

Rice Games Internship

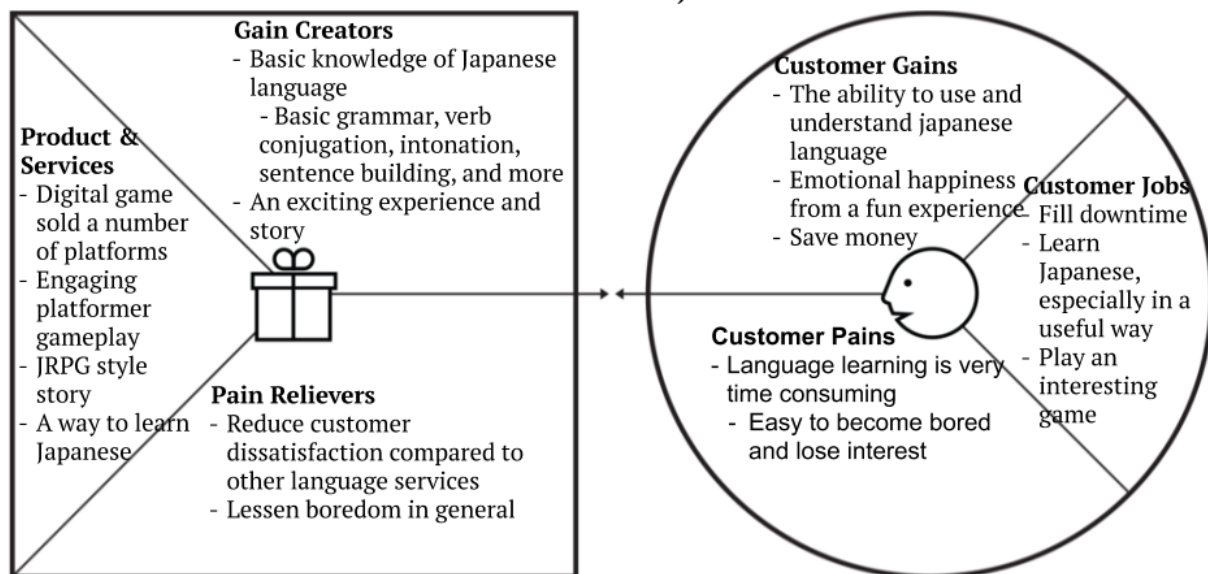
Final Report

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Business and Development Strategy

With the ever connectedness of the world, people want to learn other languages now more than ever. *Shujinkou* stands in a unique position in this market because there are no other services that aim to achieve as engaging of a language learning experience. Initial interest online supports this. The key to fully realizing this potential lies in an analysis of the customer base and *Shujinkou's* overarching goals to ensure that they align. This can be done using the Customer Profile and Value Map seen below.

Value Map and Customer Profile of *Shujinkou*



This Value Map and Customer Profile outline the connection between *Shujinkou* and its potential customers. The key takeaways are that customers often want to learn a language but either do not start because it requires a large amount of initial effort or they lose interest. *Shujinkou* needs to focus on bridging this gap by creating a fun, engrossing experience. The difficulty in this will be successfully achieving both in an intuitive way. Even though there are other services to learn a language conveniently, such as Duolingo, *Shujinkou* exists in a blue ocean, an untapped market space, because other services are not a full fledged video game that could stand on its own without the language learning aspect.

As seen in the Business Model Canvas for Rice Games in Appendix A figure, *Shujinkou* aims to offer many value propositions. The fact that *Shujinkou* tries to

accomplish so much means that it could be unsuccessful in achieving all of its goals. Gameplay and story both are more straightforward to playtest. This could be done by specific individuals using a development copy or distributing a playable demo to the public and asking for feedback. Testing the language learning aspects would be a little more difficult. It could be useful to utilize the Japanese-Language Proficiency Test with playtesters to determine the effectiveness of users abilities after playing *Shujinkou*. Additionally, this could be used in advertisements to help customers understand what they will learn and how long it will take. Further research could be done to align *Shujinkou* with a Japanese language standardized test.

