

# Japanese Marketing Strategy

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### 1. Japanese Consumer Buyer Behaviour

The purpose of the following chapters is to seek an insight into the Japanese psyche.

The perspective taken will be that of examining those factors that influence the conditioning and socializing within Japanese Society. However a word of caution is necessary.

There is an inherent problem in examining Japanese Society with Western concepts. However where possible, uniquely Japanese aspects will be amplified and analogous West-

ern aspects will be discussed.

In order to understand Japanese Marketing we must understand how the Japanese conduct their marketing domestically as well as Internationally. It therefore follows that an understanding of the Japanese consumer is central to such a study just as it would be if studying marketing in any society. Marketing as defined here refers to that process by which the needs and wants of Society are researched and anticipated and then translated into products and services for that Society. In particular, Buyer behaviour seeks to answer who buys 'the product' but more importantly why do they buy 'the product'. Buyer behaviour is also central to an understanding of how products are advertised or communicated to that Society.

Preliminary findings indicate that the Japanese Consumer unlike his/her Western counterpart is more 'passive' and therefore needs to be marketed to. 'Passive' as defined here means more contemplative/intuitive. This may explain why Western advertising in Japan fails. In Western markets, advertising is factual and convincing, this is very often sufficient to induce a purchase. In Japan however, the consumer is 'put off' by this approach. Instead the Japanese consumer has to be marketed to via a different route. In particular, the use of personal selling both directly and via the depar-

tmental store. Hence a proactive rather than a reactive approach is necessary.

A further observation is that Japanese Society is more cohesive/uniform than in the West. This in itself is a product of group processes and conditioning. This can present formidable problems in Marketing research for example when one seeks an individual response. However, it also means that products diffuse through the market differently, hence more accurately one must of necessity look at proactive marketing to the group and obtain their compliance for a product such as an export product to succeed.

Finally, the composition and structure of Japanese Society is changing. Life style research indicates that buyer behaviour of segments below thirty five years of age differs markedly from that of older generations. Hence these groups are nearer to the Western consumer model.

### (1) **Modelling Japanese Buyer Behaviour**

Buyer behaviour seeks to study these factors that affect the purchase behaviour within different groups or segments of society. In some societies this is markedly different. In Indian society, for example the rigid caste system has a direct effect upon what people buy, but more importantly, why they buy. Likewise in Japan, Chie Nakane describes Japanese Society as a vertical Society in which the Japanese person is part of a series of interlocking circles. However, a distinguishing factor in Japanese Society, from the caste system of India, is the uniformness of Japanese Society.

This can present a problem when trying to segment the Japanese market into different groups based on common traits or factors (This is an important consideration when creating

marketing strategy) to cater for different groups according to their respective buyer behaviours within each segment. However, Advertising agencies such as Dentsu & Hakuhodou have created a segmentation system or typology based upon lifestyles. This in effect is a factor analysis of Japanese lifestyles which are then clustered into groups or segments. The inference is that each segment exhibits its own pattern of buyer behaviour.

An important consideration for understanding buyer behaviour is a construct herein referred to as a marketing model. This may be thought of as a device or analytical framework which is composed of individual research findings. Hence it is a convenient form for understanding an aspect of the market very quickly. Additionally the most up-to-date research is placed on it.

### (2) **Descriptive Models of Buyer Behaviour**

The earliest and one of the simplest models is 'the Black box'. This is shown diagrammatically below. Here some form of input will produce likely outputs. However the centre of the model and hence its name remained largely uncharted.

Improvements to this model have taken the form of borrowings from applied psychology. By the 1960's several prominent descriptive models had been produced. Of these, the Engel Kollat and Blackwell model gained wide acceptance. In essence the model consists of several building blocks.

- ① Perceptual system
- ② Evaluative system
- ③ Motivational system

These are shown in the flow chart below.

**Diagram of Early Model of Buyer Behaviour (Black Box)**

inputs	outputs
ex. some form of stimulus. ex. advertisement. ex. word of mouth.	ex. Behavioural change such as an attitudinal shift towards the product or even a purchase act.

