Lotta Lantunen

STUDY OF INTEREST IN FINNISH CANDY COMPANY'S
PRODUCTS IN JAPAN, CASE: MAKEIDON

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KIINNOSTUKSEN SELVITTÄMINEN SUOMALAISIA KARKKITUOTTEITA KOHTAAN JAPANISSA, KOHDEYRITYS: MAKEIDON

Lantunen, Lotta
Satakunnan ammattikorkeakoulu
Kansainvälisen kaupan koulutusohjelma
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Opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena oli tutkia japanilaisten kuluttajakäyttäytymistä, jotta saataisiin selville, kiinnostaako japanilaisia kuluttajia kohdeyrityksen tuotteet. Työ toteutettiin kohdeyritykselle, jotta saatiin selville, onko heidän tuotteillaan mahdollisuuksia Japanin markkinoilla ja kannattaisiko heidän laajentaa kyseiseen markkina-alueeseen. Kohdeyritys on suomalainen makeisalan yritys nimeltään Makeidon. Makeidon tuottaa käsintehtyjä laadukkaita karkkeja, joissa on laaja makuvalikoima. Yritys käyttää tuotteissaan pelkästään luonnollisia ainesosia, kuten suomalaisia marjoja. Idea opinnäytetyöhön tuli siitä, että opinnäytetyöntekijä oli vaihdossa Japanissa ja hän halusi hyödyntää tietämystään japanilaisesta kulttuurista opinnäytetyöhön.

Opinnäytetyön teoriaosuus muodostui kuluttajakäyttäytymisen perusteista, joka sisälsi neljä tutkittua ominaisuutta. Nämä neljä ominaisuutta ovat kulttuurilliset, sosiaaliset, henkilökohtaiset ja psykologiset attribuutit, jotka vaikuttavat kuluttajakäyttäytymiseen. Teoriaosassa käytiin myös läpi tärkeimpiä japanilaisten kuluttajien ominaisuuksia. Empiirinen osuus keskittyi tarkemmin kohdeyrityksen makeistuotteisiin ja syihin miksi yrityksen tuotteet ovat ominaisuuksiltaan japanilaisia houkuttelevia.

Opinnäytetyön empiirisessä osuudessa opinnäytetyöntekijä lähetti kyselyn japanilaisille kuluttajille. Kohdeyleisönä toimi opiskelijat Osaka Gakuin University nimisestä koulusta Japanista, jossa opinnäytetyöntekijä oli opiskelijavaihdossa. Kyselystä saatiin tarvittava määrä vastauksia eli 47 vastausta. Kyselyn ja teoriaosuuden tuloksia vertailtiin ja tarkoituksena oli, että kyselyn tulokset vahvistaisivat teorian löydöksiä ja tutkimuksen tulos olisi luotettava. Tutkimus oli onnistunut ja tulokset täydensivät toisiaan eivätkä olleet ristiriidassa. Tutkimuksesta selvisi, että yrityksellä olisi hyvä mahdollisuus menestyä Japanin markkinoilla.

Tutkimuksen tulos oli, että japanilaisten tuotemieltymykset vastasivat kohdeyrityksen tuotteiden ominaisuuksia ja tuotteet voisivat olla potentiaalisia japanilaisille kuluttajille. Japanilaiset kuluttajat arvostivat tuotteissa luonnollisia raaka-aineita, tuotteen korkeaa laatua ja pakkaussuunnittelua. He myös arvostivat sitä, että kyseessä on suomalainen tuote. Heillä on positiivinen kuva Suomesta ja suomalaisista tuotteista. Tutkimuksesta selvisi myös, että tuotteet soveltuisivat hyvin japanilaiseen lahjanantokulttuuriin ja että erityisesti marjakarkit olivat heidän mielestään kiinnostavia. Tutkimus oli onnistunut ja yrityksellä on mahdollisuus laajentaa toimintaa Japanin markkinoille, koska siellä on kiinnostusta heidän tuotteilleen.

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Lantunen, Lotta
Satakunnan ammattikorkeakoulu, Satakunta University of Applied Sciences
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The purpose of this thesis was to study consumer behavior in Japan to find out whether there are demand for case company's products among target consumers in Japan. The case company is a Finnish candy company called Makeidon. This study was conducted because the case company wanted to know potential for Finnish candy products in Japanese markets and if the company should start to consider extending market area to Japan. Makeidon company sells hand-crafted high-quality candies and has many options in flavors like berry flavors. The company uses only natural ingredients in products. The idea for this thesis was inspired by the author's exchange year in Japan. The author wanted to use her knowledge of Japan and include her firsthand experience of Japanese consumers to this thesis.

The theoretical base of this thesis was written from consumer behavior studies and it includes four factors that influence consumer behavior; cultural, social, personal and psychological factors. In the theory the author also described main attributes that Japanese consumers appreciate and value. The theory was conducted using books, articles and online sources. The empirical part focused more in the case company's candy products and the reasons why Makeidon candies attributes match the preferences that target consumers have.

For the empirical part, the author conducted an online questionnaire for Japanese consumers. Target consumers were Japanese consumers who are students from authors previous exchange school Osaka Gakuin University in Japan. The questionnaire received expected amount of responses, 47 responses. The theoretical part summarized Japanese consumer preferences in general. The goal for the questionnaire was to validate those findings and form an idea of attributes that the Japanese consumers value the most. The theoretical findings and the main research results were similar and supported each other.

The outcome was that the Japanese consumers' preferences match Makeidon candy qualities which means that Makeidon candies are suitable for Japanese markets and could have great potential there. The target consumers value natural ingredients and they were especially interested in berry candies. The target consumers value high-quality and give importance to detailed products and beautiful package design. They also have positive image of Finnish products and they are interested in them. Makeidon candies have qualities that the Japanese consumers prefer. The research also found out that Makeidon candies could be suitable for Japanese gift-giving culture and be marketed as gifts. The case company can benefit from these results and consider entering Japanese markets.

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to study the interest among Japanese consumers towards a case company's candy products. This thesis studies the characteristics of Japanese consumers and factors influencing their consumer behavior. Case company is called Makeidon which is a small Finnish candy company. The purpose is to study if the case company could expand to Japanese market and if the products would gain interest in Japan. The purpose is to provide valuable insights on Japanese consumers to the company. The case company wants to know the potential interest in Japan for Finnish premium candies. The case company designs and produces hand-crafted candies from natural ingredients and have unique flavors to offer.

Japan is a unique country with large population and attractive market opportunities. This thesis will study the behavior of Japanese consumers to find out if consumers in the chosen target market would be interested in the case company's products. Preliminary scope of target respondents are young Japanese adults aged 18-26 years old, who are Osaka Gakuin University -students living in Osaka, Japan. Theoretical part focuses on describing characteristics of Japanese consumers and empirical part is conducted based on the theory, but it is focusing particularly on target respondents. The empirical part is conducted using online questionnaire that the author sent to target respondents in Osaka Gakuin University. In the empirical part the goal is to find out whether target consumers would be interested in Makeidon products and what product attributes they value.

With this thesis the base is to find out attributes and tendencies of consumers to be able to evaluate the potential in a new target market. It is easier for a company to target new market areas if the company's marketers have studied consumers' behavior beforehand. With the study of consumer behavior, marketers can predict and influence on how they act and think to modify their marketing to fit the target consumers. (Kotler, Armstrong, Harris & Piercy 2013, 5.) From this thesis, the case company will gain valuable information about Japanese consumers and then validate the opportunity in Japanese market. By studying consumers, it can be easier for marketers to satisfy their needs and develop products to fit the expectations of the market (Kotler et al. 2013, 5).

Japanese consumers have become more interested in products with health benefits. This growing health conscious population is a result from ageing population, growing health awareness and busy lifestyles. Japanese are also increasingly interested in Finnish products which have potential in Japan because the image of Finland is positive. They see Finland and Finnish products as environmentally friendly, natural, functional, and high-quality. (Website of Market Opportunities: Business Opportunity 2019.) The case company is interested in targeting new markets. Japanese market could have great potential for Makeidon's products because they can be advertised as fitting the product preferences of Japanese consumers. The products also fit the image that they have of Finland and Finnish products.

The purpose, objectives and conceptual framework will be presented in more detail in the next chapter along with brief introduction of the case company. The third chapter includes theoretical information about consumer behavior. The theory of consumer behavior is categorized to four factors influencing consumer behavior. The fourth chapter includes theoretical information about specifically Japanese consumer behavior and their main characteristics. The last chapters will concentrate on the empirical part, starting from chosen research method, research planning and implementation in the fifth chapter. Research findings are presented and analyzed in the chapter six. The last chapters are about research conclusions, recommendations and final words.

2   PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1   Purpose and objectives of the research

The purpose of this thesis is to find out whether the case company Makeidon's candy products would gain interest in Japanese market and whether Makeidon should consider entering that market. The purpose is also to give valuable information about Japanese consumers for the case company. This thesis surveys if the Japanese target consumers would want to buy Makeidon products.

The research studies characteristics of Japanese consumer behavior and the factors that influence buyer's purchasing habits. These topics have not been comprehensively studied before from this aspect and therefore in this thesis the purpose is to research this phenomenon to gain more information. The features of Makeidon products for example, Finnish hand-crafted quality product and natural ingredients, are assumed to attract Japanese consumers. The research is done to point out whether Makeidon products' qualities can be linked to the Japanese consumers' values.