Marketing Strategy

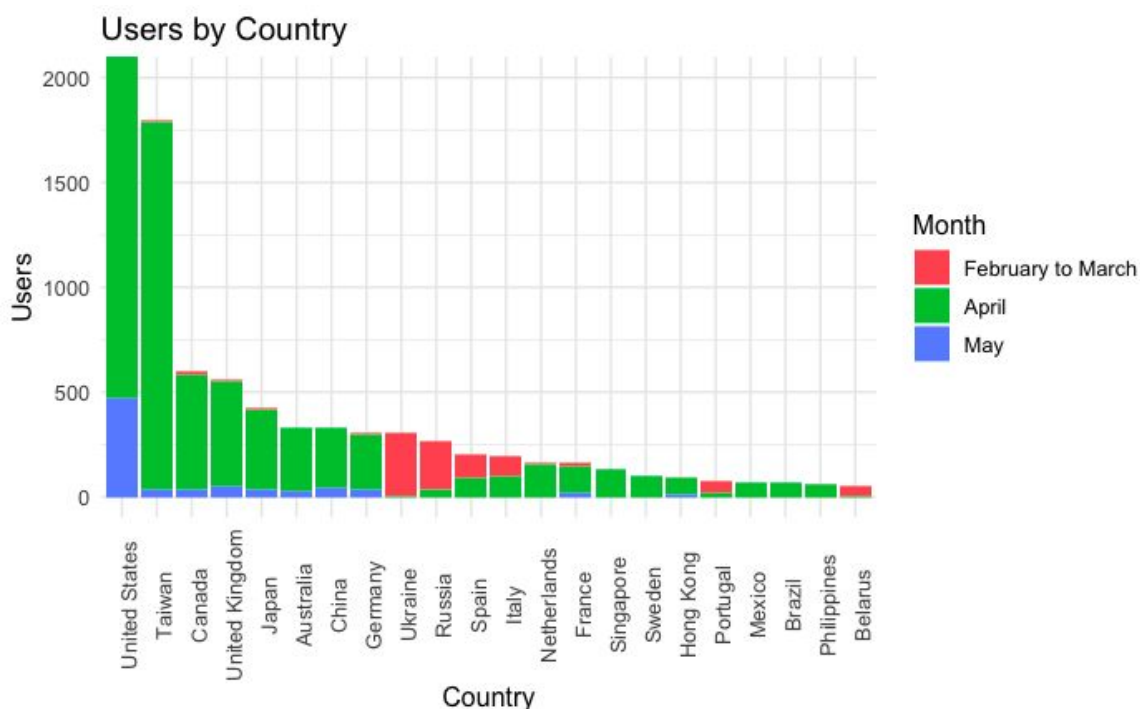
The key to *Shujinkou*'s success lies in the difficult task of turning interest into sales. It is very easy for an individual to say that in general they would like to learn a new language but it can be difficult to convince a customer to begin that journey. Successful marketing campaigns are imperative to find customers and call them to action. For customers, Rice Games needs to focus on utilizing social media, paid advertisements, and web analytics to drive sales. In addition to marketing to customers, it would be beneficial to enhance appeal towards potential investors and partners.

On April 23rd, 2019, Rice Games made a post on Reddit that has given a great amount of data and information about interest in the game and serves as a fantastic example of taking advantage of social media. The post received over 7000 upvotes and drastically boosted web traffic on *Shujinkou*'s website. This is an example of "testing the square," that is it was a way to learn about how *Shujinkou*'s value propositions interest consumers. Additionally, it reaffirms that there are ways to advertise the game for free. As development progresses, it would be advantageous to post on Reddit at certain milestones. Even though Facebook and Instagram make for a way to consistently update customers on progress, they require a person to be following Rice Games on a platform. Reddit on the other hand, allows for anyone to post on relevant subreddits and can get traction without followers. In order to not over post on Reddit, it is probably best to post at large milestones, such as a gameplay trailer, a playable demo, and when the Kickstarter campaign launches. Contrastingly, Facebook and Instagram should be used to post consistently to keep interested customers engaged throughout the development.

In addition to advertisement through social media posts, *Shujinkou* can aim marketing using paid ads on Facebook and Google. Both platforms provide excellent ways to target and track the effectiveness of campaigns. Since Facebook and Google both have their own advertisement models, each have unique benefits. Facebook allows companies to directly target certain demographics and each ad only charges the company once a certain "call to action" is completed. For example, it could be effective to target individuals who play video games, are interested in Japanese culture or travel, and show them a video of *Shujinkou* demonstrating its ability to seamlessly teach

language and the potential results users have seen. The best part of this model is that Rice Games would only pay Facebook when users watch the video rather than if it just came up in their feed.

