

Commodity Characteristics Preferred by Young People in Japan

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Abstract : This paper turns its attention to the commodities that enjoy a large sale among the university students in Japan. The aim of the study is to clarify by what criteria the university students purchase them. In order to investigate by what criteria they select goods and what constitutes the factors of selection, the method of factor analysis was applied. The method produced three factors as the criteria for selection: The 1. factor as "daily-non-daily", the 2. factor as "popular-regular" and 3. factor as "searching-dependent". This leads to the conclusion that the commodities have a good sale because of their characteristics of being suitable to daily life, being popular and being objects of searching activities among the young people in Japan.

Key words : convenience store, fashion, university student, factor analysis

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I turn my attention to the question of what kind of goods Japanese young people like. Young women in Japan, for instance, are fond of brand-name bags (Tsuji, 2000). Many young women in Japan like brand-name bags for the following three reasons: 1. In Japan, young women have many opportunities of coming into contact with brand-name bags. 2. The knowledge about brand-name bags is easy to gain. 3. It is easy to purchase brand-name bags.

What do Japanese young people, however, pursue in selecting certain goods? In this paper, I tried to show their criteria for selection. According to one of my preceding research results as to brand-name bags (*Cf. ibid.*), for example, female students wanted to maximize such factors as longing, sensitivity and appraisal by others in particular. By the factor appraisal by others I mean the mental attitude of orientation for other people that one wishes to be favorably esteemed by others.

To clarify the criteria for choosing goods by Japanese young people signifies to know what kind of goods will be sold well. In my opinion, moreover, it throws light on one of the values cherished by the young people in Japan.

Thus, the paper aims at making an investigation into the criteria of commodities pursued by Japanese young people when selecting certain commodities. The research is based on the following hypothesis: "The commodities preferred by Japanese young people are provided with

some specific keywords whose existence is to be observed commonly in a variety of commodities in addition to the characteristics of individual goods." The young people of Japan are represented in the paper by Japanese university students. This is due to the fact that the age bracket of the Japanese university students is relatively small, ranging in most cases between 18 and 24 years of age. Moreover, the university students have opportunities freely to buy goods without holding consultations with the parents on account of the allowed freedom to earn income through doing part-time jobs, while the high school students are generally supposed to obey the strict rules of the school authorities against working.

The research was carried out through the following procedure: First, a preliminary survey was conducted to make up the questionnaire for the main survey. Then, the common characteristics of goods preferred by the Japanese young people were identified by using the questionnaires. The results were analyzed by applying the method of factor analysis.

Young women create new fashions in Japan. So this paper is very useful to know the Japanese market at present and in the future.

PRELIMINARY SURVEY

Time and object of survey

The survey was conducted in February, 2001. The subject of the survey was a group of 71 18-24 years old university students. In this group, 35 students were male and 36 students were female. They were all students of private universities and resided in Hyogo, Osaka or Kyoto prefectures. I at random sampled female college students at

Mukogawa Womens University which is one of the biggest womens universities in Japan. The purpose of the preliminary survey was to make clear what sort of goods, where the students purchase them and what is their criteria for choosing some goods over others.

Method and contents

Questionnaires were distributed among the students who were asked to fill out them. The contents of the questionnaire were as follows:

(i) Purchased Goods: The entries of the items the students had lately bought, together with the manufacturers or the brand names were required. (ii) Places of Purchases: The places where the students had bought them were entered. (iii) Criteria for Selections: The entries were made for each item (i) and place (ii) as to by what criteria the students had purchased them, or what they had in mind when buying them.

Results and considerations

(i) Purchased Goods: Table 1 shows the ranking of the 20 items the students have most often purchased. The items may be classified into three groups: 1. Foods and beverages, 2. Confectionery and 3. Magazines. Everyone of the young people in Japan knows these 20 items very well.

(ii) Places of Purchases: The place where, in every case in the survey, the items most often had been bought was a convenience store. The prices of the foods and beverages are hardly low. Nevertheless, I buy the item at a convenience store. was the most frequent entry. Table 2 sets forth the ranking of the 20 items purchased lately.

(iii) Criteria for Selections: As the criterion or reason for buying, the following considerations were often entered: "I found the price low.", "I found the price reasonable.", "I found the quantity adequate.", "I have bought it before.", "The name of the item is well known.", etc. Table 3 shows these considerations.

