

Paper Hospitality

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LOCAL PEOPLE HOSPITALITY AT TOURISM DESTINATION: A STUDY OF TOKYO METROPOLITAN TRAIN CUSTOMERS

Abstract

This study analyses Tokyo metropolitan train customers' response to a foreigner's request for help, analyses the motives of the response relates to Japanese culture, and finally analyses the influence of metropolitan life on local consumers hospitality relating to their response for a small help from foreigners. The research uses a qualitative approach. As many as 25 people (informants) at several points of the city of Tokyo accidentally were asked for a small help to support a foreigner to guide or at least to give information on directions, such as the name of places, stations, train directions and building/offices. Data collection was conducted in the Metropolitan Tokyo area from 1 December to 5 December 2015. For data analysis purposes, expert interviews had also been conducted with 2 Japanese who stay temporarily in Jakarta and 2 Indonesian who have lived in Japan. Results of the study indicated that most people (23 out of 25) responded positively to a foreigner's request for help. The study indicates that train customers in metropolitan Tokyo are helpful and friendly to foreigners, despite their busy and tight schedules. Hospitality value is embedded in Japanese culture.

Research paper

Keywords: Metropolitan train customers; Local people hospitality; Tourism destination; Japanese culture; Metropolitan's life

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Introduction

Local people behaviour and hospitality may affect the success of tourist destination marketing. In fact, local people characteristics and uniqueness is a tourist destination attraction itself. On the other hand, a tight schedule and demand for people's work at a local destination might challenge serving visitors coming to the region. Therefore, this is interesting to study how people at metropolitan city behave towards visitors.

Today, the travel and tourism industry is the world's largest and most diverse industry (World Tourism Organization 2007). Tourism is also important in Japan, and accounts for a major part of the Japanese economy, where tourism businesses make up 4.5 per cent of the GDP and represent 6 per cent of all jobs in the Japanese workforce. The growth of international tourists to Japan has been robust over the last few years, and international arrivals have more than doubled between 2011 and 2014. The soft yen and various government initiatives have supported this trend (Savills World Research, Japan, 2015; Singh & Ashraf, 2020).

International visitors are rapidly growing. The Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) has announced that the total number of international tourists totalled 11.1 million to July 2015, a 47% increase from the same period last year. The increase in inbound visitors has been fuelled by the soft yen and various government initiatives such as airport capacity expansion, the growth of low-cost carriers (LCCs), the relaxation of visa requirements and new openings of duty free shops. During 2014, the number of

international tourists exceeded 10 million in October and total 13.4 million at the year-end. In 2015, the number was over 10 million by July, three months earlier than a year before. This July saw 1.9 million inbound tourists, up by 51% from the same month last year, a record on a per-month basis. This signifies a shift in the economic drivers in Japan (Bhasin & Ng, 2019; Majumder & Rahman, 2020). For the 12 months to March 2015 (Fiscal year March 2015 or FY Mar 2015), Japan's travel balance swung into the black for the first time in 55 years, with foreign visitors spending more in Japan than Japanese tourists spent on overseas travel. The balance changed from JPY530 billion in deficit for FY Mar 2014 to a JPY210 billion surplus for FY Mar 2015 (Savills World Research, Japan, 2015).

Tokyo is one of the busiest City in the world. Its population has reached almost 14 million people (Tokyo Metropolitan Government, 2015). Despite the busy lifestyle in Tokyo, people are still maintaining traditional Japanese culture. Friendliness and hospitality are part of Japanese culture (Shimizu, ND; Joshi, 2013; Jaim & Islam, 2018). This study aims to analyse Tokyo metropolitan train customers response to a request for help from a foreigner, second to analyse the motives of the response relates to Japanese culture, and finally to analyses the influence of metropolitan life on consumers behaviour in relation to response to help from a foreigner.

Literature Review

Tourism Marketing

Tourism is the temporary movement of people to destinations outside their normal place of work and residence, the activities undertaken during their stay in those destinations, and the facilities created to cater to their needs (Cook *et al.*, 2002). The World Tourism Organization (WTO) specifically defined tourism as the practice of staying outside one usual environment for one year or less if it's for leisure purposes or 24 hours or less if it's for business purposes. Marketing strategy in the tourism industry engages for an instant to local products (Suryawardani *et al.*, 2014), communication (Amin and Pri-ansha, 2019), and attraction in the destination. Involving customers in tourism activity is also one of the marketing strategies as argued by Rather (2020), who find that customer engagement's dimensions exert differing effects on customer experience and the indirect effects of customer engagement dimensions on behavioural intentions via experience and identification.