Contrastingly, Google's model determines who to show which ads based on their search terms and how much businesses are willing to pay for a users click. One way to target would be to show ads when users type "Japanese," "language," and "game." Rice Games would only pay if it was shown to a user and they clicked on the ad. I believe it would be easier to target on Facebook because creating an optimal search ad on Google is more unpredictable. If the search terms are specific, like in the example above, it is difficult to tell if a user is just looking for a video game in Japanese or actually wants to learn Japanese; however, if the search terms are too general, for example just "learn," "Japanese," and "language," Rice Games would have to compete with other language services that would bid higher for ads and might be targeting users that are not interested in video games. If the capital for ad campaigns is very limited, it would be sensible to prioritize Facebook ads before Google's. Both would require trial and error to optimize, which is where the roll of web analytics will be crucial.

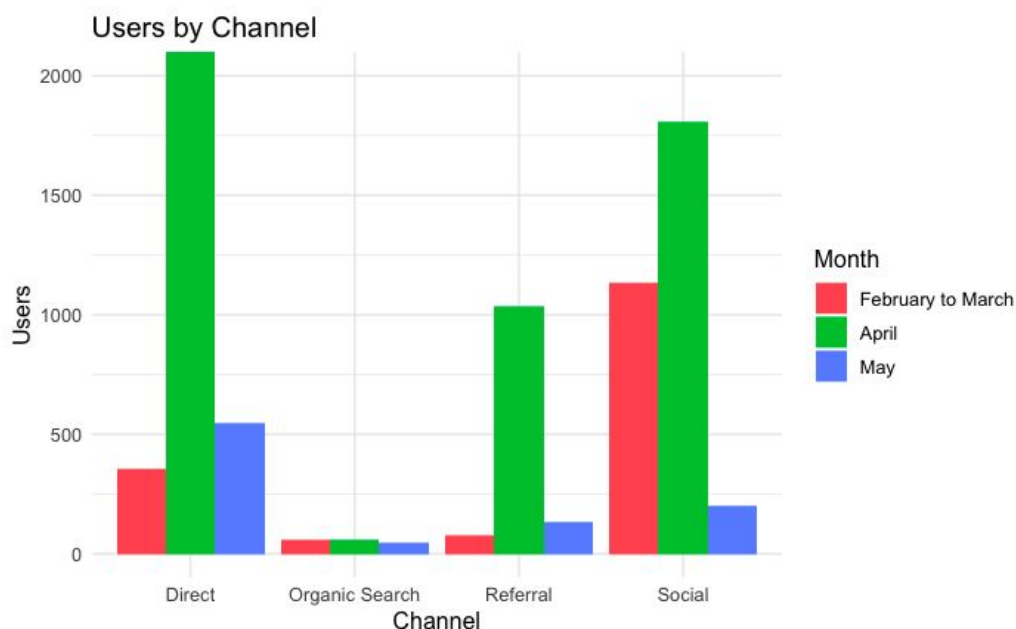


Note: the maximum user value was limited to make the graph easier to read. The full graph can be found in Appendix B.

Even though Rice Games has not begun to use paid advertisements, the data that has been collected on *Shujinkou's* website provides some interesting insights. As seen in the figure above, user traffic by country has been tracked. This graph is broken up by month, February to March, April, and May. For context, we see a large increase in traffic for April because of the Reddit post on April 23rd. The most interesting aspect of

this graph is seeing the change in which countries have the most interest. In February to March we see a lot of interest from Germany, Ukraine, Russia, and Spain, but in May there is very little. Contrastingly, countries like Taiwan, Canada, the UK, and Japan had almost no traffic in February to March, but after the Reddit post there was a large increase that continued into May. This is an example of “testing the circle,” because we find insights into which customer demographics that have an interest in a product like *Shujinkou*. This information can be used to target paid advertisement campaigns and blog articles.

The next insight that *Shujinkou*’s website provides is in its channel groupings. Web traffic is broken into organic search, direct, referral, and social groupings. Organic search would be users that click a link that is not an ad from a major search engine that, direct is typing in the link or clicking a bookmark, referral is clicking a link on a different website that is not a search engine, and social is any traffic from a social media website like Facebook. Often times traffic is misclassified as direct. For example, in the graph on the next page there was a large increase in social and direct web traffic. The two key takeaways from this graph are, firstly, the Reddit post directly resulted in a large amount of traffic in April seen in the direct column, but also an increase in social traffic which means other platforms were discussing the game outside of Reddit. Secondly, there was higher traffic in the direct column for May compared to February to March, which could mean that the Reddit post resulted in users that are now following the games development by having bookmarked the page. This is corroborated by the fact that new user traffic made up over 95% of traffic from February to April while it only made up 80% of traffic in May. Viral posts such as the one in April have empirical benefits and would be beneficial at key milestones. Additionally, more data could be collected on returning users to further determine ideal customers.