Key questions are therefore to what extent can these models apply to Japanese Society? Furthermore, does the Japanese consumer react to the same stimuli as the Western consumer? How is the information processed and what behavioural changes become manifest? Research papers from the Japanese Journal of Psychology<sup>(1)</sup> indicated that to some extent Japanese purchase behaviour could be assembled into a model based upon the Engel Kollat and Blackwell model. Additionally the work on Japanese Buyer Behaviour<sup>(2)</sup> exhibits models that are similar to those in the West.

The research approach was to look for any evidence of Japanese equivalents for the key components on the EKB model. Following an extensive search, evidence was found from the work of several researchers. These are summarized overleaf. Before considering their worth, an outline of the EKB model is given.

**(3) The Perceptual System (stage 1)**

The model begins with discussion of research findings regarding the perceptual system. This refers to how incoming information or stimulus is treated. Hakoda & Nakamizo<sup>(3)</sup> conducted experiments into the short term memory. They found that it was two dimensional in nature i. e. information was encoded both acoustically and pictorially but that the position of the information i. e. place in a sentence was encoded pictorially. The implications of this in terms of advertising are apparent, viz messages from advertising are received, all enter the short term

memory, most are discarded. However to influence those which are retained, advertisers must target information within a particular place within the copy. These findings also provide an insight into Japanese language and its processing which are discussed later.

Factors affecting perception were researched by Mochizuki<sup>(4)</sup>. He found that perceptual selection, fixation and resonance as measured by recognition, memory and association were facilitated by high or low-value orientation to the stimulus words and when the stimulus words have value and meaning. One deduces from this that advertising copy for instance will be retained providing that value orientation of the subject is positive and the value of the stimulus is either high value or quite interestingly low value. He<sup>(4)</sup> defines high value stimulus to as containing many positive evaluations or same value associations. Whereas low value stimulus has few positive evaluations, associations, or many negative evaluative associations. This is significant if one relates this to the style of Japanese TV advertisements which do not have a storyline and which many Western viewers find puzzling.

Research by Ishitani<sup>(5)</sup> looked into whether imagery-formation was more effective than sentence generation in memory of verbal materials. He found that imagery formation was more effective.

**(4) Evaluative & Decision making Systems (Stages 2 & 4 )**

Here one seeks to examine those factors af-

fecting attitude formation and change. In Japanese Society there is a major influence of the group to which the customer belongs. The concept of attitude is important to discuss here. In the West, attitude formation and change feature in many models of buyer behaviour. However, the Japanese concept of attitude i. e. *Shitashimi-Yasui* means 'feeling close'. This may be thought of as a universal attitude i. e. sharing the same attitude with others.

The Marketing implications are that people 'buy' from 'friends' by projecting a sympathetic attitude, however, unrelated to the product. People will form a favourable opinion of the sender and will want to find out more. This in the West is referred to as an overt search for further information. This has much greater influence than in the West. As Yamashita<sup>(6)</sup> points out "customers need to feel not only that quality and other functional attributes are acceptable but also that social acceptance will not be hindered if the product is purchased!"

This aspect is explored further in the chapter dealing with Socialisation processes. He also points out that housewives prefer more of a 'hands on' tactile approach. He attributes this to Zen influences and hence he regards attitude formation/decision making as more of a '*Gestalt*-processing style'. A third factor is worth mentioning here. This refers to the fact that decision making takes place in the store rather than in the home. (Japanese housewives spend longer shopping than Western housewives) .