One reason behind this topic is that the author had visited Japan as an exchange student and wanted to include her knowledge of Japan and interest in Japanese culture, business and people into her thesis work. The case company was reached by the author and the assignment and desired objective of this thesis was discussed together with the owner of the case company. The owner of the company wanted to find out if the company's products would gain interest in Japan and therefore the purpose is to survey the potential.

The case company's products are assumed to have many attracting qualities for Japanese consumers and therefore, the company could have good opportunity to access Japanese market. The focus is to find out Japanese consumers' preferences about products and especially candy products and then compare those product preferences to Makeidon candies' qualities. The desired objective is that the target consumer's product preferences can be linked to Makeidon candies' qualities and that they are interested in the products.

The empirical part is conducted using quantitative research with an online questionnaire and those findings will be contrasted with the theoretical findings. The results will be compared, and the objective is to find out that findings are linked together and not in incongruity. The findings will be gathered in the empirical part into clear reasons why these specific Makeidon candies could succeed in Japan. The objective is to find out that Makeidon candies' qualities gain interest among the Japanese consumers and the case company should target Japanese markets. The objective is also that the company will gain valuable information about Japanese consumers and what kind of products they like in order to adapt the company's products to suit Japanese markets better. The objective of this thesis is reached by the help of these research questions listed below.

The main research problem of this study is:

- What qualities in case company's candy products gain the interest of Japanese consumers?

Supporting research questions:

- How does consumer behavior studies relate to this thesis?
- What factors influence consumers' behavior in general and in Japan?
- Which characteristics are typical for Japanese consumers?
- What kind of candies does Japanese prefer to purchase?
- What product qualities are important for Japanese, why do they choose to purchase certain item?
- Does Japanese consumers gain interest in buying Makeidon products?

The theoretical part will include general characteristics of Japanese consumers, but the empirical research concentrates on specific target group. The survey will be targeted towards Osaka Gakuin University -students from Osaka, Japan. Those Japanese young adults are aged 18-26. The survey will research whether those Japanese consumers would be interested in the Finnish candy products. The intent is to figure out if the chosen target market could be potential for the case company's candy products. The aim is to survey the potential in Japan and map the reasons why the company should start to consider entering Japanese consumer markets.
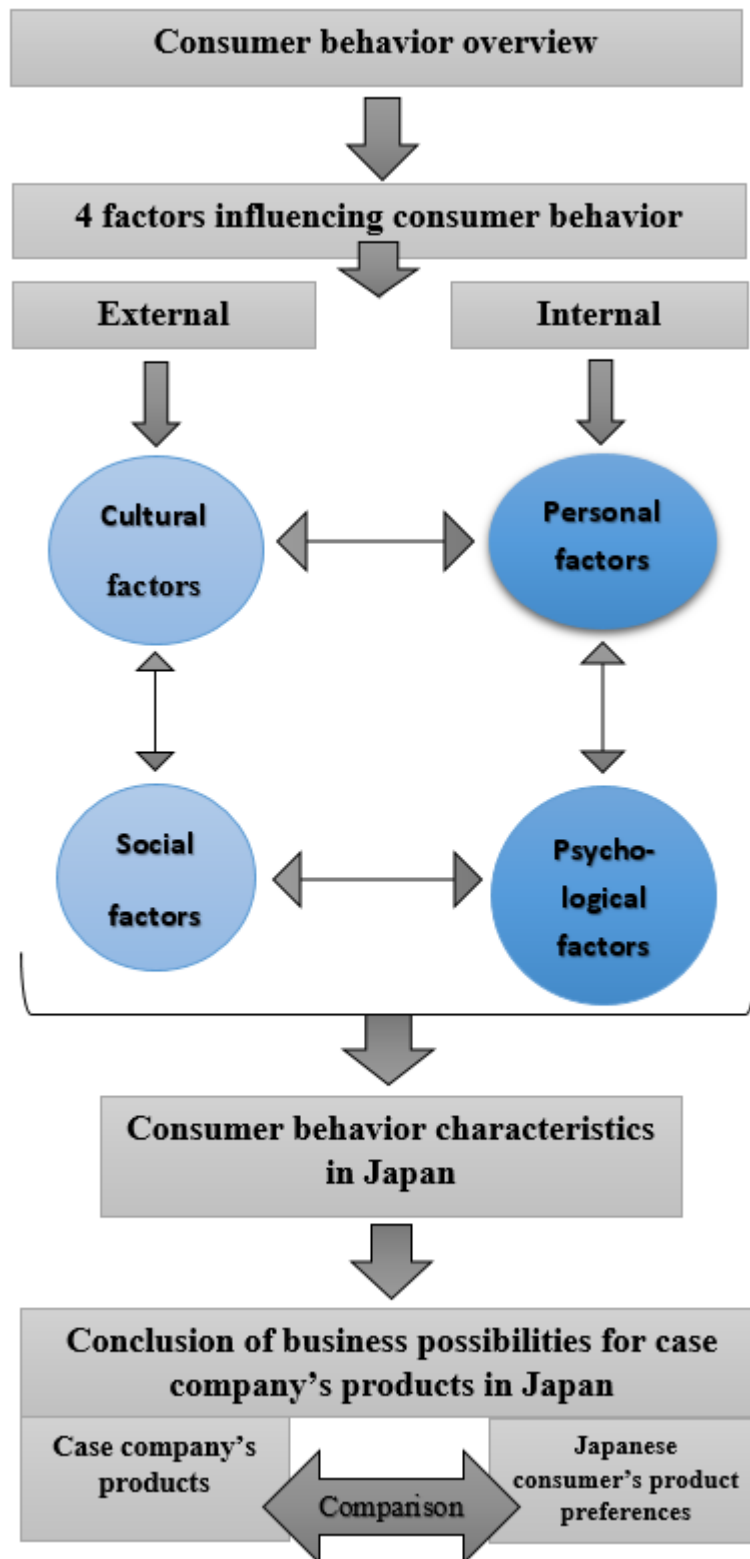
2.2 Conceptual framework

Figure 1. Conceptual framework – Study of Japanese consumer behavior and interest in case company's products in Japan

The conceptual framework (figure 1) cultivates the structure of this thesis and outlines the whole content. Most importantly the framework explains key concepts of this study and relations of these concepts. To start the research, it is important to tell about consumer behavior in general, which is part of marketing studies. Consumer behavior is the main subject of this thesis and it leads to studies of factors that influence consumers. The theoretical part of the study is conducted of consumer behavior in general and consumer behavior in Japan.

The consumer behavior theoretical part includes external and internal factors influencing consumer behavior. External factors are in light blue and internal factors are in darker blue in the figure 1 to make them stand out as being different kind of factors. There are four significant factors, which are social, cultural, psychological and personal factors. Cultural and social factors can be categorized as external factors. Those factors come outside the consumer from the environment. The internal factors, personal and psychological, are factors that come from the consumer itself and influence his or her purchasing decisions.

Those four factors are the theoretical base and key concepts of this research. All four factors are equal and influence each other. Therefore, there are no causal connections between them, but instead the four factors have arrows linking all of them together. Consumer's behavior can be affected by several of those factors or only one of them, therefore they are linked together in the conceptual framework. As an example, consumer's tendency to buy environmentally friendly products can come from social influences or also from personal interests.

The theoretical part starts from consumer behavior in general with categorization to four factors. Following chapters include specification of consumer behavior in Japan. The four factors are contrasted to Japanese consumer behavior as well and the findings are constituted into main characteristics of Japanese consumers. Significant characteristics of Japanese consumers will be presented shortly, but not specified under four factors, since they are influenced from many factors at the same time. Japanese consumer behavior characteristics are mainly influenced by external factors and therefore those factors will be introduced in more detail. To allow this thesis to be useful and

reader friendly, Japanese consumers have been slightly generalized into one market, even though there is really a diverse population.

After theoretical and empirical parts, findings of the Japanese consumer's product preferences (especially of candies) are contrasted with the case company's candy products' qualities and they are compared together. The aim is to link the case company's product qualities to the Japanese target consumer's product preferences. Presumption is that the case company's products gain interest in those Japanese consumers and the case company has great potential in Japanese market.

2.3   Boundaries of the thesis

Boundaries of the thesis were difficult to decide, since marketing studies include many researches and publications and it was difficult to figure out what is important for this thesis to mention and what is irrelevant. This thesis gathers information about target consumers and therefore this is a market research which concentrates on Japanese consumers. The theoretical base of this thesis starts from consumer behavior studies and then introduces main characteristics of Japanese consumers. With this thesis the focus is on finding the reasons behind consumers' behavior and what influences their decisions.

The theory of consumer behavior will concentrate on four factors influencing consumer behavior. Those factors (cultural, social, personal and psychological) are mentioned in many books and they are most useful to include in this thesis. Also, Stimulus-Response Model and Buyers Black Box will be introduced briefly, because the four factors are inside that Black Box (Kotler et al. 2013, 142-158). The theory will not include for example, decision-making process and stages in it. The buyer's decision-making process includes need recognition, information search and evaluation of alternatives and purchase and post-purchase evaluation (Kotler et al. 2013, 161). The decision-making process is a wide topic and it is not that relevant for this study.

