be the first time that I've felt the entire cast to be so lovable. Thank you Ama-chan!"**

c. Comments Reflecting Back on the Entire Series

So how was the series evaluated overall?

To begin with, a huge number of comments were posted by those who seemed to have continued watching over the previous six months that ended with "thank you" (*arigatō*) and other words of gratitude after finishing watching the final episode. Comments that referred to changes in viewer behavior (e.g., "I watched them all without fail, I've never done that before," "I even recorded some episodes to watch them") and changes of heart (e.g., "This is the first time that 15 minutes has felt so short," "This is the first time I've been looking forward to a program every morning") were presumed to express appreciation for a series that had brought about positive changes in the commenters themselves.

⁸ In her youth, Aki's mother Haruko left her hometown dreaming of becoming an idol. At one point, while she was working a dead-end job as a waitress in a Tokyo coffee parlor, one of her customers, a show business manager named Aramaki, asked her for a favor. At the time, Aramaki was managing a novice actress by the name Hiromi Suzuka. Since Hiromi was incredibly tone deaf, Aramaki wanted Haruko to sing in her place. Soon, the actress's record was released, dubbed with Haruko's voice. When it became a major hit, Haruko was eventually hired as a "ghost singer" for live musical broadcasts. To do so, however, Haruko had to give up on her dreams of being in the spotlight and of becoming a pop idol; she then got married in disappointment. Even after twenty years, Haruko's brief career as a ghost singer still remains as a secret known only to a select group of the individuals concerned. In the drama's "present-day" timeline, Hiromi has become a major actress, and Aramaki, her common-law husband, is now the president of a large talent production agency that manages pop idol groups. Aki, who also dreams of becoming an idol, joins this agency, and Haruko and Aramaki come into contact with each other once again. The truth is that Aramaki never told Hiromi that her voice was replaced with a ghost singer. The gripping suspense of when the secret—of which the viewers are already aware—will be disclosed continues for a little while. Eventually, Aramaki confesses the truth to Hiromi and apologizes to Haruko, and the three reconcile with each other in Week 22 of the drama. Then, in the final week, Hiromi causes Haruko and Aramaki to panic when she tells them of her plans to hold a concert in her own voice. On the day of the concert, when Haruko attempts to sing to cover for Hiromi from backstage, she finds that she has grabbed the wrong microphone that had no batteries. However, Hiromi succeeds at performing the entire concert with her own beautiful voice. Whether or not she was actually tone deaf still remains a mystery.

Kankurō Kudō also received considerable acclaim for writing a finale that left the viewing audience with a sense of satisfaction in its message of hope for the future. The topics taken up by Kudō consistently provoked high levels of interest, inspiring viewers with a drama that was not only simply enjoyable, but also embraced his unique love for local characteristics and a positive message that life can be started over anywhere, at any time.

Moreover, many comments expressed conflicting feelings of attachment to the program, some expressing the desire to watch a sequel, whereas others the opposite. Other comments expressed the expectation of watching some of the performances of actors in *Ama-chan*'s musical interludes on the annual New Year's Eve live show, "Red and White Year-end Song Festival." Many comments also expressed concern about their own sense of loss at the ending of the program, which suggests that *Ama-chan* had become an integral part of these viewers' lives.

Taking this perspective one step further, there were many comments suggesting that people's impressions of morning dramas had changed, and thus by extension those of NHK. These viewers were surprised at the innovative direction techniques, not traditional among morning drama serials, of a fast-paced development that did not leave room for "idle viewing," and combined gags and *koneta* with serious drama. The new sense of values encapsulated in Yui's opinion that "The countryside is the countryside, after all" was also perceived to be uncommon for an *asadora*, which have a tendency to idealize rural living. In contrast, if one watches to the end, the series turns out to be a biographical portrayal of the three generations of Amano women; moreover, such a storyline is viewed as a classic morning serial drama. Whichever the case, another feature of this production is the attitude taken by its creators in carefully and firmly designing a parody that prompted many comments indicating that viewers' impressions of NHK had changed for the better (e.g., "More enjoyable than commercial broadcasting" and "The series pushed the limits of NHK").

4. Challenges and Possibilities for Social Media Surveys

The analysis of social media undertaken here has suggested the possibility that trends in comments on social media, while being correlated with audience ratings to some extent, can nevertheless serve as new indices for program evaluation other than audience ratings. In particular, these trends may be suitable for capturing intangibles such as the "viewer enthusiasm," which *Ama-chan*'s viewers seemed to hold strongly.

However, this remains fraught with dangers, not least that comment biases such as the fact that less than 1% of all accounts generated 40% of all comments; furthermore, when one delves deeply enough, one arrives ultimately at a comment made by a single individual. If one were to scrutinize carefully extracted individual remarks so as to apprehend changes in viewing trends among overall viewers, and understand emotional dynamics that cannot be expressed in numbers alone, new possibilities may come into view.

Conclusion

Through these four surveys, we have glimpsed the extent of the passion felt by viewers of *Ama-chan*, a series not otherwise marked by any corresponding increase in viewership. Our analysis of social media, such as blogs and Twitter, played a major role in providing a concrete understanding of “viewer enthusiasm.” Such understanding would have been unattainable from audience ratings alone, which illustrates the potential of social media monitoring analysis.

Conversely, participants in social media represent only a tiny minority when seen in a national perspective, and we could not adequately clarify how comments by this minority can bring about such an explosive boom to shape the conversation around a program in this article.

In future, we believe that it will be necessary to focus further on clarifying mechanisms for viewing television in an era of open access to this new online communication tool of social media.

(Kensaku Saito / Wataru Nihei / Satoshi Sekiguchi / Keiko Mitsuya)