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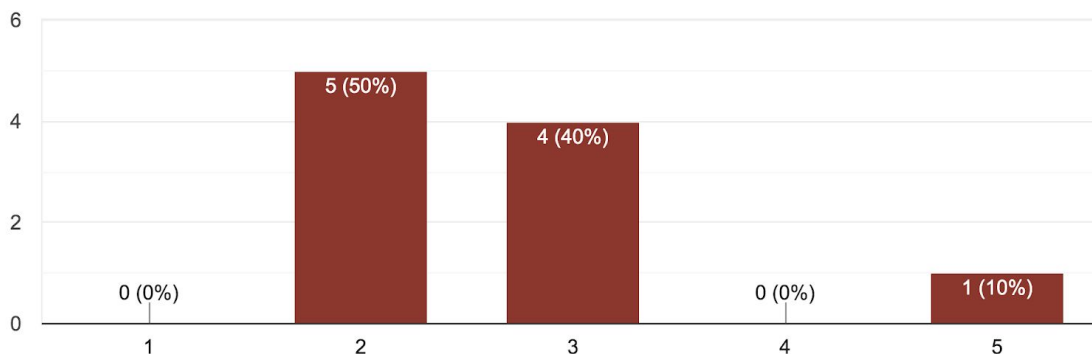
Finally, one interesting data point is May 15, 2019 because traffic on this day for the website exceeded 250 users while the week before averaged less than 50 per day. Conducting a search on Google reveals a Reddit post on May 14 and a GoNintendo blog post on May 15. The Reddit post is from Rice Games revealing the next character spotlight and the GoNintendo post is a word for word copy of it. Even though it is likely this character spotlight resulted in the increase in traffic, it is unclear the size of traffic each post drove. Nevertheless, it indicates blog posts have demonstrable value for marketing *Shujinkou*.

Survey Results

As part of the internship, I conducted a survey to ask people I knew about their interest in *Shujinkou* and language learning video games in general. Although the individuals surveyed do not nearly represent all potential customers, it does provide some understanding about the kinds of people Rice Games would want to target marketing towards and thoughts on Rice Games's focus in development. Of the ten individuals polled, over two thirds play video games and sixty percent had used a language learning service, such as Duo Lingo, before.

How important is gameplay compared to a language learning experience for you? (3 - both matter equally)

10 responses

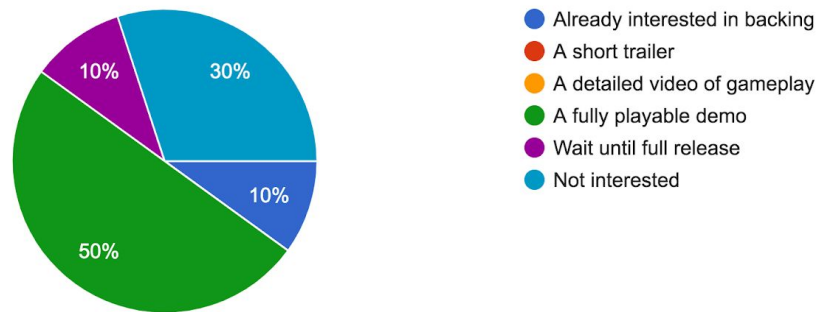


Note: 1 - Gameplay matters much more | 5 - Language learning matters much more

The graph above visualizes data on one of the most difficult questions Rice Games has to grapple with throughout *Shujinkou*'s development, balancing gameplay with language learning. Based on this data, both are very important, but the gameplay is slightly more important. Surprisingly, those with the most interest in learning Japanese always put two or three for balancing gameplay and language learning meaning they still desire compelling gameplay.

Shujinkou is planning on running a Kickstarter Campaign. What amount of preliminary content would make you likely to back?

10 responses



This next question shown above was meant to determine what amount of content Rice Games should aim to create to maximize the amount of Kickstarter backers. Examining the data reveals that most would want to try the game out themselves to determine if it is worth the investment. Moreover, it is fantastic that seventy percent of those polled are interested in *Shujinkou*.