The history of consumer behavior studies, come from known comprehensive models invented by professionals, these include for example: Nicosia Model, Engel-Kollat-

Blackwell Model (consumer decision-making model) and Howard-Seth Model (theory of buyer behavior, external and internal factors) (Xu & Jianhui 2017, 1-2). These models are not significant in this thesis and therefore they will not be mentioned more precisely.

Company who wants to enter foreign markets needs to rank countries using several factors to determine potential target market. There are many indicators by which it is easier to rank the best foreign target market. These indicators include demographic characteristics, geographic characteristics, economic factors, political and legal factors and at last sociocultural factors. (Kotler et al. 2013, 578-579.) With this research the chosen target market Japan has been decided beforehand and determination of potential target market is not needed.

In this thesis the foreign target market has been decided beforehand and therefore, there is no need for including comprehensive market analysis to this thesis. Before entering new market and targeting new consumers, company needs to validate the possibilities carefully to be able to choose the most profitable market. Marketers often create for example, comprehensive SWOT analysis, decide on market segmentation and plan a marketing strategy.

Because in this thesis the chosen target market and consumers are already decided there will not be introduction of the market segmentation process. But if the company wants to define new target consumers inside Japan, segmentation process could be a good way to validate the most profitable ones. Segmentation process helps to define most profitable target consumers, because within one segment the consumers have similar product needs and those consumers can be reached by appropriate marketing strategies (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard & Hogg 2006, 8-9).

If the company will enter new market, it needs to decide how to enter the market. The best entry mode needs to be carefully decided from several different entry modes. Also, global market program needs to be decided and this means for example product adaptation, promotion tactic and use of distribution channels. (Kotler et al. 2013, 578-579.) The entry modes and market program can be good options for further study points after this research.

2.4   Case company Makeidon

The topic of this thesis has been modified together with the author and the case company. The case company wanted to find out if it should extend operations overseas to Japan and the reasons why the company's products could be appealing to Japanese consumers. The case company's name is Makeistehdas Makeidon Ky. Makeidon company designs and makes handcrafted candies. In this thesis the company is addressed with the name Makeidon or the case company.

The products are small hard candies. The candies are aesthetically appealing from the outside and the company produces many flavor options. The products are produced from natural ingredients with a traditional recipe. Food additives or colorants and gelatins are not used, instead all ingredients are natural. Makeidon has put emphasis on the naturalness of the products. The flavors vary from ordinary flavors such as berry, coffee or chocolate flavors to more exotic ones like ginger, salty liquorice and cotton candy. Berry candies are made from domestic berries and the flavors are blueberry, cranberry, sea-buckthorn, lingonberry, cloudberry and blackcurrant. Raspberry and strawberry candies are not made from real berries, but they are still naturally produced. (Hirvensalo, personal communication on 17.12.2019; Website of Makeistehdas Makeidon 2020.)

Even though the products are candies, they also have healthy ingredients like berries with antioxidants, or ginger candies to cure or prevent a flu. The candies are advertised as healthier and better choice for sweet tooth. From figure 2, one can see the appearance of the product. The candies are sold in small packages made from cellophane, with image and information of the ingredients in it. The appearance of the products has been made appealing by attractive colors and packaging. (Hirvensalo, personal communication on 17.12.2019.)

According to the owner of the company K. Hirvensalo (personal communication on 17.12.2019), the company is small and therefore it is flexible and adaptable for customers' wishes. For example, new flavors have been added due to customers' wishes. The company designs and produces candies by themselves in a small company factory

in Finland. The company has been operating for decades. The factory is located at the idyllic and romantic countryside.

Makeidon has been selling products mostly in Finland but also in Northern Europe. Makeidon candies have been sold also few times to single customers in Russia and Asia. Most of the sales goes to wholesalers, marketplaces like Christmas markets and specialty shops or cafes. The company also sells candies to interior design shops and tourist attractions. The order requests come directly to the owner. Since the products are special candies, they have not been sold in convenience stores or department stores, because it would not be that profitable. (Hirvensalo, personal communication on 20.04.2018.)

Now the case company is also investing in a new idea of selling blueberry candies to Japan with the help of a wholesaler. This means that the company's owner is already starting to think about extending market area to Japan. The owner of the company has noticed the growing interest that Japanese consumers have towards Finnish products and especially berry products. Therefore, this thesis will give current and valuable information about Japanese consumers for the case company. (Hirvensalo, personal communication on 17.12.2019.)

Figure 2. Makeidon candies

3   CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

3.1   Consumer behavior in general

This thesis can be categorized to belong under the large concept of marketing studies. Marketing studies include several aspects and there are many perspectives from which the subject can be studied. Consumer behavior is a sub concept under marketing studies and this thesis focuses on it. Learning about target market's consumers is key to mapping out characteristics of those consumers in that country, and then deciding on marketing strategies (Kotler et al. 2013, 5). The main purpose of this thesis is to point out characteristics of Japanese consumer behavior, to be able to research whether the case company could have potential customers in Japan for candy products. Therefore, this thesis will start by focusing on mapping out the basics of consumer behavior to understand what influences Japanese consumers as well.

In this thesis the theoretical background is based on Philip Kotler's (2013) ideas of four factors influencing consumer behavior. These factors are cultural, social, personal and psychological. These factors are clearly divided and explained in Kotler's Principles of Marketing book from year 2013, but they are also described in many other professional marketing books.

Kotler has compressed the definition of marketing into: "Marketing is a social and managerial process by which individuals and organizations obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging value with others" (Kotler et al. 2013, 5). Most important element in the marketplace is the consumers. Marketers need to understand reasons behind consumer behavior, to be able to effect on how consumers think and act. Nowadays marketing is understood by sense of satisfying consumer needs. If marketers understand those needs, they can develop their products and they will sell easily. (Kotler et al. 2013, 5.)

Consumer means a person who consumes and buys products. Consumer behavior can be defined as activity involved in evaluating, using and disposing goods and services. (Khan 2006, 4.) Consumer behavior studies try to find out: why do consumers make

purchases, what factors influence their purchase, from who do they buy from and when and how do they make the purchase. The knowledge of consumers will provide an advantage in marketing and therefore, marketers should study consumers before deciding on a marketing strategy. Since consumers have a wide range of products and services available in the market, marketers need to study what their consumers want. The understanding of consumers will make it easier for marketers to directly satisfy their specific needs. (Lake 2009, 10-11.)

This thesis will concentrate on influences effecting consumer behavior. Consumer behavior is affected by four main factors: cultural, social, personal and psychological. Those four factors will make it easier to understand the concept of consumer behavior. The process of consumer behavior starts before the actual purchase. Consumer thinks about questions like whether to buy or not, from where to buy, what to buy and when to buy. (Khan 2006, 4.)

Before introducing those four main factors this thesis will introduce stimulus-response model. The stimulus-response model (figure 3) is the starting point for figuring out how the consumers respond to marketing effort (Kotler et al. 2013, 142-158). Stimuli is a sensory input (sights, sounds, smells, taste and textures) and stimulus is any unit of input to any of the senses. Stimuli can be for example, advertisement, commercials, brand names or packages. (Schiffman, Kanuk & Hansen 2012, 159.)

Stimulus is interpreted differently by everyone, based on his or her own experience and needs. Consumers notice only small part of constant stimuli that comes from their environment. They concentrate on some and ignore or are unaware of others. (Solomon 2018, 108.) Consumers are influenced by many commercials and ads and the mind is under constant influence of different stimulus. Consumers might not even understand themselves and the reasons behind their purchases, because companies have constant efforts to affect their decisions. (Kotler et al. 2013, 142-158.)
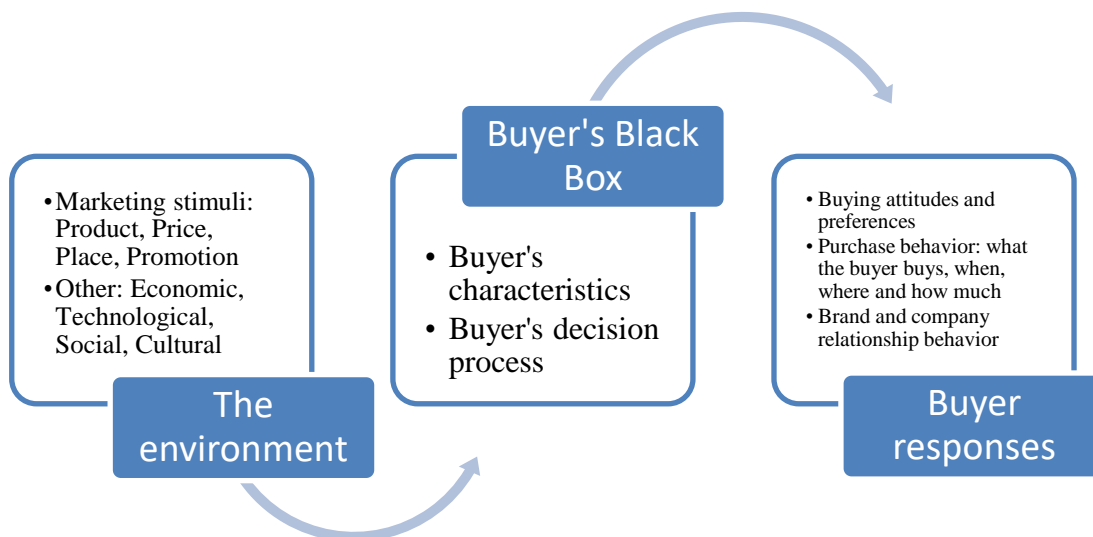
Figure 3. Stimulus-response model (Kotler et al. 2013, 145.)