Japan Economy and Culture

Japan is one of the world's leading industrialised countries. With consistently high growth rates throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the Japanese economy became the world's second-largest. However, during the second half of the 1980s, a dangerous equity and property price bubble developed. After suffering from a recession during the 1990s, the Japanese economy has

recovered and is expected to continue growing. Economic growth has improved, and unemployment has decreased due to increased export, investments and consumption (Swedish Trade Council 2006, Datamonitor 2006).

Today, it is not hard to find highlights in the Japanese economy, which once again is the second largest in the world, preceded only by the United States. Therefore, the performance of the Japanese economy significantly affects the world (European Travel Commission 2006, Nobuyoshi & Toshiki 2006, Swedish Trade Council 2007), known for its hardworking employees and competitive companies supported by the government. According to Woronoff (2001), consumer spending in Japan is also the second-highest globally, with 126 million consumers spread to a relatively small space (in Norman and Pettersen, 2008).

1 Culture is in constant change and repeated social relationships develop the culture and form patterns, which become internalised by the group members. Hollensen (2001) mention that culture has three different characteristics; First, culture is learned, which means that the culture is thought and learned by people through their membership of a group. Second, it is interrelated, where two parts of culture can be connected to each other, for example, religion and business status. Third, culture is shared, which means that the values of a culture are passed on to an individual by other members. Assessing these three aspects, can provide valuable information to build a framework, which will help with a company's promotion (Hollensen, 2001) in Norman and Pettersen (2008).

3

When Japanese people feel another's kindness toward them and see someone's warm-hearted feelings, thoughts, and behaviours, they appreciate that person's *omoiyari*. The primary meaning of *omoiyari* is "an individual's sensitivity to imagine another's feelings and personal affairs, including his or her circumstances" (Shinmura, 1991, p. 387, translated by Hara). *Omoi-yari* has attracted non-Japanese scholars' attention as one of the most important ideas in Japanese cultural value and communication (e.g., Lebra, 1976; Travis, 1998; Wierzbicka, 1997).

The word *omoiyari* is often seen on signs bearing a school motto and at police stations. In many surveys of public opinion, Japanese people have listed *omoiyari* as a key concept on which they put a high value. Although *omoiyari*-based behaviour and activity are seen across cultures, Japanese people are the ones who put the highest value on *omoiyari* all over the world (Kikuchi, 1988; Akanuma, 2004), in Hara (2006). However, Japan still has some issues to solve. The ageing Japanese population will increase public spending, and the country has a large national debt. Therefore, the government agenda includes economic reforms with decreased state expenditures, increased tax incomes, deregulations, and increased decentralisation (Woronoff 2001).

The immense economy of Japan heavily depends on trade with the external world. It is the world's sixth-largest exporter and importer and also the world's largest international creditor. Its industrial strength is among the world's largest and most advanced (Datamonitor 2006) in Norman and Petersen (2008).

The Japanese Customer

¹ In Western countries, it is commonly known that *'the customer is always right'*. In Japan, they go a step further, saying *'okyakusama wa kamisama desu'*, which means *'the customer is the God'*. The Japanese are taught to expect to be served by others and to serve others from birth. With this mentality, being able to provide top-level service to their consumers is second nature. In Japan, the customer is never wrong, implying that great effort must be placed into taking care of unsatisfied customers, which might have a complaint (Genestre *et al.* 1995).

It is important to have a high level of attentiveness and care for the customer's personal needs as well as business needs. The after-sale attention is as important as the attention given to the customer at the moment of purchase. If a customer finds the after-sale treatment poor, they will without hesitation change brands (Genestre *et al.* 1995). Due to the importance of service in Japanese culture, giant companies in Japan have taken service to a whole new level. By Japanese definition, the consumer has the power due to that the seller is willing to sell to any customer, while the consumer is not willing to buy from any seller. This is why the Western way of looking at such a transaction as equal is an unnatural view to the Japanese. The seller is the servant while the consumer is the master; hence there is no equality.

Due to many competitors, sometimes the only thing that can attract consumers is the service. Service must go before all products. The entire organisation is taught to know *'what the customer really wants'* as opposed to *'what the organisation thinks the customer wants'* (Johansson & Nonaka

1996, Genestre *et al.* 1995). Lately, one large consumer group in Japan is on the rise, and the members of this group are Japanese female consumers, which largely outnumber the male and are considered the main target group when approaching Japan (Normandy 2005) in Norman and Pettersen (2008).

Research Method

Research Approach

A qualitative approach allows looking at details and to receive a deeper understanding and a general picture of what the situation appears to be (Jacobsen, 2002). “*Qualitative methods allow us to stay close to the empirical world. They are designed to ensure a close fit between the data and what people actually say and do. By observing people in their everyday lives, listening them talk about what is on their minds, and looking at the documents they produce, the qualitative researcher obtains first-hand knowledge of social life unfiltered through concepts, operational definitions, and rating scales*” (Taylor & Bogdan 1984 p. 7), in Norman and Pettersen (2008).