Playtesting

Despite that *Shujinkou* is still in its early development phases, it is still important to playtest it since it is easier to solve problems if they are discovered early. So far, Rice Games has created a small demo that exhibits three different levels and a dialogue menu. Complete levels are not ready yet, but it is helpful to see what gameplay, design, sound, and performance look and feel like. Below are my thoughts on these aspects of it:

I. Gameplay

It is difficult to tell how gameplay will compare as levels are completed and enemies are added. But, I did enjoy the controls to select different ammos. I believe it would be nice if the ammos were more than a color and word change. For example, different ammos could have different accuracy, spread, fire rate, and special projectiles, like a beam instead of a ball.

II. UI & Level Design

The UI and level designs were well thought out. The positioning of characters, items, and points are intuitive. It is difficult to tell how layout will change through development, but it might be rewarding to expand Sanrin with underground portions and Himamura with buildings to break up the open space.

III. Art

This was my favorite part to view because all the artwork is stunning. The 3D effects on Genya Kaikou were incredible. Additionally the selection animation for ammo felt clean. The two things I think could be worked on are the crispness of lines on the trees and rocks of Himamura compared to the torii and house and the smoothness of Shu's animations. I know that animating characters is an arduous task, so tweaking Shu's animations may not be a priority.

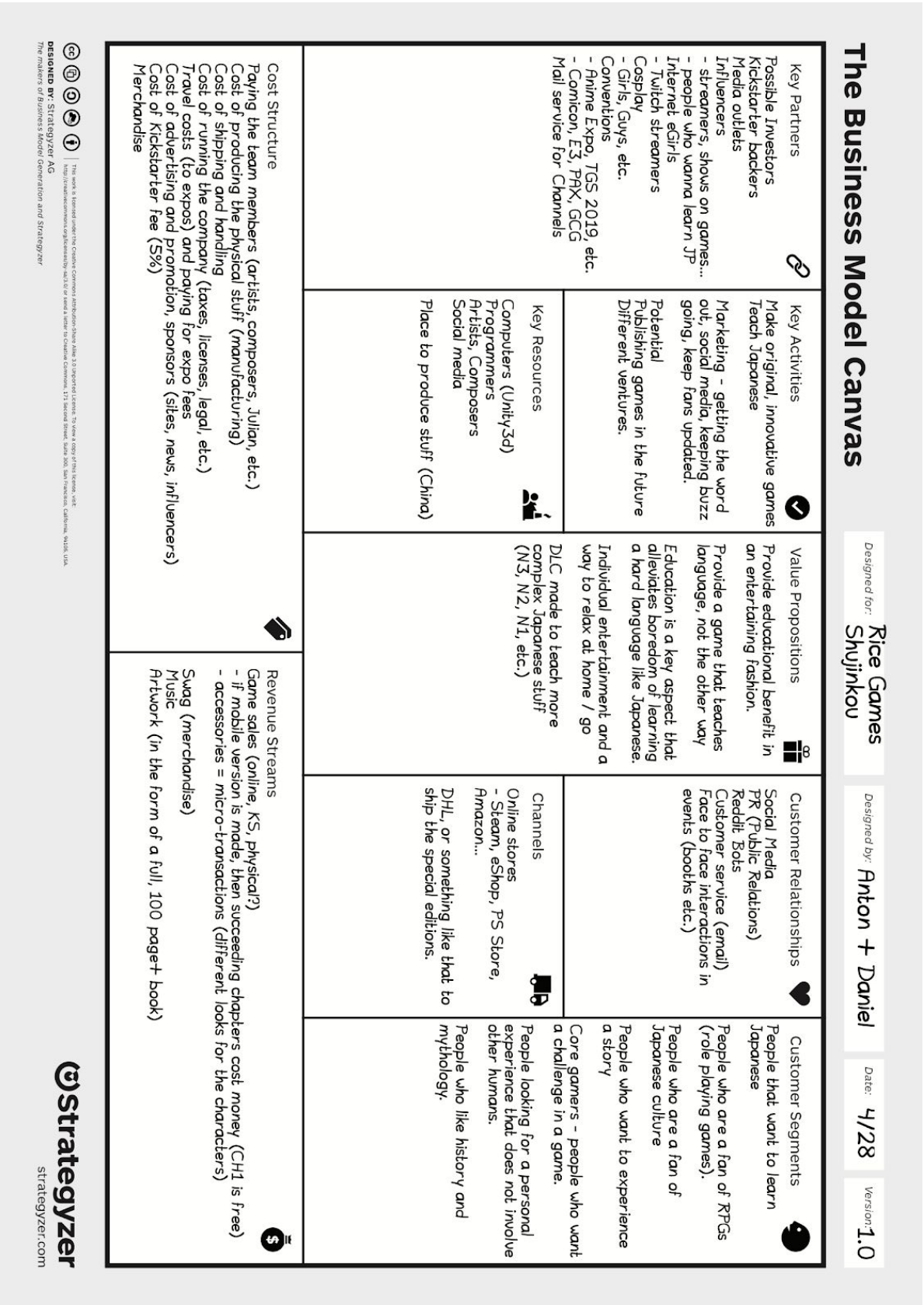
IV. Music & Sound Effects

For the most part the music felt very appropriate. Mood was appropriately calm for levels without action while Sanrin was more energetic. Taking damage correctly triggered a change in music that was small but distinct. However, music for the dialogue level felt a little too jazzy. It was not bad sounding, but it felt out of place in the world of *Shujinkou*.

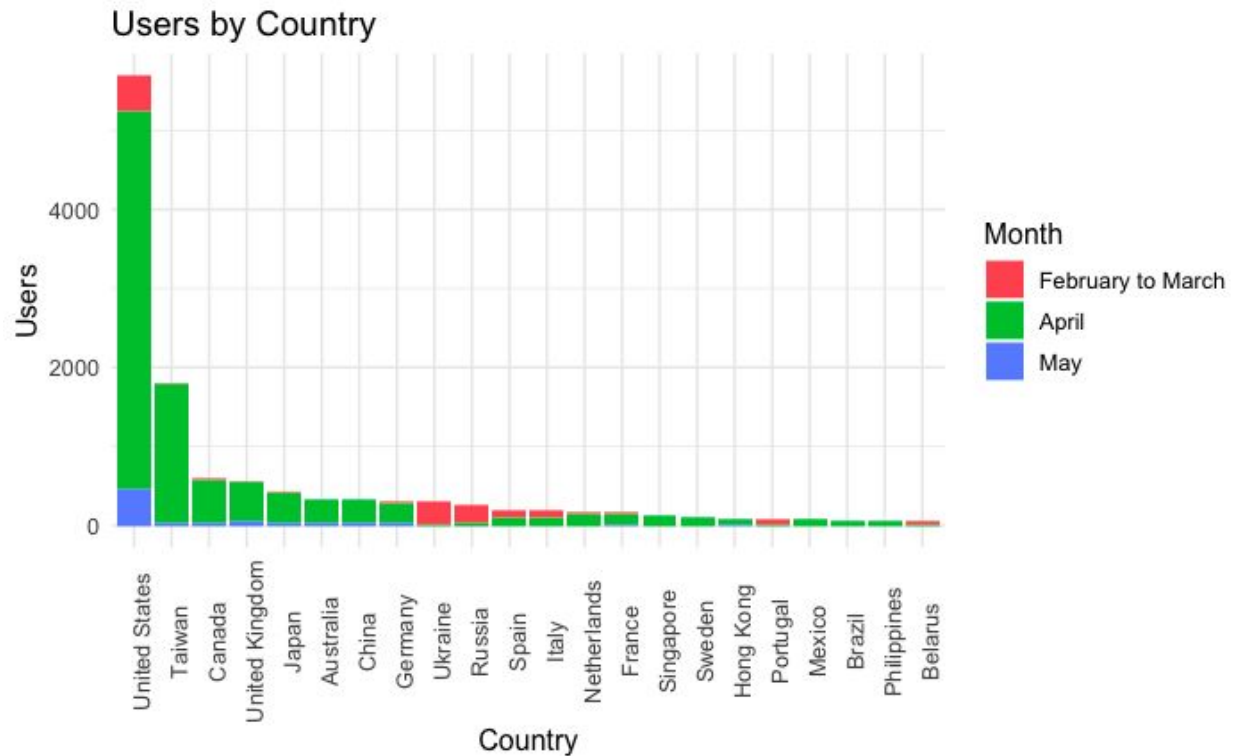
V. Performance

High framerates were maintained even on my old Macbook Air. Additionally, the side scrolling was very clean with little tearing. However, I did have a couple of issues. First, characters on Sanrin clipped into walls more when facing right than left. Also, the fastest and fast graphical settings sped up animations of Shu in the menu. Finally, my mouse was unable to move after finishing the dialogue options.

Appendix A - Business Model Canvas for Rice Games's *Shujinkou*



Appendix B - *Shujinkou* website traffic by country and month



Appendix C - *Shujinkou* website traffic by channel and month