It is difficult to predict what is inside consumers mind and therefore the middle square is called a black box. The figure shows how certain stimuli enters the mind of the consumers and responds into actions. The figure starts from the left square by the environmental stimulus, which effects consumers. These are the marketing stimuli, the 4 P's and other stimuli in buyer's environment. The 4P's are product, price, place and promotion. The unfigured part is the black box, which marketers want to know and the last circle on right, shows the responses that the buyer makes because of the stimuli. (Kotler et al. 2013, 145.)

The buyer's black box includes the four main characteristics influencing consumer behavior. These are the four factors, social, cultural, psychological and personal factors. In this thesis the theoretical emphasis is on these factors. They will be introduced in the next chapters. The second part in the black box is the decision process, which is an important part of consumer's purchase decision. The decision process affects consumer's behavior itself. Decision process is not central part of theoretical basis of this thesis, and therefore it will not be reviewed thoroughly. (Kotler et al. 2013, 142-158.)

The square on the right shows how stimuli is changed into actions inside consumer's mind. These responses are attitudes, preferences and actions. The responses can be actions, like buying behavior, what do they buy, when and where. These responses are

what the marketers want to know, buy studying the buyer's black box. (Kotler et al. 2013, 145.)

Consumer behavior is influenced by external and internal factors, which can be classified into four broad categories (Khan 2006, 30). External factors include cultural and social factors and internal factors include personal and psychological factors. These factors interact with each other and they altogether influence consumer behavior. Internal factors are thoughts, feelings and intentions. On the other hand, with external factors, the influence comes from outside the person. (Lake 2009, 12-15.)

Cultural factors include culture, subculture and social class and social factors include social role and status, reference groups and family. Personal factors consist of age, lifestyle, occupation and economic situations and personality and self-concept. Psychological factors include motivation, perception, learning and beliefs and attitudes. (Kotler et al. 2013, 142-158.)

3.2   Cultural factors

Culture

Culture is a huge influence in one's behavior. The behavior is largely learned from person's society and the people he or she associates with. (Kotler et al. 2013, 142-158.) Culture is a way of life for a group of people. It includes many factors like law, morals, beliefs, knowledge and customs, and those habits are organized by humans and transmitted through generations in a society. Culture influences patterns of living and individuals' behavior. (Khan 2006, 39.) Culture shapes people's attitudes and beliefs towards everything, including purchasing decisions. Culture reflects into purchases and consumption patterns. When purchasing products, the consumer evaluates whether the product supports values and beliefs of his or her culture. (Lake 2009, 10-15, 136-138 & 140.)

Culture is a way of life, in which common things are shared. Culture consists of three major points: beliefs, values and norms. Consumers have specific priorities inside one culture. The products and services which meet those priorities have better chances of

being bought, than competitors' products. Power of culture is often undermined. Consumers' behavior is shaped from culture and this contributes into unconscious decisions. By studying cultures, the marketing can be done more effectively towards specific cultures. (Lake 2009, 10-15, 136-138 & 140.)

Subculture

Subculture is even deeper form of culture, it is a group of individuals within a culture that share similar characteristics and shared value systems. In a subculture the members have own values, customs and behavior. Subcultures exist in all nations and societies. Subcultures can be for example nationalities, geographic areas or religious groups. It can also mean a group of people with similar interests and common life experiences, like bodybuilders, gamers, vegans or students. The group can be of any kind, but the common thing is that it influences person's life and they often have shared needs, that marketers try to target. Division into smaller subcultures makes it easier for marketers to assess needs of these groups more effectively. (Khan 2006, 39; Kotler et al. 2013, 142-158; Lake 2009, 10-15.)

Social class

Social class refers to a position in which a person belongs in a society, according to his or her education, wealth or income. More precisely: education, occupation, ownership of property and source of income determine person's social class. Social classes include lower class, working class, middle class and upper class. There is a similarity of buying behavior between members of each social class. (Khan 2006, 50; Kotler et al. 2013, 142-158.)

Social class structures are quite permanent divisions in which the members share values, interests and behaviors. Social class can indicate our status and status differences reflect on power, privilege and prestige. Social classes have an influence on one's preferences, purchases, consumption and communication. Therefore, this unique behavior has an impact on consumer behavior. (Khan 2006, 50; Kotler et al. 2013, 142-158.)

3.3   Social factors

Social role and status

Social factors can be divided into social role, status, family and reference groups. An individual belongs into many groups in which he or she can take different roles and statuses. These factors can define individual's position in the group. Roles have status levels, which are defined by society. Status is the position and level of importance of the role viewed by others. (Kotler et al. 149-153.)

Social role is a role that an individual can take in a certain environment and alter himself or herself to fit to the situation. Concept of self will be introduced more deeply in its own chapter, but self-concept means a perception of oneself by thoughts and perception. It is the way consumers see themselves and represent themselves to others. Self-concept determinates consumers' identities. In different situations and environments individuals display social roles with somewhat specific personalities and act differently with different people. When talking about consumer behavior, this knowledge is relevant. Marketers should target products and services to one `self` of a consumer and target those values and needs that `self` wants. (Lake 2009, 113-115; Schiffman et al. 2012, 147.)

Reference groups

Consumer behavior starts when people try to identify themselves with desirable individuals or groups. Group means at least two people who share values and norms. People in a group interact to accomplish mutual or individual goals. The desirable goal is to fit in the group. Social power makes the groups so persuasive. Social power means the ability to alter actions of others, and it makes someone do something, even though they may not be willing to otherwise. In other words, social power makes individuals want to fit in a certain group, and while pursuing this goal, they may purchase products which fit the group's values. (Schiffman et al. 2012, 295; Solomon 2018, 415.)

Reference group means a group (or individual) which significantly influences one's behavior. Smoking or drinking coffee is a good example of behavior that is influenced by a reference group. If in person's reference group others smoke or drink coffee a lot, it is more likely for the individual to do so as well, to feel part of the group. Reference

groups influence buying behavior less in products, which are not complex or does not include a risk in buying them. (Solomon 2018, 416-417.)

There are two kinds of reference groups. A membership reference group, in which a person belongs to and aspirational reference group, in which a person wants to belong and admires. Membership groups have direct impact, and reference groups have direct or indirect impact on person's behavior and attitudes. Marketers want to find out reference groups of their target market. (Kotler et al. 2013, 142-158; Solomon 2018, 416-417.)

There is a strong impact of buyer's product choices, if the person that the buyer respects, gets to see the products buyer has bought. Reference groups can affect the product and brand choices quite visibly. Individuals within a group often have an opinion leader and by influencing him or her the marketer can target the whole group. Group can be for example a school group, business group or group of athletes from same field. (Kotler et al. 2013, 142-158; Lake 2009, 15; Solomon 2018, 416-417.)

Family

Generally, family means a group in which people are related by blood, adoption or marriage. Family concept is complex, and the structure can change during lifetime. Family is one of the reference groups, which influences one's behavior. Household on the other hand can consist of for example room-mates, but still be regarded as family. When talking about consumer behavior, family is often the same as household, because that structure influences one's buyer behavior. (Schiffman et al. 2012, 306.)

Family has a strong role in influencing person's behavior regarding buying and purchases. The husband or wife influences many decisions as well as the kids. They need or want certain products, which the buyer purchases for them or the family in general, like a car or a holiday trip. The marketers need to however be precise about not being too stereotyped about gender roles, to avoid offending anyone. The gender roles and family roles have been shifting, for example nowadays many fathers stay at home and take care of children and therefore they can be the one who purchases the products for the kids or the food for the whole family. (Kotler et al. 2013, 142-158.)

3.4 Personal factors

Age

People are likely to have similar interests with people close to own age. Age can be a significant influence on person's identity and the needs often change when growing older. Age groups can be viewed as subcultures as well, and each of those age subcultures have different needs and consumer preferences. Age groups are a usual target for marketers, because they often share similar behaviors. Typical age target groups are for example, teens, young adults and seniors. (Solomon et al. 2006, 456-473.)

Preferences in clothes and food differ during lifetime, depending on individuals' age. Consumer's life cycle and stage in life influences his or her purchasing decisions. These stages can be for example marriage, having children or retirement. There are many stages in life and many life-stage groups to whom marketers can target and base their consumer segmentation on. (Kotler et al. 2013, 142-158.)

Lifestyle

A person chooses how he spends his money and time and these choices are reflected by lifestyle. Lifestyle means people's patterns of living and acting and the way they interact with the world. Lifestyle effects his or her choices about time, money, activities, interests and opinions. Nowadays people are free to choose their products, services and activities which they want to have. Those things define our self and create a social identity. (Kotler et al. 2013, 142-158; Solomon 2018, 258-260.)

