

Study on recipients' brand attitudes considering the effect of Japan-visit experience

Noriko Tsujimoto (Faculty of Business Administration, Momoyama Gakuin University, tsujimoto@andrew.ac.jp, Japan)

Abstract

This study determines the impact of recipients' Japan-visit experience on the hierarchy of effects for Japanese confectionery brands. Many Chinese tourists purchase confectioneries as travel souvenirs for gift giving. This study focuses on recipients' brand attitudes regarding the received travel souvenir. Attitudes comprise of three components: cognitive, affective, and conative. The hierarchy of effects concept is developed to explain the relative impact of the three components. The study focuses on the learning hierarchy process, low involvement hierarchy process, and dissonance-attribution hierarchy process, develops three sequential models to clarify brand character related to the attitudes, and tests ten brands. The results show that the regional souvenir brands are associated with the dissonance-attribution hierarchy process, and affected by the recipients' Japan-visit Experience, with their visiting frequency making a positive impact.

Keywords

brand attitudes, hierarchy of effects, inbound tourism, Chinese tourist, recipients of souvenirs

1. Introduction

Japan experienced an increase in the number of foreign tourists until 2019; the number stood at 32 million in 2019, a 2.2 % increase from the previous year and the highest ever recorded, and the shopping consumption of souvenirs was valued at JPY1.67 trillion, primarily attributable to tourists from China [Japan Tourism Agency, 2020]. Additionally, several Chinese tourists purchase confectioneries as travel souvenirs for gift giving [Tsujimoto, 2018].

This study focuses on Chinese recipients of travel souvenirs from tourists who visit Japan. A travel souvenir is typically a one-time purchase during the visit to a location. Therefore, it is essential that the recipients promote repeat purchases to increase the sales of travel souvenirs [Tsujimoto, 2015].

With the belief that travel souvenirs companies should have an overseas online shopping channel for repeat purchases—especially under the current situation where the number of tourists is decreasing due to the COVID-19 pandemic—this study proposes a new viewpoint on the travel souvenir purchasing behavior of recipients.

Brand recall can be the deciding factor in getting an item on the shopping list [Aaker, 1996]. Therefore, it is necessary to create brand awareness and increase brand accessibility to ensure repeat purchases. The recipients can easily recall the brand name and place a repeat order from their home location. Brand awareness is a component of attitude. Attitudes comprise of three elements: cognitive, affective, and conative [Lavidge and Steiner, 1961].

According to Tsujimoto [2019], recipients who visited Japan tended to buy the same souvenir they received owing to brand awareness. This study determines the impact of recipients' Japan-visit experience (JVE) on their attitudes toward Japanese confectionery brands.

2. Previous studies

Shopping is a popular tourist activity and tourists' purchasing behavior is an crucial subject [Oh et al., 2004]. Moreover, souvenirs have special and symbolic memories and are valued and cherished [Littrell et al., 1994]. In Comparison to Western culture, souvenir purchases appear to be a major factor in the amount the Japanese spend while on trips [Witkowski et al., 1991]. Some studies claim that Chinese tourists' purchasing behavior of travel souvenirs is similar to that of the Japanese. Young Chinese (Chinese students) show a strong interest in buying souvenirs and traditional Japanese meals [Arima et al., 2014; Oyabu et al., 2016]. Chinese tourists with high visit-to-Japan frequency show keen interest in and perform repeat purchases of travel souvenirs [Tsujimoto, 2016].

It is important to study the valuation of travel souvenirs based on a consumer's purchase decision-making process: problem recognition—information search—evaluation of alternatives—purchase—post-purchase evaluation. According to Tsujimoto et al. [2013], post-purchase assessment of the process identifies two types of users—a purchaser and a recipient of travel souvenirs—because tourists buy souvenirs for themselves, friends, and family. However, scant research is available on the recipients of travel souvenirs.

The cognitive component of attitude includes the intellectual, mental, and rational status. The affective component includes the emotional and feeling status, and the conative component includes the striving status [Lavidge and Steiner, 1961].