##### (5) Marketing Implications

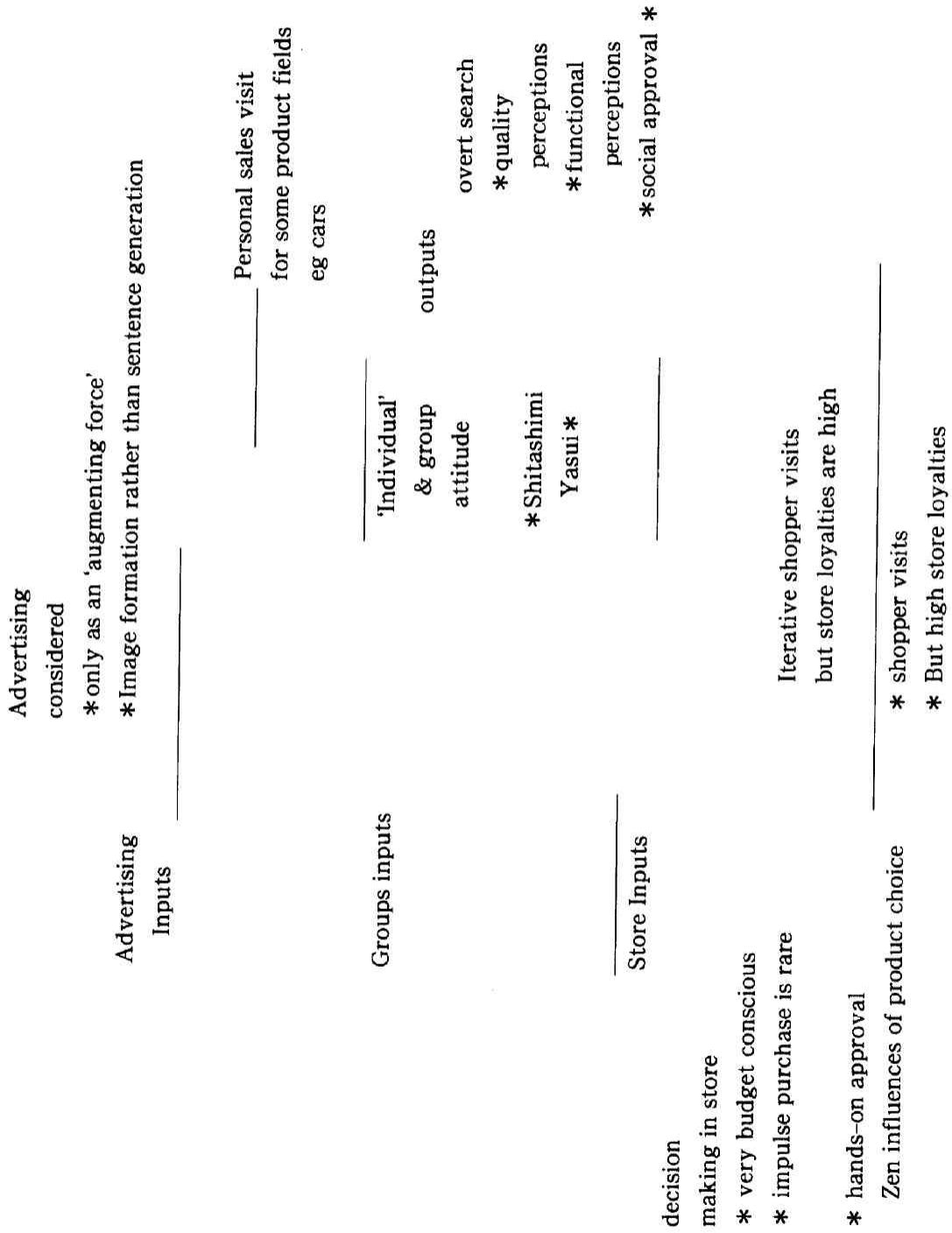
A high frequency of shopper visits combined with a long time spent shopping is in keeping with research findings i. e. that decision making takes place in the store not in the

home. By implication, marketing strategy must, of necessity, become visible in the store and via the store. This means display/packaging is important as are demonstrations for and by the housewife (to convince herself). To this extent stores are central and proactive in marketing. To amplify the point further, store reputation is a guarantee of product performance and products are bought because they appear in the right store. Precisely because consumers rely on store information, there is strong loyalty to stores.