Marketers also define lifestyle on how we choose to use our leisure time, so it is not only about how we use our disposable income. Marketers who want to market from lifestyle perspective, the key strategy is to focus on people who use products in desirable social activities. The desire is to associate products to certain social situations. Consumers want to buy products and services because of the values they represent. Consumers values can change and understanding of lifestyle will help marketers to identify those changes. (Kotler et al. 2013, 142-158; Solomon 2018, 258-260.)

Occupation and economic situation

Some occupation groups have more notable interest towards products than others. These groups can be for instance office workers, legal professors or nurses, who need occupational products. Person's economic situation affects purchasing choices, because income determines how much that person can spend. There can also be global economic trends that affect consumer markets. For example, increase in savings and low spending rates. (Kotler et al. 2013, 142-158.)

Income determines what consumer buys and lifestyle is highly connected with consumer's income level. More money means more opportunities and less money means that he or she needs to start saving it. When income level raises consumer is more likely to spend money on wants than needs. (Lake 2009, 123.)

Personality and self-concept

Personality and self-concept are aspects which also belong to personal factors. Personality influences behavior. Personality includes self-confidence, sociability, aggressiveness and other traits. Personality reflects on how person responds to his or her environment and distinguishes one individual from other. Personality is although not consistent and the environment and situations may alter our behavior and therefore also the way our personality is. Personality is often associated with brands because brands can also have personalities and people tend to buy brands that match their own personality. (Lake 2009, 113-115; Solomon 2018, 243.)

Self-concept is the way a person sees himself and represents himself to others. Self-concept consist of physical and psychological attributes. Beliefs that a person holds about those attributes and how those attributes are seen by himself, create the self-concept. (Solomon 2018, 201-202.) "Person's self-concepts influence her attitudes, interests, and opinions, which in turn influence her lifestyle; together these factors determine her identity" (Lake 2009, 114-115).

Person's self-concept is complex and each element in self-concept is an identity. These identities can change over time and therefore self-concept can change. Marketers want to develop products that meet the needs of people with certain identities, like environmentally responsible identity. Reason why self-concept relates to consumer behavior,

is that consumers can identify products to their self-concept. Marketers can adapt and promote their products for consumers and make them feel like it was made just for them. Consumers can express and define themselves by products they consume. (Lake 2009, 113-115; Solomon 2018, 201-202.)

3.5   Psychological factors

Motivation

Motivation comes from a motive or a drive, and it makes the consumer want to achieve long-term goals. It puts the person to an intense need and he or she will gain satisfaction from pursuing it. Consumers may not be aware of their own unconscious acts and motivations, which will become needs and finally purchases. Marketers want to study motivation to seek attitudes towards buying situations. Marketers want to find out what motivates consumers in general. Motivations are subconscious and can be triggered by marketers. Motivation consist of drives, urges, wishes or desires. If a marketer identifies these motivation drives it is easier to implement marketing strategy. Consumer will not be satisfied until the needs generated by motivation are satisfied. Authors and researchers have multiple ways of categorizing the motivations into smaller sections, but the most known theory is the Abraham Maslow pyramid. (Kotler et al. 2013, 142-158; Lake 2009, 71-73.)

Abraham Maslow has made a theory of motivation, which tries to explain people's drives towards needs at different times. He claims that human needs are arranged in a hierarchical pyramid. The pyramid starts from the most pressing at the bottom to the least pressing one. The pyramid has five stages, starting from physiological needs at the bottom as the most important needs. Those needs include hunger and thirst. Then following safety needs (security and protection), social needs (sense of belonging and love), esteem needs (self-esteem, recognition and status) and self-actualization needs (self-development and realization). The needs are usually pursued from bottom to up. For example, people in developing countries are more interested in satisfying their hunger and need of clothes, more than worrying of how they are seen from others or esteemed by them. (Kotler et al. 2013, 142-158.)

Consumers do not want to pay extra money for their basic needs, physiological and safety needs. If marketers' target are the consumers who are motivated by basic needs, marketers should set their prices low. Motivation effects level of importance about the products for the consumer and the interest consumer has for the products. Motivation could also be negative, which means that this kind of motivation leads to purchases of life insurance. The purchase is forced by the negative motivation and it may not make the consumer happy, but instead less worried. Positive motivation leads to purchase of products which makes him or her feel happy. These purchases can be so called impulse purchases. (Lake 2009, 71-73.)

Perception

Perception means the process of selection and interpretation of information to form meaningful picture of the world. Information is gathered by hearing, smelling, touching and tasting and everyone receives this sensory information differently. Information which triggers consumers can be called a stimulus. Consumers have a screening system which is triggered by multiple stimuli each day. Screening helps a person to recognize what is relevant and what is not. (Kotler et al. 2013, 142-158; Lake 2009, 85-86.)

Perception process has three stages, selection, cognitive organization and interpretation. Selection comes when person encounters stimulus. In stage two, person organizes thoughts about stimulus. In the last stage person confirms his or her perception of the stimulus and executes a response. (Lake 2009, 85-86.)

In more detail, perception can be divided into perception processes called selective attention, selective distortion and selective retention. The first one means the tendency for people to only pay attention to some of the information from an advertisement and ignore the rest. "Selective distortion describes the tendency of people to interpret information in a way that will support what they already believe" (Kotler et al. 2013, 157). This means that people notice stimuli, which fits their mindset, and which supports their attitudes and beliefs. The last process is called selective retention which means that people tend to remember positive advertisement from a brand they know and value and may forget advertisement from an unknown brand. These perceptions make it difficult for marketers to attract consumers. (Kotler et al. 2013, 142-158.)

Subliminal perception means that consumers are affected by advertisement and stimuli unconsciously. This matter has been notified and researchers try to study it more, but there is limited amount of data gathered. Consumers are concerned about subliminal messages affecting their purchasing decisions. (Kotler et al. 2013, 142-158.)

Learning

Marketers want to find information on how consumers learn, in order to teach them about products, product attributes and benefits those products have. Marketers also want to know how well they have been teaching consumers to choose their products and prefer their services from competitors' offerings. Marketers are interested on how well their indirect (package, design etc.) and direct (advertisement) efforts have affected on consumers. (Schiffman et al. 2012, 195-196.)

Learning of products and services affects consumers' behavior because if they have found a product they like, they are likely to buy it again. Knowledge and personal experience guide individuals for future behavior. Marketers want to increase their market share and brand loyal consumers by teaching them to buy their products. They want to teach consumers that their products are the best and satisfy their needs. (Schiffman et al. 2012, 195-196 & 222.)

Beliefs and attitudes

By learning and acting people acquire beliefs and attitudes which influence consumer behavior. Attitude is general evaluation of something. Attitude is evaluations or feelings towards idea or object. It contains knowledge of that something and feelings regarding it. Attitude is learned evaluation towards an object. Attitude is formed by beliefs, intentions and feelings (thoughts, behaviors and emotions). Attitude effects consumers behavior because it makes them like or dislike the product or the service. (Kotler et al. 2013, 142-158; Lake 2009, 99-102.)

Belief is a cognitive component of consumer attitude. Belief is not the same thing as a feeling. Belief is a thought about something, which can be either an opinion or a known fact. Belief is an opinion, a way someone thinks. Belief can be a statement person

makes. For example, candies being unhealthy, can be a belief. This belief is a component of attitude and this belief creates his attitude (point of view) towards candies. (Kotler et al. 2013, 142-158; Lake 2009, 99-102.)

Beliefs and attitudes towards products and service gain interest from marketers, because people formulate images through it. Attitudes make person like or dislike something. Marketers want to target their products for existing attitudes, since attitudes are unlike to change. For example, today's attitudes about healthful lifestyle have become popular and marketers want to advertise health benefit products to fit those attitudes. (Kotler et al. 2013, 142-158.)

4 CONSUMER BEHAVIOR CHARACTERISTICS IN JAPAN

4.1 Background on Japanese consumer behavior

The four factors, which influence consumer behavior, are the theoretical base of this thesis. These four factors are divided into external and internal factors. External factors are easier to point out than internal factors. Internal factors are strong influence in consumer's behavior, but they come from consumer's individual attributes and therefore they are difficult to know. With external factors, the influence comes from the environment, group or society, and those factors are easier for marketers to study because they are visible.

This thesis aims to point out if the target respondents who are Japanese consumers would be interested in the case company's candy products. To conduct successful research, it is necessary to study Japanese consumer behavior from earlier studies to understand their significant characteristics. Strongest influence on Japanese consumers come from external factors which are cultural and social factors. In Japan the external factors are easier to point out than internal factors, because individualism is not a strong cultural trait.

Japan is a country with traditional culture, which affects strongly on people's behavior. Japanese usually belong to multiple religions, but most significant influence comes from Confucianist ideology and this can be seen in traditional tendencies for people to respect elders and commit to groups, company or family. Collectivism, which means that people have tendency to support society over individuals, is a strong cultural trait in Japan. Japanese culture has also high hierarchy, which can be seen in the language and manners towards older people. (Guirdham 2009, 239-242.)

Japanese are community-oriented population. In general sense, Japanese put groups and the community in a priority over their individual goals. Individualism is not admired in Japan. Nowadays this has changed a little due to increase in experience abroad, from exchange studies or work. Younger generation have noticed that in general, Western countries have very different norms. (Guirdham 2009, 244.) The external factors, for example culture, social class, reference groups and family, are strong influences in Japanese society. These cultural and social factors are easier to point out in a country that has unique and distinctive culture.