The hierarchy of effects is developed to explain the relative impact of the three components [Solomon, 2014]. Lay et al. [1973] used the three pattern models: the learning hierarchy process model (cognitive-affective-conative), the low involvement hierarchy process model (cognitive-conative-affective), and the dissonance-attribution hierarchy process model (conative-affective-cognitive). The learning hierarchy process occurs when the involvement level is high, and the perceived product differentiation is distinguishable. The dissonance-attribution hierarchy process occurs when the involvement level is high and perceived product differentiation is almost indistinguish-

able. The low involvement hierarchy process occurs when the involvement level is low or when the low involvement makes actual differences unimportant to the people [Lay et al., 1973].

This study determines the impact of recipients' JVE on the hierarchy of effects for Japanese confectionery brands. When recipients have much JVE, they may have information about national brands of food companies with nationwide marketing coverage and regional brands, with regionally limited marketing coverage.

Products of small regional food companies tend to be sold as travel souvenirs in Japan [Tsujimoto, 2017]. This study discusses the recipients' brand attitudes toward souvenirs, and it makes a significant contribution to the marketing of regional food companies.

3. Hypotheses

The relationship between recipients' JVE and each hierarchy process is unclear. Furthermore, the recipients' hierarchy process is affected by the characteristics of brands, especially the regional brands.

The reason is that the recipients may be aware of large confectionery companies such as "Meiji," which has established subsidiaries in China, but not Japanese regional confectionery companies. However, when the recipients have much JVE, they may be aware of both large confectionery companies with overseas marketing coverage and regional brands with regionally limited marketing coverage, through their souvenirs in Japan. Hence, this study considers that JVE is the first step of each hierarchy process.

Corporate names have an advantage in building presence and awareness because multiple businesses support the brand name [Aaker, 1996]. The hierarchy process is different for a corporate name such as "Meiji" and a product name like "Pocky." Large confectionery companies have several products and therefore, while recipients recall the corporate name, they face difficulty in understanding the product differentiation, which may be unimportant.

According to Lavidge and Steiner [1961], the cognitive component can be measured by brand awareness and aided brand

recall. The affective component can be measured using rating scales of brand preference, and the conative components can be measured by intention to purchase.

Three sequential models were developed to clarify brand character related to attitudes. Figure 1 shows the hypothesis model of the study. For hypothesis testing, following Tsujimoto [2018], ten Japanese confectionery brands were selected. The matching model for each brand was chosen based on two factors: (1) corporate name or product brand name and (2) nationwide marketing coverage (including China) or regionally limited marketing coverage. The following hypotheses were framed:

- H1: In large companies, the product name is related to the learning hierarchy process (high involvement and distinguishable).
- H2: In large companies, the corporate name is related to the low involvement hierarchy process (low involvement and unimportant or indistinguishable).
- H3: In regional companies, the product name (the regional brand) is related to the dissonance-attribution hierarchy process (high involvement and indistinguishable).
- H4: Recipients' JVE affects the regional brand model (model 3), but does not affect the product name model (model 1) and the corporate name model (model 2).

4. Method and results

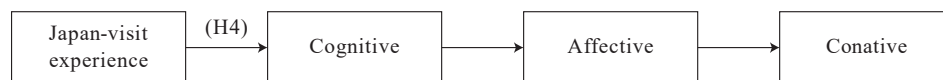
4.1 Study population

An online survey was conducted involving 372 Chinese individuals (192 male and 180 female) aged between 20 and 69 years in Beijing, Shanghai, Canton, and Shenzhen who received souvenirs from Chinese tourists who visited Japan, via an online research company, Cross Marketing Inc.