Given that there is an emphasis on 'push' through the channels, advertising is only an augmenting force, whereas in the West, advertising support is larger and does more of the 'selling'. Ishikawa<sup>(7)</sup> points out that unlike the West, it is difficult to presell with just advertising in Japan. The marketer in Japan must carry the vertical marketing concept very far down towards the consumer and even into their homes, concludes Yamashita. This is strong supporting evidence for the proactive approach. Briefly restated this means carefully nurturing the market around the product. It may also explain why car manufacturers visit homes of potential purchasers directly, whereas in the West, car purchase is influenced by advertising and is more remote by comparison. Similarly, insurance, securities/shares, domestic electronics and cosmetics are marketed in this way.

Store and group processes are central to a Marketing Strategy to the Japanese consumer. Decision making predominantly taking place in the store. Stores are regarded as providers of reliable information about products by the Japanese consumer. Hence in order to market to the Japanese consumer, retail distribution strategies rather than advertising strategies are significant. Given that it may be difficult

Model of Japanese Consumer attitude formation within the context of group and associated Marketing Implications



Source R Dace



to market through a Japanese retail chain, from an exporter one solution might be to establish a joint venture or indeed buy a retail outlet in Japan. International retailing, if carefully researched, can be very successful.

Secondly, group acceptance of the product is instrumental in its diffusion through that market.

#### (6) **The Motivational System (stages 3 & 5)**

In the EKB model, consideration of the motivational system is given in terms of Eysenck's Maudsley personality Inventory (MPI<sup>(8)</sup>). In essence this sought to position an individual on a two dimensional grid. The grid was composed of measures of stability, instability and introversion, extroversion. These produce stereo types of choleric, sanguine, phlegmatic and melancholic personality types. Inferences of these types on buying behaviour are made by marketers. For instance a choleric type is impulsive and excitable whereas a phlegmatic person is very conservative. Purchase frequencies reflect this being high in the former and low in the latter.

*Messieurs Iwasaki*<sup>(9)</sup> *et al* have succeeded in constructing a Japanese version of the above. However it is interesting to note that experiments revealed the extraversion scale to be independent of the neuroticism or stability scale. Unfortunately, no explanation is given for this. In all other experiments completed by this group, there was a high degree of concordance or matching with the MPI. One infers from this that the M. P. I. grid is applicable to the Japanese consumer, this is assuming that there are not problems of translation or of cultural transference.

Referring to the EKB model again, the consumer may have two outcomes following a purchase. If she is happy with the purchase

then marketing can complement itself on a satisfied customer. If the outcome is dissonance, then marketing also has a role to play.

Stage 5 refers to dissonance in the EKB model. This may be explained as a form of grudging after the purchase of a product. This grudging is usually related to the expenditure of the product. Hopefully there will not be any dissonance however. Research into dissonance by S. Kojima and Y. Hama<sup>(10)</sup> provided some valuable insights into Japanese prioritisations. They explain it this way. When a housewife buys a product grudging of the expenditure may take place. For example if \$50 is spent on rice, little objection or dissonance would be raised. If \$50 is spent on 'mattake' then this could create dissonance, depending on whether it was purchased as a gift (Oseibo gift & Ochugen gift) or for use at home. They therefore looked at how each commodity was positioned within the value structure of consumers.

Further work was conducted by Asahi Shinbun<sup>(11)</sup> who substantiated the findings of theirs. Results from both pieces of research produced the prioritisation. The listings refer to psychological grudging accompanying expenditure of \$50 or equivalent.

Summary of EKB - Japanese findings. From discussions of research into evaluation perception and personality dimensions of Japanese consumers it is possible to conclude that there are similarities in the way the Japanese receive and act upon information. In the next chapter discussion will centre upon differences in how information is processed and also the impact of language and culture.

## **2. The Japanese Mind (Japanese Psyche) Information processing and Impact on Advertising/Marketing**

Rudzinski and Mayuzumi<sup>12</sup> write that 'It is difficult for Westerners to perceive patterns or hidden meanings in Japanese speech because cultural differences between them are so great. There is a tremendous difference in the structure of thinking between Western and Japanese business people. The Japanese mind is particularly complicated because of the wide range of influences upon it'.