Some main characteristics of Japanese consumers and their preferences towards products, were found from the theoretical sources. Those findings will be introduced briefly in the next chapter. Those characteristics cannot be categorized under only one of the four factors (cultural, social, personal and psychological), since they can be results from both external and internal factors. Many of them are cultural factors or results from group-oriented society, but they can also be results from person's lifestyle or attitudes at the same time. From the conceptual framework of this research (figure 1), reader can see that the four factors are connected, and consumer behavior is equally influenced by all those factors. After main findings, the cultural and social factors will be introduced separately, because they influence strongly on Japanese people, and therefore they also affect their consumer decisions.

4.2   Main characteristics and preferences of Japanese consumers

Increasing interest for healthy foods and ingredients

The number of elderly households in Japan has increased and it has led to great demand for healthier food options. Convenience stores have reached this demand by adding healthier options in their selection. They have for example added vegetables and used fewer food additives. This is a remarkable achievement towards healthier food consumption, because Japanese use close by convenience stores a lot due to time-pressured lifestyles. Japanese have started to appreciate foods with no added preservatives and artificial colorings. (Japanese convenience stores… 2018.)

Kenneth and Soyeon researched Japanese snacking behavior and the results showed interesting facts about Japanese consumers' preferences towards snacks. Japanese spend quite a lot of money on snacks, like processed and packaged food. The reason is in promotion of snacks, and in time-pressured lifestyles. Japanese people are also worried about how they appear to others and they avoid being seen doing something that may cause attention to them. (Kenneth & Soyeon 2003, 180-194.)

This can also be contrasted to food behavior by Japanese. Japanese prefer healthier options. They often avoid eating unhealthy foods in front of others, especially if they do not share it with them. Japanese want to eat healthy foods if they are with somebody and if they eat alone, unhealthier foods are accepted. For Japanese consumers it could be a potential idea to promote unhealthy foods as somewhat healthy, so that they would feel comfortable eating them. (Kenneth & Soyeon 2003, 180-194.)

Demand for high quality

Japanese are also high-quality conscious and pay attention to detail. They demand for high-quality and do not accept products in poor condition. Japanese expect to get the exact product according to specifications. (Serita et al. 2009, 37-49.) Japanese people identify themselves with part of their company. An inferior product will be a shame to whole company. Company feels a strong sense of responsibility to manufacture perfect products to avoid reflecting on company's honor if problems would occur. Quality means different things in West and Japan, in Japan it means excellence. People expect excellence in affordable and reasonable prices. (Martin & Herbig 2002, 171-179.)

Japanese population is ageing, and marketers are trying to adapt their products to suit adult tastes. People buy premium products with special ingredients, to celebrate achievements or as gifts for someone. Companies want to focus on high-quality food products to attract adults. In Japan, consumers are often easy to attract by releasing some special products to limited locations, such as one flavor of the product can be only found in one city or one department store. For example, Nestlé Japan Ltd. is selling premium flavors of KitKat chocolates in only certain locations to attract customers by more variety and special flavors. (Premium Versions of…2017.)

In Japan, KitKat is not just viewed as ordinary chocolate, but it can be even categorized as gourmet candy. There are many ordinary flavors, but also special ones and most unique flavors are made from traditional Japanese foods or ingredients, flavors such as *maccha* (green tea), *wasabi*, *momiji manju* (bean jam flavored Japanese steamed cake), sake (Japanese alcohol) or *sakura* (cherry blossom). Many flavors can be bought only from one region, for example only from Kyoto. This kind of marketing strategy of limiting the purchase opportunity and adding unique exotic flavors, has been successful, but of course it requires stable customer base at first. (Website of Nestlé KitKat 2018.)

Brand consciousness is significant in Japan. Japanese are willing to pay more for a known brand, because it assures level of high quality and good customer service. (Synodinos 2001, 235-248.) This factor also comes from the matter that Japanese are very group-oriented. High-fashion products are popular because they have the image that shows that the individual has good taste. One purchases a specific brand to gain group acceptance. Consumers seek status and prestige from logos and brands. Japanese expect extremely high quality and product durability and reliability. (Martin & Herbig 2002, 171-179.)

Importance of detailed products

Japanese see the whole products, including the material and the associated image with it (Martin & Herbig 2002, 171-179). If the product is purchased as a gift, especially with food products, they usually choose a safe choice and medium sized package, because those are easy to carry and have enough quantity of product. Smaller packages are considered more luxurious and precious than bigger boxes. Simplicity is regarded

as luxurious. (Sakuma 2015, 71-80.) Products that are compact and of high quality are appreciated. Japanese consumers value easy choices, they do not appreciate multiple choices, because it can cause extra anxiety. This can be seen in Japanese stores in multiple ways, such as already selected packages or meal options or other combinations. (Martin & Herbig 2002, 171-179.)

Japanese expect complete products, meaning that they want not only the product to be in high quality but also the service and image to be perfect. They want the appearance of the product to be on point. They also value if the product is presented beautifully in the sales place. Customer loyalty is a key to succeed. Japanese expect the product to work and failures to be fixed without extra charge. Japanese also form opinions of products quickly based on the advertisement, promotion and presentation. If the products are not well-presented Japanese will automatically ignore the otherwise great ideas. Japanese expect effort from companies to show their enthusiasm towards their own products and then gain Japanese consumers' trust. (Martin & Herbig 2002, 171-179.)

Package design

Japanese have strong aesthetic values and it can be seen in the drive for perfection in many aspects. For example, with food presentations and wrapping of products. The aesthetic appearance of products is therefore critical. (Synodinos 2001, 235-248.) Japanese emphasize the appearance of products and the packaging is important and viewed as part of the product. The wrapping and tiding must be done properly. Japanese stores have salespersons by the cash counters who will wrap purchases even when they are not purchased as gifts. Japanese don't accept poorly wrapped products because they value products also based on package's appearance that needs to be beautiful and high-quality. (Martin & Herbig 2002, 171-179.)

Image is important factor influencing consumers' decisions. Japanese pay attention more on visual elements than the information listed in the package. Especially with foreign products due to language barrier, the images and package design are important to attract Japanese to purchase the item. Attention is grabbed by colors and shapes and the image is often linked as informative element about product's taste. (Sakuma 2015, 71-80.)

For example, certain colors are associated with one product group, and if used with wrong products it can be a bad influence on purchasing power. But, like in many societies, the younger population is not so strict about traditional coloring or other aspects. Japanese value traditional simple coloring, such as white, red and black. (Martin & Herbig 2002, 171-179.) With food packages, yellow and pink colors give a sweet impression and brown and blue are also associated as being tasty. Gold, black and brown colors give luxurious impression. (Sakuma 2015, 71-80.)

Environment-consciousness and presumptions of Finland

Japanese do not know much about Finland, but they have a positive image of the country. Finnish cognitive country image is strong, even stronger compared to for example Denmark or Sweden and overall Japanese value Nordic scenery. Japanese can recognize some known Finnish brands and they are viewed as high-quality. Finland is regarded as pleasant, friendly and safe country and associated as land of forests and lakes. (Lindblom, Lindblom & Lehtonen 2016.)

The image of Finland is stereotypical, they see Finland as land of pure nature with forests, lakes, snow and northern lights. Winter and Moomins are also associated with Finland and the country is often seen as a winter wonderland. Japanese want to find out that the image they have of Finland is correct and products they purchase enhances those images. Japanese see Finland as clean, nature oriented and functional. (Serita et al. 2009, 50-54.)

Japanese consumers are environment-conscious, and they emphasize image of clean and environmentally friendly Finland. Products with ecological values and timeless design attract Japanese consumers. Finnish blueberries and other gifts of nature are popular in Japan now and attract Japanese consumers and tourists. (Serita et al. 2009, 50-54.) There is increasing demand for berry-products in Japan (Website of Market Opportunities: Business Opportunity 2019). Japanese and Finns have similarities in aesthetic ideas like simplicity and use of natural materials (Serita et al. 2009, 56-58).

Finnish design is often seen as great quality, but on the other hand the manufacturing may not be good enough for Japanese market (Serita et al. 2009, 37-49). Japanese may not distinguish Finnish and Scandinavian products from each other, but they

acknowledge Scandinavian products as good quality. Scandinavian products and design have become increasingly popular in Japan. "Made in Finland" label has a positive image among Japanese. Marketers should emphasis the clean, environmentally friendly image of Finland and point out Finland as land of wellbeing and pure nature. (Serita et al. 2009, 56-61.)

Importance of cuteness

Japanese are known for their cute culture and therefore the Japanese word kawaii has become quite known internationally. Kawaii culture is getting attention all over the world. Kawaii can be used to describe anything and it can be translated into cute, cuteness, lovely, pretty and so on. Kawaii culture can be seen especially in consumer products and fashion, but also in make-up trends and places with cute appearances like specialty restaurants and cafes. Cuteness is everywhere in Japan and it is often used for marketing means, since it is a strong selling point. (Sawada 2017.)