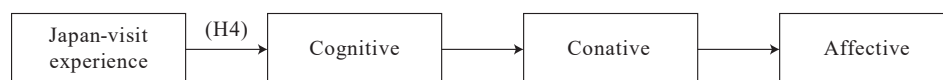
4.2 Variables

The variables were as follows (1) Attributes (gender, age, and place of residence), (2) JVE (visit frequency: from none to 10 times or more; 11 scales), (3) Conative: unaided brand recall (open-ended: first recall, second recall, third recall, or more;

Model 1: The product name model for the learning hierarchy process (H1)



Model 2: The corporate name model for the low involvement hierarchy process (H2)



Model 3: The regional brand model for the dissonance-attribution hierarchy process (H3)

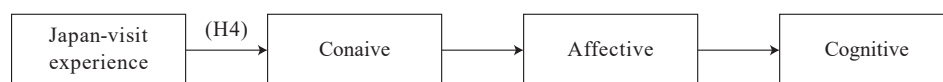


Figure 1: Hypotheses models of the study

three scales), and aided brand recall of ten brands; two scales, (4) Affective: brand preference among ten brands; five scales, (5) Conative: purchasing intention from among ten brands; five scales.

4.3 Preliminary analysis

Eighty percent of all respondents had JVE. Most visits were once (39.8 %), followed by twice (22.3 %) and thrice (7.8 %).

Prior to hypothesis testing, the difference between the visiting frequency and attributes of respondents was clarified by a cross-sectional analysis. Pearson's chi-square was used to assess associations between categorical variables, which was complemented by adjusted residual analysis. Statistical Package for the IBM SPSS Statistics Version 25.0 for Windows was used to perform the tests.

Table 1 shows the results of a cross-sectional analysis, demonstrating a statistically significant association between the frequency of visits of the three groups (not visited, visited once, and visited twice or more) and the characteristics of the study population. Gender, age group, and location of residence were not statistically significant and thus, the results of the tests proved that the attributes of recipients do not affect their visiting frequency to Japan.

4.4 Brand awareness of respondents

Based on Tsujimoto [2018], ten confectionery brands of popular Japanese souvenirs for Chinese tourists were selected. "Meiji," "Fujiya," and "Glico" are large confectionary companies with subsidiaries in China. Therefore, they are considered to have nationwide (overseas) marketing channels. "Kinokonoyama" is the product of "Meiji," "Pocky" is the product of "Glico," and "Milky" is the product of "Fujiya." Hence, they are the products of nationwide companies. "Shiroikoibito,"

"Strawberry chocolate white," and "Jyagapokkuru" are famous souvenirs in Hokkaido, and "Tokyo banana" is a famous souvenir in Tokyo. People can buy them only at souvenir shops in these areas or duty-free shops at the airports in Japan. Therefore, they are considered products that have limited marketing coverage.

Table 2 shows aided brand recall and unaided brand recall of the ten brands. The most recognized brand in aided brand recall was "Meiji" (72.6 %), followed by "Fujiya" (71.5 %), "Glico" (63.2 %), "Shiroikoibito" (63.2 %), "Pocky" (61.3 %), "Kinokonoyama" (59.1 %), "Milky" (50.3 %), "Strawberry chocolate white" (48.9 %), "Jyagapokkuru" (44.4 %), and "Tokyo banana" (41.7 %). In unaided brand recall, the most recalled brand was "Shiroikoibito" (19.6 %), followed by "Meiji" (7.5 %) and "Fujiya" (7.0 %). Thus, the results support the study of Tsujimoto [2018].

4.5 Hypotheses tests

Ten brands per three models were analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM). The variables used were JVE, unaided and aided brand recall, brand preference, and purchasing intention of ten brands. Akaike's information criterion (AIC) and the Bayesian information criterion (BIC) were used to choose an optimal model from the alternatives. Amos for the IBM SPSS Statistics Version 25.0 for Windows was used for the analyses.

Table 3 shows the results of hypotheses tests. On comparing AIC and BIC, the preferred model for "Pocky" (M1: AIC 65.679, BIC 93.111) and "Kinokonoyama" (M1: AIC 90.001, BIC 117.433) was model 1, and for "Milky" (M3: AIC 46.225, BIC 73.657), model 3.