Central to the Japanese psyche is the belief of 'animism' - that everything has a spirit. Hence there is a spirit in the garden, a spirit in the mountain. Proper respect must be accorded to the objects that surround the Japanese person. This may be the reason why there is a lack of violence/vandalism in Japanese society.

Another important influence was that of China. Japan's intellectual heritage owes much to China. From 6th Century AD, Kanji scripts were imported and modified. Similarly Confucian ethics/codes were imported and modified.

Japan has always perceived itself as being a neighbour to China and not a province of China. Hence, the system of rules devised to govern remote districts by China never applied. Japan did not adopt Chinese rules. Instead they developed their 'own system of values' which were more pragmatic. At this point it is worth introducing Zen Buddhism. Zen places emphasis upon pragmatism or 'hands on' approach.

In the mid-16th Century, the Jesuit 'black boats' arrived. There followed rapid assimilation of fire arms and mining technologies. The wealth from these technologies had a destabilising effect and a series of wars ensued. The Tokugawa dynasty unified the country in the early 17th Century, but in so doing closed it to Western influences until 1853. This enforced isolation externally was accompanied by inter-

nal social stability. This was enforced by a power structure.

Japanese social structure 'crystallised out' into the form of samurai, farmer, craftsmen, merchants. These aspects are more fully discussed in the chapter on historical developments in Japanese Marketing.

### 3. Language/Perception and Processing

The perspective taken in this chapter is that of perception being affected by the language one acquires from birth. Similarly that perception is 'specific' to language. This means that the way a person sees the world is dependent upon the language that the person speaks. This view was expressed by Edward Sapir<sup>13</sup> in his concept of '*Weltanschauung*'. Japanese is unique in that its alphabet exhibits both ideographs or pictorial symbols (Kanji) as well as written symbols (Hiragana/Katakana). The implications of these are discussed later in terms of information processing. He is quoted as saying that 'We see, hear and otherwise experience largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose us to certain choices of interpretation'. Conversely the Lexical Universal theory of language ascertains that language is universal and that a chain of thought could be expressed in any language. Whorf<sup>14</sup> concluded that 'a change in language can transform our appreciation of the cosmos'. He made a special study of the Japanese language and found that the language 'enjoys conciseness at the same time with great precision'. It does this through its ability to rank two subjects within a sentence and relate them both to the same predication i. e. the language is honorific. He found that study of Japanese also revealed how the Japanese mind works i. e. on a **much more of a**

**holistic plane.** Typically a consumer will consider not only himself in relation to a purchase, but the effect on others within his own social or cultural group. To summarise therefore, precision in the language is economically communicated by use of two subjects and the 'status' between them. Secondly, the language also reveals the holistic nature of thought.

### (1) Language & Processing

As B. L. Whorf has discovered, language controls thought processes hence logically much may be discovered by researching the processing of written forms of language and thereby reveal perceptions/ways of seeing the world.

Hence not only will a speaker of Indo-European languages speak in constructions that are difficult to understand from Japanese constructions but their perceptions of the same phenomena will differ!

For example, Arabs have 6,000 words for parts of a camel, such a vocabulary if acquired by a Westerner would greatly enhance one's view of the significance of camels in Middle East. Similarly, Eskimos have forty words for snow. Again, this reflects the importance of this element in their lives.

Hatta<sup>(15)</sup> sought to research the processing of Japanese alphabets. Japanese is unique in that one of its alphabets is composed of ideographs or symbols. These are interspersed within sentences. Secondly, the other two alphabets are composed of non-ideographs. It should be added that scientists have long known of the different processing that takes place between left and right hemispheres of the brain. He found<sup>(16)</sup> that the left hand visual field was superior in its recognition of Kanji. Whereas the right hand visual field was more adapted to the remaining alphabets (hiragana & Katak-

ana). Similarly, he also found that when Kanji was transcribed into Hiragana letters, subjects recognised them more accurately in the right hand visual field.