So-called kawaii culture or cute culture has evolved from Japanese cultural phenomenon to contemporary consumer culture, especially among young females. This youth culture has been dominated by women. In Japan, the phenomenon started from youth culture, but now it has been appropriated by country's industry and society overall, due to aggressive marketing and promotion efforts of kawaii items. Cuteness can add personality into otherwise meaningless consumer goods. Typically, Japanese consumers do not put emphasize on expressing their personalities openly. But by purchasing cute items, consumer can express individualism in a safe and easy way because of popularity of the cute culture -trend. (Granot, Alejandro & Russel 2014, 66-87.)

4.3   Cultural factors

Japanese business culture is considerably different compared to Western countries. In Japanese culture, the business life is not separated from personal lives, they consider their companies as a community they belong to or even a family. (Synodinos 2001, 235-248.) Japanese employees are used to knowing everyone in their work life and getting together with them also outside business hours. There are no clear lines between private and working life. (Guirdham 2009. 65-66.)

Respect for elders and seniority admiration are significant features of the culture. Japanese are loyal, and they value relationships in personal, business and consumer interactions. (Synodinos 2001, 235-248.) To establish trust, one must maintain consensus by polite behavior. In business life this can be seen in many ways, such as seniority-based promotion and life-time employment. (Guirdham 2009. 65-67.) Japanese feel obligated to respect and value their company at all the times. One form of respect is gift-giving culture. One thing that is important for Japanese is to build relationships and trust and one way to honor existing relationships is gift-giving. (Leaper 2009, 118-119.)

In Japan gifts are needed in more situations than expected in Western cultures. The one who is joining a group like a company, is expected to give a gift to whomever has direct responsibility for them. The gift should be presented in one-to-one moment, without embarrassing anybody. (Bramble 2013, 70-72.) Foreigners may be expected to bring items from home country, when having business meetings (Leaper 2009, 118-119).

Wrapping is also an important element, beautiful wrapping is needed and expected, and it is essential part of the product. Good example of gift is food or beverages. Gifts are also expected from travels, for company co-workers and family members. These souvenirs are called *omiyage* and they are usually some sweets. One suitable gift would be sweets packed in individual wrappers, because then they are easy to serve as gifts. (Bramble 2013, 70-72.)

Japanese stores receive huge amount of their profits from gift purchases. Negative side of gift-giving is that it takes a lot of money. People feel obligated to bring gifts for many occasions. People give gifts to whoever they feel responsible to please. (Rupp 2003, 1.) Even though Japanese are faithful to traditions, some people have started to realize how troublesome and exhausting it might be to give all those gifts. Especially traditional seasonal gifts are viewed as bit unnecessary, even though stores in Japan bloom from seasonal gifts. These traditional habits have started to fade slowly, but they are still visible and especially important in business situations or with souvenir habits. (Shoji 2018.)

4.4 Social factors

Japanese are a group-oriented society and reference groups affect strongly on consumers. People value relationships and connections more than individual goals. Japanese think that it is safe and easy to put emphasis on being part of a group. It is important for them to be appearing similar as others. (Kenneth & Soyeon 2003, 180-194.) Products that gain acceptance from the marketplace and groups, are popular among consumers (Synodinos 2001, 235-248).

There are several groups among Japanese consumers and the members have often similar consumer habits, they have guidelines on what to wear or use and what is popular. Consumer purchasing decisions are highly impacted on the groups in which they belong to and therefore it is important for marketers to target those groups. (Serita et al. 2009, 37-49) Even fashion trends among younger population are a result of being part of the group and being accepted by them. (Synodinos 2001, 235-248.)

Japanese individuals can sacrifice their own identities to have a consensus in group and they distrust or even fear being left outside. Japanese want to maintain relationships and therefore avoid "losing face". (Synodinos 2001, 235-248.) This can also be seen in consumer markets. Japanese want to fit in and buy products that their group supports and values. Japanese have trust issues towards foreign products due to consumer nationalism. This distrust has been loosened over time and it often requires local adaptation of foreign products into Japanese market. (Martin & Herbig 2002, 171-179.)

4.5 Japanese market opportunities now

In February 2019 EU-JAPAN Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) entered into force. The agreement has been named Economic Partnership Agreement, because it is not only a free trade agreement, but also the agreement reaches for growth in economic partnership. The agreement covers large part of trade in goods, related regulation and barriers to trade, as well as trade in services. Japan is one of the largest consumer

markets and second largest business partner for EU after China. (Website of Market Opportunities: Country Outlook 2019.)

The agreement opens Japanese markets by making special treatment to tariff system for items between EU and Japan. As the agreement is finalized more than 90% of the EU's exports to Japan will be duty free. After transition time Japan will have scrapped customs duties on almost all goods imported from the EU. The agreement removes tariffs from many major foods like salmon, cheese, chocolate, candies, biscuits, pasta and confectionary. The agreement does not disable all trade barriers but gives good advantage to products produced in EU and it is said to double exports from EU to Japan. Japan is a growing trade partner for Finland since Finnish products gain interest from quality-conscious Japanese consumers. (Website of European Commission 2019; Website of Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland 2019.)

There is a continuing market trend for healthy and natural foods in Japan especially due to growing number of health-conscious consumers. Japanese favor products with natural ingredients and high nutrition. The EPA agreement presents opportunities for Finnish healthy, natural and premium food products. The sales for healthy and functional foods have been on a steady rise. Small product packages have been popular in Japanese markets and there is also growing market for luxury food items. (Website of Market Opportunities: Business Opportunity 2019.)

Products that especially have good potential are for example berry-based products and berry-related ingredients. Finnish chocolate has also become more popular and retailers are seeking for specialty chocolates and those that include preferably Finnish ingredients like berries. In general, Finnish food products are gradually gaining more interest among Japanese consumers. Japanese markets are seeking for products that include exotic Finnish ingredients from the nature. (Website of Market Opportunities: Business Opportunity 2019.)

Business Finland is working with retailers to offer exotic Finnish products and organize buyer meetings, store campaigns and exhibitions. Business Finland is a government organization for innovation funding and trade promotion. Japanese consumers have a positive, clean and healthy image of Finland, and Finnish design and culture is known.

Recently Moomin park was opened in Tokyo and it partly increases the popularity of Finland in Japan. One could say that there is increasing Finnish boom and it allows many opportunities for Finnish companies to promote natural, healthy and functional Finnish food items and ingredients to the Japanese market. (Website of Market Opportunities: Business Opportunity 2019.)

5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research ethics

Ethical issues come from the question of right and wrong. There are many ethical issues related to research implementation. With research implementing, ethical issues can be related to selection of the topic, gathering the data or publication of the work. Ethical thinking needs to be used also with treatment of the participants of the research and on influences that the publication of the results may cause. Ethically accepted research follows good ethical behavior. Finland has many public institutions, for example ministry of education, supervising and directing the appropriation and ethicality of research works. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2009, 23-27.)

This thesis uses online survey as data collection method. Online survey is ethically good option as research method, because questionnaire leaves out personal questions of the respondents. Some background information is asked to formulate general information of respondents as a group, like age and gender. All personal questions including names are not asked, because that information is irrelevant for the research. Participants in online survey questionnaire will not be published, because it is conducted anonymously. Therefore, confidentiality is not a problem with this research.

The information shared of the case company needs to be closely considered to avoid releasing information to the public, which could cause inconvenience to the company's sales. The case company and its products have been described objectively and the description has been discussed together with the company owner. The emphasis is in information that the company's owner has wanted to point out and in information that

suits thesis topic. Publication of this thesis will only give good advertisement for the company.

5.2 Research methods

Research can be conducted using either quantitative or qualitative method. Qualitative research methods are observation, interviews and documents. Most used qualitative method is theme interview. With qualitative research, the researcher does not know beforehand the studied phenomenon and therefore data is collected until research problem can be solved and reliable answers gathered. Researcher drives to extensive and comprehensive data collection. The data is conducted into understandable textual form instead of numerical results. (Kananen 2015, 127-129.)

This research was implemented by using quantitative method with an online survey. Quantitative research requires known information and theory as a base of the research. The theoretical base in this research is consumer behavior studies. Knowledge of the subject is required to be able to implement quantitative research; find research problem, research questions and finally research method. Solution for research problem comes from the research material, which is usually a survey. (Kananen 2015, 197-198.) Survey means a method in which the data is collected in a standard way and respondents create a population from certain universe. All questions are asked in same way with the same questions to every respondent. The collected data will be analyzed in a quantitative way. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 193-195.)

It is practical to use questions with ready answer alternatives in the online survey to get exact answers from participants. It is also possible to use open questions, but then it requires even deeper understanding of the theoretical base. Open questions can cause difficulty in concluding research results into understandable form. The theoretical basis helps to decide on research questions for questionnaire. (Kananen 2015, 202.)

Most used research method for survey research is questionnaire. Main advantage of questionnaire is the possibility of comprehensive research. This means possibility of many respondents and to ask multiple questions. Questionnaire is efficient, and it saves

time and effort. The time and resources in this type of research can be estimated beforehand. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 193-195.)

Three forms of rational research strategies are used in different types of researches. These are experimental research, quantitative survey research and case study. With survey, data is collected in a structural form from a group of people. Purpose is to describe, compare and explain the phenomenon. Advantages of survey are anonymity, low costs and fast data collection and disadvantages include possible low number of respondents and answers, and objectiveness of the research. (Kananen 2015, 134-135.) With this thesis the phenomenon is Japanese consumer behavior characteristics and the survey drives to found out and describe their consumer buyer habits and values, especially with candy products.