These considerations have proved to be often common to the factors I had used in my preceding research work (Ide, Yukie, 1998). So, as the criteria for selections I utilize 32 factors there in principle as is shown in Table 4 for comparison:

These 32 factors were developed, however, as those considered by female students when purchasing brand-name bags. Based on these 32 factors, I have established new criteria as the criteria by which the male and female young people in Japan select the goods they like by changing 3. "It has a capacity to store things in.", 11. "It fits to the clothes." and 32. "My boy friend will like it." in Table 4 to 3. "It has the feel of an original material.", 11. "It suits to my sensibility." and 32. "My boy(girl) friend

Table 1. Items lately purchased

Ranking	Items	Ranking	Items
1	o-bento (packed lunch)	2	Magazines (mainly weeklies)
3	o-cha (green tea)	4	Gasoline
5	Bread	6	Instant Chinese noodles
7	Compact disks	8	Chewing gum
9	Kara-age (deep-fried chicken)	10	Potato chips
11	Frisk (refreshing candies)	12	Cigarettes
13	Pinky (refreshing candies)	14	Nodo-ame (throat candies)
15	Momo no Tennensui (juice)	16	Beer
17	Mainichi-Kajitsu (biscuits with raisins)	18	Kan chuhai (canned shochu and soda)
19	Stationery	20	CalorieMate (diet biscuits)

Table 2. Items lately purchased at convenience stores

Ranking	Items	Ranking	Items
1	o-bento (packed lunch)	2	Magazines, comics
3	o-cha (green tea), o-nigiri (rice balls)	4	Canned coffee
5	Bread	6	Instant Chinese noodles
7	o-den (food stewed in a warm soy soup)	8	Buta-man (buns with pork filling)
9	Kara-age (deep-fried chicken)	10	Potato chips
11	Pocky (chocolate candies)	12	WeiderINJelly (nourishing jellies)
13	Pinky (refreshing candies)	14	Nodo-ame (throat candies), yogurt
15	Momo no Tennensui (natural water)	16	Natchan (orange juice)
17	Mainichi-Kajitsu (fruit and vegetable juice)	18	Jagariko (fried potatoes)
19	CC lemon (juice with vitamin C), cola	20	Nutritious foods

Note: More than 20 items are mentioned, because some of them rank in purchase frequency as the same.

Table 3. Criteria (Reasons) for purchasing the items at convenience stores

"I found the price low.", "I found the price reasonable.", "I found the quantity adequate.",
 "I have bought it before.", "The name of the item is well known(or, I know it well).",
 "The manufacturer is well known.", "I have once seen it in a magazine.",
 "I saw it in a TV commercial.", "I saw and found it to my taste at storefront.",
 "The package came to the fore.", "It seems easy to handle.. One of my friends bought it, too.",
 "I can boast of it.", "I like the design of the package.", "I am fond of the color.",
 "It is (or seems to be) durable.", "Ill not lose interest in it.", "It is tasteful.", "I like the materials.",
 "It is elegant.", "It suits to my sensibility.", "The size is appropriate.", "It weighs light.",
 "Everybody possesses it.", "It is popular.", "It is chic.", "It is simple.", "It is gorgeous.",
 "It is suitable for university life.", "It is passable.", "It is regular.", "The price is high.",
 "The brand name is famous.", "It is striking like an accessory.",
 "The brand name gives reassurance.", "It has a great deal of personality.", "It is a freak.",
 "Im accustomed to it.", "It appears in magazines.", "I look at it often in TV.",
 "People in the news possess (or eat) it.", "It is a rarity.", "My boy(girl) friend likes it.",
 "I saw my friend use it.", etc.

Table 4. Criteria for selections: 32 factors for questionnaire

1	I can boast of it if i possess it.	2	I like the design.	3	It has a capacity to store things in.
4	I am fond of the color.	5	The price is reasonable.	6	It is durable.
7	Ill not lose interest in it.	8	It is tasteful.	9	I like the materials.
10	It is elegant.	11	It fits to the clothes.	12	The size is suitable.
13	Everybody possesses it.	14	It is popular.	15	It is chic.
16	It weighs light.	17	It is simple.	18	It is gorgeous.
19	It is suitable for university life.	20	It is passable.	21	It is regular.
22	The price is high.	23	The brand name is famous.	24	It is striking like an accessory.
25	The brand name gives reassurance.	26	It has a great deal of personality.	27	It is a freak.
28	I have been accustomed to it.	29	It appears in magazines.	30	I look at it often in tv.
31	People in the news possess it.	32	My boy friend will like it.		