- H1: The results supported two of the three brands.

Table 1: Characteristics of the study population

Variable	Japan visit experience				<i>p</i>
	Total (<i>n</i> = 372)	None (<i>n</i> = 75, 20.2 %)	1 time (<i>n</i> = 148, 39.8 %)	2 times or more (<i>n</i> = 149, 40.1 %)	
Gender – <i>n</i> (%)					
Men	192 (51.6)	34 (45.3)	70 (47.3)	88 (59.1)	0.061
Women	180 (48.4)	41 (54.7)	78 (52.7)	61 (40.9)	
Age-group – <i>n</i> (%)					
20-29	92 (24.7)	21 (28.0)	37 (25.0)	34 (22.8)	0.431
30-39	92 (24.7)	18 (24.0)	34 (23.0)	40 (26.8)	
40-49	101 (27.2)	22 (29.3)	46 (31.1)	33 (22.1)	
50-69	87 (23.4)	14 (18.7)	31 (20.9)	42 (28.2)	
Place of residence – <i>n</i> (%)					
Beijing	94 (25.3)	16 (21.3)	39 (26.4)	39 (26.2)	0.527
Shanghai	136 (36.6)	25 (33.3)	60 (40.5)	51 (34.2)	
Canton	87 (23.4)	21 (28.0)	33 (22.3)	33 (22.1)	
Shenzhen	55 (14.8)	13 (17.3)	16 (10.8)	26 (17.4)	

Note: The *p*-values were obtained by Pearson's chi-square test.

Table 2: Brand awareness of the ten Japanese confectionery brands

Variable (Brand name)	Aided brand recall		Unaided brand recall	
	Numbers (<i>n</i> = 372)	Percentage (%)	Numbers (<i>n</i> = 372)	Percentage (%)
Meiji	270	72.6	28	7.5
Fujiya	251	71.5	26	7.0
Glico	235	63.2	11	3.0
Shiroikoibito	235	63.2	73	19.6
Pocky	228	61.3	3	0.8
Kinokonoyama	220	59.1	0	0.0
Milky	187	50.3	3	0.8
Strawberry chocolate white	182	48.9	4	1.1
Jyagapokkuru	165	44.4	17	4.6
Tokyo banana	155	41.7	7	1.9

Note: For example, “Have you heard of Meiji?” was asked to aid brand recall and “What brand of Japanese confectionery can you recall?” was asked for unaided brand recall [Aaker, 1996].

Table 3: Selecting an optimal model from the alternatives

Variable (Brand name)	Hypotheses	Model 1 (M1)		Model 2 (M2)		Model 3 (M3)	
		AIC	BIC	AIC	BIC	AIC	BIC
Pocky	M1	65.679	93.111	106.007	133.440	65.683	93.115
Kinokonoyama	M1	90.001	117.433	191.724	219.156	90.129	117.562
Milky	M1	48.300	75.732	94.131	121.563	46.225	73.657
Meiji	M2	37.211	64.643	22.015	49.447	37.235	64.667
Fujiya	M2	42.544	69.986	30.328	57.761	42.399	69.831
Glico	M2	27.072	54.505	60.538	87.971	25.824	53.256
Shiroikoibito	M3	19.339	46.771	43.706	71.138	18.410	45.843
Strawberry chocolate white	M3	51.205	78.637	130.980	158.412	48.396	75.828
Jyagapokkuru	M3	41.097	68.529	63.122	90.554	26.137	53.569
Tokyo banana	M3	63.825	91.258	110.509	137.941	47.797	75.230

Note: Numbers with boldface indicate the preferred model from AIC and BIC comparisons.

On comparing AIC and BIC, the preferred model of “Meiji” (M2: AIC 22.015, BIC 49.447) and “Fujiya” (M2: AIC 30.328, BIC 57.761) was model 2, and for “Glico” (M3: AIC 25.824, BIC 53.256), model 3.

- H2: The results supported two of the three brands.