Further evidence comes from Yamadori<sup>(17)</sup>. In conducting an experiment on persons suffering from aphasia, he found that the stroke victim could only read Kanji ideographs. The Hiragana/Katakana symbols could not be read. The deductions from this are that Japanese use the integrated action of both cerebral hemispheres when reading/watching. It also means that Japanese tend to process material much faster than Western consumers. Secondly, Kanji recognition is holistic. Kanji possesses more highly organised and distinctive graphic patterns than the other alphabets. This, it is felt, makes it a good candidate for direct visual mapping. The evolutionary aspects of Kanji deserves mention. Kanji easily correspond to concrete shapes and objects. That is how they evolved into ideographs. An interesting linkage or parallel is the influence of elements in Shinto & Buddhism.

Further evidence comes from Tsunoda<sup>(18)</sup>. He found that the brains of Japanese people function in a different way to those of Westerners. He applied a series of visual recognition tests on Japanese and then repeated them on second and third generation Japanese-Americans. He found that the brains of Japanese-American consumers processed information differently to those of Japanese. Hence this would tend to support the work of Whorf and Sapir regarding language perception and processing. It also shows vividly the impact of culture upon thought processes and environment.

The Marketing implications of this are that Japanese consumers interpret information differently. In Japanese TV commercials a vertical Kanji script superimposed over the visual



footage, would be processed by the right hand side of the brain. Whereas the left hand side would process the visual aspects.

If marketing to the Japanese consumer, this fact should be recognised. A Mexican beer company has recently sought to try a different route into the evaluative and decision making part of the Japanese brain with the TV commercials.

Cervecerias Modelo<sup>19</sup> has deliberately created a campaign to impact on the right hand side of 'the Japanese brain'. Whilst Advertising is discussed it is worth noting here that since Japanese people can assimilate information quicker than their Western counterparts, their TV ads are shorter. Usually TV advertising space is sold in multiples of 15 seconds in Japan, whereas in the West, multiples of 30 second ads are the norm.

## (2) The Japanese Consumer (Life Style Research)

Here major structural changes in Japanese society are examined and their implications on buyer behaviour. A brief segmentation study<sup>20</sup> reveals that there is a sharp divide between those over and under 35 years of age. This reflects Japan's post war development and consequent wealth. It is also a product of their culture and increasing western influences. As George Fields<sup>21</sup> points out the Japanese modernize but not westernize. By this he means that the Japanese have a propensity to take on board modern products emanating from the West, but these do not alter their set of values. For instance the eating of hamburgers extends the Japanese cuisine without destroying the sushi industry. Conversely the eating of sushi in New York would be seen as a fashion trend away from consumption of hamburgers. A further illustration may help. In modern kitchens,

Japanese housewives can be seen preparing coffee, surrounded by the most modern appliance. Or, at a baseball match, a huge set of drums/drumming session may accompany the match. As Rudzinski and Mayuzumi assert, the Japanese have a propensity to take on board many external influences without changing their core values. In addition, they also hold onto these values and do not discard them as we do in the West e. g. as with a fad.

The age stratification/characteristics of Japanese society is as follows<sup>22</sup>.

The 'Kyujinrui' (or old home sapiens) fifty/sixties

The 'Baby boomers' thirty/forty

The 'Shinjinrui' (neo home sapiens) twenties

The 'Ichigozoku' (the strawberry generation) teenies

At the Hakuhodo Institute of life and living, continuous research is conducted into lifestyles. We do not have any equivalent in the U. K. The Henley forecasting centre do not conduct lifestyle research.

Continuous research looks at all aspects of trends in Japanese Society. Where these trends converge a fashion crystallizes. At the Hakuhodo Institute there are differences between parents and children. Children are most sensitive to change. Similarly the differences between the 'Shinjinrui' and the 'Ichigozoku' are more marked.

'The Kyujinrui' are considered to be the corporate warriors of Japanese Industry. They are nearest to the traditional model of Japanese Society.

The 'Ichigozoku' - are most susceptible to change: teenage girls have strong active personalities ! Contrast this with 'group attitudes/behaviour of older generations. 'Baby boomers' and their children 'the Shinjinrui relate to each other on a comparatively equal footing.

### (3) Buyer Behaviour Across Different Generations

Fathers of Shinjinrui are considered workaholics, These type value production and work rather than their family. Here it is the wife that plays the major role in purchasing.