Source: Ide, Yukie (1998), p. 133

Table 5. New criteria for selections: 32 factors for questionnaire

1	I can boast of it if I possess it.	2	I like the design.	3	It has the feel of an original material.
4	I am fond of the color.	5	The price is reasonable.	6	It is durable.
7	Ill not lose interest in it.	8	It is tasteful.	9	I like the materials.
10	It is elegant.	11	It suits to my sensibility.	12	The size is suitable.
13	Everybody possesses it.	14	It is popular.	15	It is chic.
16	It weighs light.	17	It is simple.	18	It is gorgeous.
19	It is suitable for university life.	20	It is passable.	21	It is standard.
22	The price is high.	23	The brand name is famous.	24	It is striking like an accessory.
25	The brand name gives reassurance.	26	It has a great deal of personality.	27	It is a freak.
28	I have been accustomed to it.	29	It appears in magazines.	30	I look at it often in TV.
31	People in the news possess(eat) it.	32	My boy(girl) friend will like it.		

will like it.", respectively. The new criteria for selections thus obtained are shown in Table 5:

As criteria for selecting a brand-name bag in 1998, many female students mentioned, e. g., that they could boast of it, the brand name was famous, the price was high, they liked the design, the brand name gave reassurance, etc. For reference, the results of surveys (Tsuji Yukie, 2000) on the criteria for purchasing a brand-name bag by the female students are summarized in the following Table 6:

As Table 6 shows, the reason for selecting which

ranked first or second through the four years was that the brand name was well known. Thus, the female students in Japan apparently liked to buy bags of a well known brand names. A brand-name bag is not simply a bag, but is marked with the value added that it is related to a brand name. I regard it as one of the values nursed by the female students that a brand name is to be appreciated.

On the other hand, the factor that the possession could be a boast ranked first in 1998 and second in 1999, but eighth in 2000 and below tenth in 2001, respectively. This means that it has become in recent years no more so

Table 6. Criteria for purchasing a brand-name bag by female students

Ranking	1998	1999	2000	2001
1	Boast	Brand name	Brand name	Popularity
2	Brand name	Boast	Popularity	Brand name
3	High price	High price	Reasonable price	Suitability to clothes
4	Design	Design	Being chic	Reasonable price
5	Reassurance	Reassurance	Being tasteful	Appearance in magazines
6	Regularity	Popularity	Design	Being tasteful
7	Elegance	Being tasteful	Appearance in magazines	Being chic
8	Popularity	Color	Boast	Color
9	Being chic	Being chic	Suitability for university life	Personality
10	Everybody's possession	Elegance	Color	Simplicity

important among the criteria for purchasing by the female students that the possession can be a boast. It is due to the mental attitude of the female students that they lately give precedence to their own appraisal over the appraisal by others. It may also be interpreted as an inclination in the values of the female students that they like the simplicity by assigning higher priority to their own appraisal.

As to the price, moreover, the high price was mentioned as a criterion for buying in 1998 and 1999; in 2000 and 2001, however, the reasonable price was the preferred criterion. Further, greater importance was attached to the popularity in 2000 and 2001 as compared with the former years. This deeper interest in the popularity is backed up with the criterion: appearance in magazines being given greater importance.

Based on the foregoing considerations, the following five elements in the values among the female students can now be ascertained: i) They attach the brand name a value added. ii) They give their own appraisal precedence over the appraisal by others. iii) They seek simplicity and personality. iv) They make the reasonable price a criterion. v) They make the popularity a criterion.

MAIN SURVEY

Time and object of survey

The survey was made in April 2001. The subject of the survey was a group of 1,300 18-24 years old university students. In this group, 650 students were male and 650 students were female. All of them were students of private universities and lived in Hyogo, Osaka or Kyoto prefectures. Responses were given by 917 students consisting of 468 males and 449 females. Thus, the rate of the responses was 70.5%. This high response rate is attributed to the use of the group survey by circulating about 90% of the questionnaires and collecting them during a class session, while the mail survey was utilized only for those who lived at remote places (some 10%). As 8 questionnaires with mistakes and/or omissions were discarded, 909 questionnaires were analyzed.

naires were analyzed.

Contents and method of questionnaire

The main question was: "Please encircle the grade numbers for the selection criteria that fit most to your feeling when you buy the following 20 goods." The 20 goods were those which were cited in Table 1. As the selection criteria the same 32 factors for questionnaire as in Table 5 were used. For each questionnaire factor, the respondents were required to encircle a grade number according to the five-grade system:

To the five numbers the following meanings were assigned: 1: "It is entirely false."; 2: "It is to some extent false."; 3: "It is neither true nor false."; 4: "It is to some extent true."; 5: "It is entirely true."