Data Collection Method

Data collection is gathered through *field* data collection by asking 30 people who were taken accidentally at the Tokyo Metropolitan area, especially train consumers. Data from 25 out of 30 informants are used. Informants ages are predicted above 18 years old.

Question for help to the train consumers (passengers), are as follows:

1. Excuse me, can you tell me which train goes to ... (i.e.: Ikebukuro)?
2. Excuse me, do you know where The New Tokyo Building is located?
3. Excuse me, Is this the right train to... (i.e.: Yoyogi?)
4. Excuse me, do you know what train goes to... (i.e.: Tokyo Tower)?
5. Can you tell me the direction to the train station, please?

Data collections are made as follows:

1. 1st day/Tue. 01 Dec. 2015:

At Haneda: Accidentally asking one informant (female), at 8.00 am.

At the Train on the way to Shinagawa: Asking one informant (female), at 8.20 am.

At Shinagawa area: Asking two informants (both female), at 8.30 am.

At Ikebukuro area: Asking three informants (2 female, 1 male), at 8.50 am.

At Ikebukuro, Sun Shine City shopping mall: Asking one informant (male) who was sitting on a chair, at 10.00 am.

2. 2nd day/Wed. 02 Dec. 2015:

At Ikebukuro area on the street: Asking one informant (male) 10.00 am.

At Shinjuku: Asking one informant (male), at 10.20 am.

At Ginza: Asking two informants (male and female), at 11.00 am.

At Tokyo: Asking one informant (female), at 12.00 at noon.

At Aitochi: Asking one informant (female), at 12.40 pm.

3. 3rd day/Thu. 03 Dec. 2015:

At Ikebukuro: Asking two informants (both female). Two young and good looking females, at 17.00 pm.

4. 4th day/Fri. 04 Dec. 2015:

At Uyogi: Asking one informant (female), a neat young lady with coat, mini skirt and high heels at 9.00 am.

At Ikebukuro: Asking one informant (female): a neat lady, wearing mini skirt at 14.00 pm.

At Tokyo Tower: Asking one informant (male), mid age, wearing coat at 19.00 pm.

5. 5th day/Sat. 5 Dec. 2015:

At Imperial palace: Asking two informants (both female). Good looking females at 10.00 am.

At Tokyo station: Asking two informants (both female). Good looking and neat females 13.00 pm.

At Shinagawa: Asking two informants (male and female). Both neat wearing coat at 11.00 am.

Then at a different point at Shinagawa asking for help to a male at 15.00 pm.

Few events occurring during observation:

4 Dec. at 17.00 pm found a young lady helped a male (not really old but around 40 's helped collected paper items/book which dropped to the floor at Nearby Yoyogi Train Station.

5 Dec. at 16.00 found two young ladies helped an old man collected many small cakes covered by plastic packaging which accidentally dropped in the street at nearby Tokyo Station.

5 Dec. 20.00 pm a man wearing a quite dirty shirt shouted loudly in a crowd at Ikebukuro station. It attracted train passenger's attention

General impression: People concern and care about cleanliness and regularity.

Analysis and discussion

Total informants are 25 persons. All the people being asked generally provided their help and assistance to answer or to show the directions being asked; often, they show their assistance on the direction very detail. They also express friendly faces. Their basic English capability is generally ok. It is indicated by their understanding of the questions in the field. The hospitality of Japanese to visitors is presumably correlated to the education level. The literacy of Japanese reach 99%, and the people pass minimum at the diploma education level. In Japan, 46% of 45-54 year-olds and 32% of 55-64 year-olds have tertiary education, and the children of these adults may be more likely to have the same educational attainment as their parents. Character building is starting in kindergarten (Hoikuen). Children's minds have been printed to have fun to help someone else problem, do not take any belonging which finds at a place otherwise put it and give to a police station (Koban).

Rejected response: one young male below 20 at mall Sun Shine City on 1 Dec. 2015, he avoided, did not want to listen to the question, probably due to he was in a hurry.

One male young mature above 25 at Ikebukuro station on 5 Dec. 2015, politely directed to ask somebody else (most likely he has English problem).

All local in site informants are believed to be native Japanese. For the most informants, since they knew that the person who asked for the direction is a tourist (tourism customer), they apply their hospitality as introduced and taught in Japanese culture, as saying in their business practice *'okuyakasama wa kamisama desu'* (the customer is God), like in the tourism industry. Furthermore, the Japanese are taught to expect to be served by others and to serve others from birth. With this mentality, being able to provide a top-level of service to their consumers is second nature. This can be seen in how local people (train customers) respond to a foreigner who needs help for the direction.