The Shinjinrui, on the other hand, seek a lot of information about products and make carefully considered purchases.

Research into the Shinjinrui by Hakuhodo Institute found the following:-

- They tend to base decisions on personal desires rather than upon logic i.e. wants, not needs
- They buy products such as cars or stationary for design in preference to **function**.
- They are group orientated, they form shallow relationships. By this is meant that they choose friends not according to values and beliefs but individual interests. Groups so formed comprise of friends with homogeneous tastes. Of significance to marketing is the fact that the clothes worn by these groups are purchased not because they are necessarily expensive but because their purchase confers membership of the group.
- Of perhaps greater significance is the fact that the Shinjinrui are very economically minded. They view work as the means to fund their 'extravagances'. This is a marked departure from 'the Salaryman' who has a different view of work.

A longitudinal study of the Japanese consumer by Tomita<sup>20</sup> has shown that since 1976 there has been a gradual change in Japanese Society as reflected in the attitude/motivation of the Japanese. He has shown that attitude towards traditional lifestyle has shifted mar-

ginally to a more liberal lifestyle. This is shown in the diagram below.

The results of the 1976 study and the 1981 study may be compared. Similarly he looked at propensity to consume (fashions) this shows a greater shift than the afore mentioned. Hence a conclusion might be that the Japanese consumer, whilst still basically conservative/liberal, is showing an increased propensity to consume fashion items.

The study also sheds light upon the shift towards individualism. In the table key indicator are shown from 1974 to 1988. In<sup>20</sup> 1974, 32% of Japanese Consumers chose items for individual reasons and 48% chose items they felt were acceptable in everybody's eyes'. By 1988 these percentages had changed to 34% and 35% respectively. perhaps the biggest change has been the shift in emphasis given to saving. In 1974, 71% of people interviewed said that they would first save money before buying something. By 1988 only 57% said they would save before buying the item. This is shown below.

### 4. The position of Women in Japanese Society-Buyer Behaviour and Consequent Marketing Stance (from Proactive to Reactive)

The Japanese housewives traditional role has been that of treasurer. This remains unchanged. She is renowned for thrift and a high level of savings. This does not mean that she shops infrequently. In fact the reverse is true. As compared to her Western counterpart, she will shop on average four times during the week and once during the weekend. Japanese cuisine is orientated towards fresh items and this results in a higher frequency of shopping. However, women are playing a greater part in the economic life of Japan. Now 45% of mar-

ried women are working. This has led to a shift in purchasing to convenience outlets e. g. the 'Seven-Eleven' chains which stay open longer. If one accepts that the housewife is one of catalysts for change, then given the trends in consumption of under 35 years olds it is likely that a change will occur in buyer behaviour and hence the approach of marketing. George Fields sees it as a shift from 'distribution push' or proactive marketing to a 'consumer pull' or reactive marketing stance. The equal opportunity law of 1986 has led to an impact of women in the work place.

In this chapter, key aspects of consumer buyer behaviour were discussed. In particular the research findings from the Japanese Journal of Psychology and book by Shuzo Abe revealed similarities in the perceptual evaluational and motivational systems of the Japanese mind with that of the Western mind. However, group or shared attitude was fundamentally different as was the complex number of influences that were retained. Work into language processing also revealed insights into the Japanese way of seeing the world after Whorf and Sapir.

The marketing implications both domestically and for that of an exporter were discussed. Typically that given Japanese housewives buyer behaviour, i. e. a high tactile 'hand on approach' at the point of sale was significant. Conversely advertising, though absorbed quickly was only regarded as an augmenting force. Hence point of sale display promotion and packaging over and above product quality were key determinants of buyer behaviour. Attitude formation and change, a precursor to the purchase act was found by group attitude. Lastly decision making took place at the point of sale not in the home.

Hence given the above, proactive marketing

via vertically related stores was in evidence. However, given the structural changes in Japanese society, reactive marketing was found. Interestingly, these changes might lead, in the long term to a change in advertising, closer to the Western model.

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