In this survey the interval scale was applied, because it is employed by many research works (Abe Shuzo, 2001) and meets with the purpose of the study. If, for instance, to the questionnaire factor: "I can boast of it if I possess it." the answer is: "I can boast of it (more than other goods) if I possess it.", either 4 or 5 is encircled. If to the factor: "I like the design." the answer is: "I like the design (including the package).", either 4 or 5 is encircled, too. On the other hand, if to the factor: "Everybody possesses it." the answer is: "Everybody does not always possess it.", either 1 or 2 is encircled. In this way, the surveyed students were required to answer to each of the 32 questionnaire factors according to an attitude rating scale in five grades.

Method of analysis

In the present survey, the factor analysis in the form of the principal factor method was applied. The data are composed of the resulting answers by the individuals to each of the questionnaire factors relative to the 20 items of goods. In other words, they are score figures consisting of 1 to 5 gained based on the attitude rating scale. To clarify the attitudes when coming in contact with certain objects, the factor analysis has been employed by many

preceding research works(Sasaki Hashiji, 1988).

Results

The results of the contribution ratios of each factor that are gained by applying the factor analysis are:

The first factor: 30.3%;

The second factor: 25.9%;

The third factor: 14.8%;

The fourth factor: 9.0%.

The contribution ratios of the fourth factor or below are not more than 10.0%. Besides, the cumulative contribution ratio of the first three factors is 71.0%, so that only the first to third factors are taken into considerations here.

Table 7 displays the figures of the factor loading relative to each of the first to third factors.

The plus(+) and minus(-) signs of the factor loading values are reversed in the cases of the scores: 1 or 5 depending on where the rotation is stopped. Through scrutinizing the answers of all the respondents it was examined whether the respondents with the plus factors

give more answers in the scores: 1 and 2 or 4 and 5. The scores: 3 were excluded from the examinations, because they mean that the questionnaire factor is neither true nor false.

The results are summarized in the following Table 8. In Table 8, I give to each of the first three factors the names that characterize them by turning my attention to the questionnaire factors which showed an absolute value of 0.65 or more after a varimax rotation. By naming or characterizing each of the first three factors it becomes possible to clarify the reasons for which the Japanese university students buy goods and hence the attributes of the goods which sell well.

CONSIDERATIONS

(i) The 1. Factor

In Table 8, such questionnaire factors as "The price is reasonable.", "It suits to my sensibility." and "It is simple." are cited as the factors with a plus sign. Like the uni-

Table 7. Values of factor loading of questionnaire factors

	Questionnaire factors	First factor	Second factor	Third factor
1	I can boast of it if I possess it.	0.47	0.34	0.08
2	I like the design	0.22	0.66	0.35
3	It has the feel of an original material.	-0.11	-0.52	-0.12
4	I am fond of the color.	0.35	0.15	-0.11
5	The price is reasonable.	0.80	-0.15	0.03
6	It is durable.	0.25	-0.35	0.24
7	I'll not lose interest in it.	0.08	0.44	0.52
8	It is tasteful.	0.29	0.50	-0.22
9	I like the materials.	0.24	-0.56	0.16
10	It is elegant.	-0.02	-0.17	-0.04
11	It suits to my sensibility.	0.71	0.28	0.38
12	The size is suitable.	-0.21	-0.39	0.05
13	Everybody possesses it.	0.15	0.72	0.02
14	It is popular.	-0.55	0.80	0.65
15	It is chic.	0.50	0.33	-0.14
16	It weighs light.	-0.04	-0.48	0.35
17	It is simple.	0.65	-0.05	0.45
18	It is gorgeous.	-0.69	0.28	0.27
19	It is suitable for university life.	0.47	-0.49	-0.28
20	It is passable.	0.58	-0.65	0.01
21	It is regular.	-0.45	-0.70	0.23
22	The price is high.	-0.82	-0.05	-0.12
23	The brand name is famous.	-0.24	0.78	-0.23
24	It is striking like an accessory.	-0.18	-0.44	-0.21
25	The brand name gives reassurance.	0.42	0.02	-0.68
26	It has a great deal of personality.	-0.39	-0.50	-0.08
27	It is a freak.	-0.70	-0.43	-0.16
28	I have been accustomed to it.	0.18	-0.68	0.04
29	It appears in magazines.	-0.34	0.46	0.78
30	I look at it often in TV.	-0.08	0.32	0.74
31	People in the news possess (eat) it.	0.02	0.28	-0.65
32	My boy (girl) friend will like it.	0.16	-0.03	-0.65