Further, A Japanese educator informant who works in Jakarta during an interview stated: "*Japan has a very disciplined and strict education system, not only that it is tough. In schools, Japanese culture is taught, including the culture of courtesy, respect for parents or guests, the culture of greeting*".

On the other hand, *Omoiyari* tradition (kindness and empathy towards others) in Japanese culture has made the spirit of hospitality in the tourism sector emerged as strong Japanese values. Japanese also appreciate another's kindness toward them and see someone's warm-hearted feelings, thoughts, and behaviours. Japanese strongly hold *Omoiyari* tradition and respect others who does the same values. This is why *Omoiyari* has attracted non-Japanese scholars' attention as one of the most important ideas in Japanese cultural values. *Omoiyari* tradition is reflected in Japanese hospitality in inbound tourism industry.

“Hospitality in Japanese people has been introduced from the earlier age. Elementary school and even kindergarten children have been accustomed to being friendly to their surrounding such as to friends and teachers, or when they are in the community. This hospitality practice continues until they grow up. So the hospitality of the Japanese people to foreign tourists is no longer an appeal but it has become a character of the people. If we shop in Japan, the cashier will bow in, after giving a service to you. The other example, if there are people who are given the opportunity to cross the road (by drivers), then they will thank them with a bow. The hospitality is also shown when refueling at the gas station, all employees of the gas station will shout together saying arigato gozaimashita (means thank you very much), not only the employee who gave the service”. (An Indonesian informant who has stayed in Japan for 3 years).

Further, another Indonesian informant who has lived in Japan said: *“Children at school are obliged to obey a value by the teacher, if they found other people's belonging which left behind or scattered on the road, it must be delivered to the nearest police station, or just leave it. So if you lose an item, you can easily find it at the nearest police station. If from the scattered belonging mention a phone number, the person who found it will call and notify you so that the item can be found again.”*

Community hospitality, therefore, is the basic capital in the tourism industry in Japan. Not only destinations and cultural attractions that can make

the tourism industry successful, but also community hospitality and willingness to support, like giving help or assistance to the questions from visitors in need.

Conclusion

We found people in metropolitan Tokyo, despite their busy lifestyle when they are being asked they tend willing to help. They are friendly to foreigners. The finding indicates that Japanese female is likely more friendly than male. Japanese male on working seems more focus on their job and responsibility than making a response to a foreign request for help. They tend to keep on working. It reflects a sense of responsibility for their work first. First work first. All females who were being asked for help showed a positive response and showed a maximum effort to help. Some actions they showed, for example, guiding to the nearest place, walking for some meters of distance just to make sure her guidance is understandable. It is strongly indicated that female train customers are more ready to respond for help than males. This data can be used as an early indication that Japanese females are more ready to help than males. Only one informant did not give a positive response for help and tried to avoid it. Another one refused to answer and asked politely to ask somebody else, it is predicted due to language problem. Unfortunately, they all were male.

The study indicates that train consumers in metropolitan Tokyo are helpful and friendly to foreigners, despite their busy and tight schedule, they

still allocated their time to respond positively to help for a request. Train consumers at Tokyo typically busy people, things are always made in a rush, walk fast on the street, at the station and on the way to work or home. But when a foreigner asks them, they showed their sincerity and are ready to help. Friendly Japanese culture has been embedded in the way of life of train customers in Tokyo. Metropolitan life does not affect their natural friendliness and hospitality lifestyle to the tourist visiting Tokyo, as confirmed by a Japanese educator informant: *“Thus, the behaviour of Japanese people in big cities does not leave their Japanese culture. No wonder in a metropolitan city like Tokyo the Japanese are friendly to foreign guests/tourists”*. It shows clearly the importance of service in Japanese culture. Service must go before all products, as believed in a Japanese hospitality culture.

Implications and suggestions for future research

This research implies potentially developing an effective tourism marketing program from the perspective of local hospitality as a tacit capital, especially in a Metropolitan area, such as Tokyo. This is a short qualitative study; therefore, a more comprehensive future research is suggested, especially related to the local people (host) attitude and behavior towards visitors from various countries and cultures at tourism destinations and its impact on the success of the tourism sector with quantitative approach.

Limitations

This research is subject to several limitations. Firstly, lack of understanding on the information of informants demographic background, except gender and proximity of their ages from physical appearance. Secondly, a total number of 25 participants might not represent Tokyo metropolitan population, although the qualitative approach accepts a smaller number of informants.

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