On comparing AIC and BIC, the preferred model of “Shiroikoibito” (M3: AIC 18.410, BIC 45.843), “Strawberry chocolate white” (M3: AIC 48.396, BIC 75.828), “Jagapokkuru” (M3: AIC 26.137, BIC 53.569), and “Tokyo banana” (M3: AIC 47.797, BIC 75.230) was model 3.

- H3: The results supported four brands.

Binomial test was used to find the probability of accepting eight of the ten brands. The result was statistically significant ($p = 0.0107 < 0.05$).

$-p = 0.0107 < 0.05$).

Table 4 shows the path coefficient values of the eight brands supported by the hypotheses. The path coefficient value from JVE to cognitive of model 1 (“Pocky”: $\beta = 0.004, p > 0.05$ and “Kinokonoyama”: $\beta = 0.040, p > 0.05$) and model 2 (“Meiji”: $\beta = 0.011, p > 0.05$ and “Fujiya”: $\beta = 0.010, p > 0.05$) were not statistically significant, and the path coefficient value from JVE to conative of model 3 (“Strawberry chocolate white”: $\beta = 0.130, p < 0.05$, “Jagapokkuru”: $\beta = 0.239, p < 0.01$ and “Tokyo banana”: $\beta = 0.324, p < 0.01$) were statistically significant, except “Shiroikoibito” ($\beta = 0.053, p > 0.05$).

- H4: In models 1 and 2, four brands were supported. In model 3, three out of four brands were supported.

5. Conclusion

The results show that recipients' hierarchy process is affected by brand characteristics. Thus, it can be implied that the

Table 4: The path coefficient value of eight brands

Model 1		Pocky		Kinokonoyama	
Path	β	p	β	p	
Cognitive	← JVE	0.004	0.932	0.040	0.444
Affective	← Cognitive	0.887	0.000	0.927	0.000
Conative	← Affective	0.905	0.000	0.896	0.000
Model 2		Meiji		Fujiya	
Path	β	p	β	p	
Cognitive	← JVE	0.011	0.836	0.010	0.847
Conative	← Cognitive	0.643	0.000	0.683	0.000
Affective	← Conative	0.893	0.000	0.910	0.000
Model 3		Shiroikoibito		Strawberry chocolate white	
Path	β	p	β	p	
Conative	← JVE	0.053	0.306	0.130	0.012
Affective	← Conative	0.922	0.000	0.908	0.000
Cognitive	← Affective	0.690	0.000	0.894	0.000
Model 3		Jyagapokkuru		Tokyo banana	
Path	β	p	β	p	
Conative	← JVE	0.239	0.000	0.324	0.000
Affective	← Conative	0.930	0.000	0.877	0.000
Cognitive	← Affective	0.769	0.000	0.831	0.000

Notes: Japan-visit experience is abbreviated as JVE. β weight is a standardized regression coefficient. p -value is used in the t -test for each path coefficient and a p -value less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

product name is associated with the learning hierarchy process, the corporate name is associated with the low involvement hierarchy process, and the regional brand is associated with the dissonance-attribution hierarchy process.

The regional brands are affected by the recipients' JVE, with their visiting frequency making a positive impact. "Shiroikoibito" is unsupported because it has the highest unaided brand recall, and it is possible that some recipients might have received it at their home location, and is the first experience of their consumption. In its case, the proportion of brand recall of people should be considered.

These observations may help in choosing an appropriate method of market segmentation. Brands with regionally limited marketing coverage should segment the market based on tourists' JVE. However, when aiming for nationwide marketing coverage, selecting the brand name is an important issue. Although the product name has the advantage when the product is distinguishable, the corporate name has the edge when it is indistinguishable.

A limitation of this study is that respondents were living in four big cities in China, and only ten popular confectionery brands were analyzed. Therefore, the results indicate brands with higher recognition for urban dwellers in China.

Finally, future research may choose to study how the Chinese tourists' sightseeing intentions affects their brand attitudes toward Japanese souvenirs, after the COVID-19 pandemic.

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