



**A look into Japanese culture**

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## **The Market**

After the United States, Japan has the second-largest advertising market. With the change in government it has been anticipated that Japan will become an easier market for Western companies. The decline of the global economy caused a drastic decrease in Japan's exports. Essentially their exports had been sustaining their local economy. Even domestic production has gone down. The advertising industry is optimistic that the only room is for improvements. A new campaign promises to increase consumer spending by providing a bonus for new parents. The hope is that along with spending it will stimulate the growth of the population. Current trends in Japan suggest that the environment is of a high importance to the population. Another government-sponsored idea is to introduce a consumer advocacy organization. The assumption is that it will raise the awareness of corporate responsibility. (Japan Ad) (The Asahi) The number one trend of 2009 was hybrid vehicles. Also top among the list were flu masks, low-priced domestic fashions, vehicles eligible for tax reductions and eco-vehicle purchasing subsidies, and eco-point energy-saving home appliances. These top trends reveal the importance that the Japanese place on the environment, personal health and personal spending. (20 Hit Products)

## **Communication**

In Japan it is very common to have communication between groups. The Japanese were raised to think of themselves as a group member. Groups can be made up of different subcultures, or be sections within a school or company. Depending on the situation, common while involving in foreign interactions, the group can be as large as Japan. Not uncommon in most cultures, Japan has an enormous sense of national pride. They also have a distinguishable personal pride as well. In Japan it is referred to as 'Face'. As well as representing personal dignity it indicates status within their group. Although in business, the Japanese are known to be honest and straightforward they also do not say 'no'. When turning down a proposal they have a tendency to deliver things in a concise manner without using the word. It is felt that openly criticizing or insulting someone will cause them to lose face. (Doing Business) (JAPANESE CULTURE)

Japan has many unions and rules in place to ensure that people work together and this often results in harmonious conditions. The Japanese educational system emphasizes cooperative behaviour, politeness and personal responsibility. (Doing Business) (JAPANESE CULTURE)

Because criticism is rarely voiced the Japan often read body language to obtain any clues to accompany the verbal communication. Most Japanese project a neutral expression when talking. Eye contact is considered to be disrespectful when made with a person of higher status. Due to the crowding in Japan, many avoid eye contact to gain privacy. (Doing Business) Another important aspect of non-verbal communication is through colour. White often indicates death in Japan. (Visual Color)

## **Religion, Morals and Ethical Standards**

There are two major religions in Japan, Shinto and Buddhism. Although religion does not typically have a large role in day-to-day life, many of the Japanese follow religious rituals at ceremonies and participate at local festivals. (Religion) Shinto has been described as "an amorphous mix of nature worship, fertility cults, divination techniques,

hero worship and shamanism". Essentially there are many Gods in this religion that took different forms or served specific purposes. Some of the forms and purposes are natural objects; some ruled particular areas; exceptional people; as well as abstract creative forces. These gods sustain and protect the people. Shintoists generally follow the moral code of Confucianism. (Shinto) Confucianism teaches the following values; Li – ritual; Hsiao – love within the family; Yi – righteousness; Xin – honesty; Jen – kindness towards others; Chung – loyalty to the state. (CONFUCIANISM) Buddhism, although divided into a number of different traditions, has a common set of fundamental beliefs. Buddhist's practice the principle of equality and reciprocity, and develop their minds to lead to personal freedom. Buddhism also has Four Noble Truths that explore human suffering and Five Precepts that are rules to live by. The Five Precepts are: Do not kill. Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not misuse sex. Do not consume alcohol or other drugs. (Buddhism's)

### **Expressions of Culture**

Many of the symbols that hold meaning for Japan are natural ones, animals and plants. Each symbol represents something different. They are often used in designs, on kimonos and family crests. Some of the themes are joy, longevity, good fortune, the transience of life, healing, and victory. (Symbology)

Japan has many historical and mythical heroes. Among them both are military commanders and generals. Also, historically, a naval officer, pro wrestler and professional baseball player are historical persons of note. (Japanese Myth) Japan relies on social sanctions for inappropriate behaviour. Going back to the concept of the group, children learn early to recognize that they are a part of something. Self-control is favoured over competition and confrontation. It is believed that self-control is rewarded with the pride of contributing to the group. (Japan – VALUES)