Table 8. Results of analysis of criteria for selections of lately purchased goods

Factors	Signs	Number of respondents	Questionnaire factors	Factor loading values	Naming
1. Factor	+	334	The price is reasonable.	0.80	daily
		299	It suits to my sensibility.	0.71	
		256	It is simple.	0.65	
	-	56	The price is high.	0.82	non-daily
		87	It is a freak.	0.70	
2. Factor	+	89	It is gorgeous.	0.69	popular
		345	It is popular.	0.80	
		339	The brand name is famous.	0.78	
	-	249	Everybody possesses it.	0.65	regular
		67	It is regular.	0.70	
3. Factor	+	90	I have been accustomed to it.	0.68	searching
		98	It is passable.	0.65	
		338	It appears in magazines.	0.78	
	-	320	I look at it often in TV.	0.74	dependent
		246	It is popular.	0.65	
		91	The brand name gives reassurance.	0.68	
		97	People in the news possess (eat) it.	0.65	
		96	My boy (girl) friend will like it.	0.65	

Note: Only the questionnaire factors with absolute values of at least 0.65 are listed.

versity students they are, the respondents have proved to prefer simple commodities of reasonable prices that suit to their sensibility. So, I name these characteristics "daily". On the other hand, as the factors with a minus sign such factors as "The price is high.", "It is a freak." and "It is gorgeous." are mentioned. These appear to be factors that are somewhat distant from the university student life. So, I give the characteristics the name of "non-daily". In this way I consider the 1. factor as that of "daily-non-daily".

(ii) The 2. Factor

In Table 8, "It is popular.", "The brand name is famous." and "Everybody possesses it." are listed as the factors with a plus sign. If being popular means that certain commodities are famous and possessed by everybody, these characteristics are nothing short of popular. Meanwhile as the factors with a minus sign "It is regular.", "I have been accustomed to it." and "It is passable." are listed. Since commodities may be characterized as regular that one has been accustomed to them, I regard the 2. factor as the factor "popular-regular".

(iii) The 3. Factor

The factors with a plus sign are: "It appears in magazines.", "I look at it often in TV." and "It is popular." I interpret them as the result the respondents are active in searching information. So, I give these characteristics the name "searching". On the other hand, "The brand name gives reassurance.", "People in the news possess(eat) it."

and "My boy(girl) friend will like it." are equipped with a minus sign. As these are a rather passive attitude, I call the characteristics "dependent".

In this way, the analysis of the criteria for selecting commodities recently bought by the university students produces three factors: The 1. factor of "daily-non-daily", the 2. factor of "popular-regular" and the 3. factor of "searching-dependent". I deem that, against the background of the present recession, even the young people prefer commodities of not high but reasonable prices. According to Table 8, 334 respondents gave a score of 4 or 5 to the factor "reasonable prices", while only 56 circled 4 or 5 to the factor "high prices". In other words, many students bought goods because of reasonable prices; not many students selected goods on account of high prices. Moreover, rather than being a freak or gorgeous, agreement to one's sensibility or simplicity was adopted as criterion for selecting goods. It may, therefore, be conjectured that something daily is preferred to something non-daily.

Concerning the 2. factor; "popular-regular", it has become clear that overwhelmingly great number of the respondents apply the criterion of popularity. This means that they seek new commodities in fashion instead of regular goods to which they have been accustomed. This is why the Japanese market is even today full of many new commodities, which occupy the interest of university students in Japan.

The 3. factor of "searching-dependent" signifies that more respondents are actively involved in gathering information. Advertisements in magazines or TV seem to be to some extent effective when information is to be searched for, so that the Japanese university students may select goods which they have seen in magazines or TV.

SUMMARY

The factor analysis conducted in the paper has produced the following criteria for selecting the commodities that preferred by the young people (here: university students) in Japan:

1. factor: "daily-non-daily"
2. factor: "popular-regular"
3. factor: "searching-dependent"

Based on the considerations as to these three factors, it has become clear that the characteristics of the commodities which are accepted and so, preferably bought by the young people in Japan is to be daily, popular and objects of searching.

The following two questions remain, however, to be investigated in future:

1. If these three factors show differences depending on whether the respondents are males or females.
2. If these three factors are applicable to individual commodities, as in the cited case of brand-name bags.

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