### **Hofstede's Dimensions of Culture**

#### **Power Distance Index (PDI)**

Japan's score indicates that it is generally accepted that there is an inequality of power. However, their score is slightly lower than the World's indicating that more members of society view themselves as equals. (Hofstede's) (Japan – Japanese)

#### **Individualism (IDV)**

Japan displays strong ties among people to others within their community. Comparing it across the World though it indicates a more loose connection, lacking of interpersonal connection. Countries with a higher IDV have little sharing of responsibility outside of family. (Hofstede's) (Japan – Japanese)

#### **Masculinity (MAS)**

Japan has an extremely high score in the MAS level. This indicates value of gender roles, in this case men are considered to be the provider. They are expected to be tough, assertive and strong. Men and women do not work equally in Japan. Working women

would have separate professions from men. In comparison to the World's level, Japan has almost double the MAS. (Hofstede's) (Japan – Japanese)

#### Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)

Japan has a high score in this level as well. Japanese feel a high amount of anxiety when in uncertain or unknown situations. As discussed in communication, it is extremely important to save face. Uncertainty may lead to a lack of self-control, which is not viewed very highly in Japan. There is an expectation of structure in Japan where differences are avoided. Japan's score is significantly higher than the average World score. (Hofstede's) (Japan – Japanese)

#### Long-Term Orientation (LTO)

Japan has a high score in the LTO level. Japan values long-standing traditions and values. It believes that family is the basis of society. With a high value placed on education and training, the Japanese have a strong work ethic. (Hofstede's) (Japan – Japanese)

#### **Consumer Behaviour**

Consumers in Japan take many social needs into consideration while making purchases. As noted in their Long-Term Orientation score, family is the basis of society. Also noted are the views they hold on being part of a group. Japan has a high need to belong to a group and this would no doubt motivate some of their purchases. (Dynamics)

When considering about what the Japanese culture commonly buys it is necessary to consider the environment and economy. Japan has one of the largest producing fishing industries in the world. The sales of fish are significantly higher in Japan. Also, because of the high population in Japan, space is continuously an issue. The Japanese buy smaller items and quantities because of space confinements. (Dynamics)

Finally it would be important to investigate who the primary purchaser is. Although the man is the primary income earner for the family, the woman will make most of the major family purchases. Usually the wife will be in charge of the household budget. She will allocate funds into expenses, savings, leisure activities and retirement. (Dynamics)

#### **Advertisement: Softbank – Wind**

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k6e5gA\\_WPKI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k6e5gA_WPKI)

This is a television commercial, created by Dentsu for Softbank Mobile, showcasing Softbank. It is from Japan. Essentially Brad Pitt is walking down an extremely windy street, there are even cars flying past him but he is still able to talk on his phone. There is no talking in the advertisement, only music *Banged and Blown Through* by Saul Williams.

The concept is universal. The phone allows the user to make a phone call no matter what the weather is outside. It speaks for the network that the phone is on as well as the quality of the phone. However, culture bound is that there is no actual verbal statement of the benefits of the phone. In North America the celebrity endorser would be describing their experience with the phone. Although there is music playing it seems silent in many ways.

It is an effective strategy in Japan because it shows the benefits subtly. Also, the celebrity endorsement is obvious to them by their appearance in the commercial. I am not sure what kind of reaction it might achieve in a North American market. On one hand, the North American audience is listening for what they might be told. They want to hear the advertiser say why it is worth their time and make up their minds from there. A musical commercial could easily be ignored on television, it would not stand out among the other advertisements. Although on the other hand, it could set it apart as well. It is a comical commercial that really has a narrow focus. I think it would have to be targeted at a more niche market though, one that might appreciate the music being played. Oddly, an article that I read on this advertisement attributes it, as well as other similar celebrity advertisements to the popularity of Softbank.

As far as the scenery is concerned, it is not obvious where the commercial is taking place. The ad is shaking slightly but it seems to be emphasizing the extreme weather. I think this could be a universal ad. It is a bit outside of the norm for North America but being different could set it apart.

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