The reason for chosen quantitative method is in lack of resources for the research. The author was unable to observe Japanese consumers by being in the country in Japan and thereby online survey was the best option. Observation, interviews or survey were not possible to conduct locally in Japan. The lack of money and time were the reasons for this. Language barrier and lack of connections to Japanese people were the reason for not executing qualitative interviews as data collection method. The results would not have been comprehensive. Afterall quantitative method suits this thesis better since it allows the possibility to ask many consumers the same questions and therefore collect analysis of the target group's consumer behavior.

5.3   Creating the questionnaire

The author of this thesis was an exchange student in Osaka Gakuin University in the city of Osaka, Japan. Therefore, the questionnaire was targeted to Japanese students of that school. The draft of questionnaire was conducted first into Word data file and then transferred into an online platform called Forms, provided by Microsoft Office 365. The questionnaire (see appendix 1) was sent to respondents in October 2019 and was active for two weeks. Reminder was also sent to the school before the two-week time ended.

Questions were decided with the help of the main research question and supporting research questions. The questionnaire questions were carefully planned to be able to collect data which will be useful for the case company and tell new information about Japanese consumers and their preferences towards candy products. The objective was to find out that Japanese target consumers like Makeidon candies and would be interested in purchasing those products if they were available. Ideas for questionnaire questions came from the theoretical base and especially from the chapter Main characteristics and preferences of Japanese consumers.

The structure of the questionnaire affects the response rate. The understandability depends on the appearance, format of the questions, the answer options and language that is used. Too formal words may be difficult to understand by the participants. The appearance also matters. Short, comprehensive and concise cover letter or introduction in the beginning of the questionnaire can determine the response rate. It determines how seriously the research is taken and how willing they are to answer the questionnaire. It is recommended to not use too many questions and to consider the order of them. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 196-204.)

The starting point in creating the questionnaire was to conduct it in a simple and understandable form so that answering would not take too much time. Average response time was seven minutes, which is convenient. Respondents could get frustrated if questionnaire was too complicated. The questionnaire consists of structured questions, so that it is convenient and leaves low possibility of misinterpretations and allows to gather data easily. Multiple choice questions make it easier to gather data and analyze it and open questions are usually left unanswered. With the answer options, there were many alternatives so that it would not be too leading. Although, structured questions can anyhow be a bit leading, but the questions may have been too difficult to understand for Japanese without simple answer options.

The questionnaire was conducted in Japanese and English. Language used in the questionnaire has been simplified as much as possible for Japanese to understand. All questions and answer options were in both languages to be sure that at least one of the languages is understood and to ensure the amount of responses. If the questionnaire was only in English, there could be a risk of misinterpretations and the results may not

be as reliable. Japanese students do not understand English sufficiently and they may have discontinued to answer the questionnaire if it was only in English. This assumption is due to the author's experience as exchange student in Japan and observations made during the stay.

The Japanese sentences were created carefully with the help of the author´s Japanese friends. Making the questionnaire in Japanese took a lot of time and effort but it was worth it because of the language barrier. The topic of this thesis and the implementation of the research is quite ambitious and took a lot of effort. Doing survey in Japanese is not usual and it turned out to be challenging, but it also makes this survey unique. The cover letter in email and in social media was short and prominent and only in Japanese, so that Japanese people would notice it. The introduction in the beginning of the questionnaire (see appendix 1) was quite long because it had to be done in both languages.

It took a lot of time to conduct the questionnaire and decide what is relevant. Limitation of the questions and multiple questions' answer options were difficult. There were five necessary basic information questions at the beginning of the questionnaire, and it meant that it was not possible to have many specific questions without the questionnaire to become too long. Author was able to limit the number of other questions to nine most important ones. Those questions consisted of questions of Japanese consumers in general, questions about Makeidon candies and in last questions about Japanese gift-giving culture. Those aspects were most relevant for the research objectives.

5.4   Data collection and analysis

The chosen preliminary population for online survey was decided to be young Japanese adults aged 18 to 26 years old that are students from Osaka Gakuin University in Osaka, Japan. The author only had connections to that school in Japan and therefore they were the chosen target population. That population is presumed (referring to the theory and observations in Japan) to be promising and suitable target population.

The author asked the office workers in Osaka Gakuin University International center to send the questionnaire to the target respondents. Author did not send it directly to students because she did not have their emails. The author also advertised the questionnaire in Instagram publicly and sent the questionnaire directly to twenty Japanese friends, who are Osaka Gakuin University students, with Instagram direct or Facebook messenger. The author had no other connections to Japanese citizens other than the exchange school she went to and that is one heavy reason for the decision of the chosen target group.

Before it is possible to conduct conclusions from data analysis, it is necessary to do some preliminary work. These tasks can be divided into verification, supplementation and organizing. Verification of the used research material needs to be done to point out possible incorrect answers or information that is missing. Some data may need to be rejected if it is not possible to analyze. The gathered information may need to be enhanced by using reminders or another research method like interviews or surveys. Supplementation is necessary if the information gathered is lacking important points. The last step is to conduct data into a form that is possible to analyze. The organizing of data is done in a different way in quantitative and qualitative method. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 221-222.)

Main problem of questionnaire is the lack of deeper knowledge of research. There is also no way to be sure if the respondents answer honestly to the questions and take it seriously. It can be difficult to predict misunderstandings, and this can lead to wrong interpretations of the questions. The respondents may not know the subject beforehand and the questions might be difficult to understand. The amount of non-responses may also be high in some cases. Therefore, it takes time to conduct desirable questionnaire that collects useful information. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 193-195.)

This research was conducted using online questionnaire form called Forms. Forms saves answers automatically to the system and creates structured data for analyzation in a numerical form. Therefore, there is no need for transferring the data to external survey platform. The chosen method was decided because it was the easiest way to reach Japanese consumers since online survey is possible to see from the other side of the world via social media and email. Forms creates charts and diagrams automatically

and therefore the research results were easier to analyze. The data gathered was thoroughly analyzed first in numerical form and then summarized into main findings.

The preliminary target group was students from Osaka Gakuin University, but the questionnaire was sent via school officers to the students. The questionnaire had a question about whether the respondent is a student at the school and received also answers from non-students. There are two reasons for this, some answers are from the author's exchange year friends who have already graduated since the exchange was in 2016 and some answers are from school officers. Because the target group was challenging, and it was difficult to gain many responses, author decided to accept all those answers, because they are still similar consumers.

Possibility to target the author's Japanese friends by direct messages increased response rate due to active responses and some of the contacted friends also advertised survey to other students. The fact that some respondents and the school officers, who helped to distribute the survey, were authors friends helped the validity of the research. Japanese give importance to personal relations and therefore they were eager to help and maintain good relationship with the author. Author believes that the questions were answered honestly and since the questionnaire was in Japanese language it helped the respondents to understand it better.

5.5   Reliability and validity

The reliability and validity can differ with various research studies. The objective is to avoid mistakes, but often it is not completely possible. Most important thing is to validate research work to point out mistakes and reasons behind them. Reliability and validity need to be measured in both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Sometimes the validity of the research can be strengthened by using triangulation, which means combination of both research methods and use of several processes. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 231-233.) There was no need for triangulation since the questionnaire received hoped amount of responses.

Reliability means consistency of the results. Reliability can be measured many ways. It can mean implementing the same research twice and gaining same results. Research can also be defined as reliable if same results are gathered by different researchers. There are also several indicators used with quantitative research to judge the reliability of the research. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 231-233.) The questionnaire could be used again to another target population to find out if the results are repeatable in Japanese consumer markets. The questionnaire could also be sent to more respondents to increase the reliability, if there were more resources to conduct the survey.

Validity means the ability for the research to measure exactly what was intended. The researcher intends to use research methods in a way that the research will gain results for research problem. The researcher needs to consider the possibility that respondents or participants may not understand the questions in a hoped way. For example, research questions in a survey can be understood incorrectly by the respondents and this conducts into false and incompetent results. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 231-233.) Many respondents answered in a similar way to the questionnaire that the author had beforehand predicted based on the findings from the theoretical part. This means that the questionnaire had suitable questions and the survey supports the theoretical part of this thesis. The research measured what it was intended to.

The theoretical base of this study is conducted using multiple books, previous studies and other literature reviews. The number of sources used is diverse and vast and they are used consistently. The consumer behavior four factors -theory was conducted from reliable book sources written by marketing experts. The theoretical basis of Japanese consumer behavior is also valid, since information is gathered from multiple sources. The information was although difficult to find since the topic of this thesis is not widely studied. Some sources were older, but as proof of legibility also new sources with similar information were used to point out that the information was not outdated.

The questionnaire was advertised to Osaka Gakuin University students by the school officers and by direct messages to the author's Japanese contacts. Reason for not using direct emails to respondents, was that the emails were not known. This means that the preliminary population is not exact since the questionnaire was targeted to all possible

respondents and the author could not completely control who answered the questionnaire. This decision was decided to get as many responses as possible from Japanese citizens. Validity of the research has still been ensured by using Japanese language in the cover letter and the questionnaire so that only Japanese consumers would answer to it and adding defining basic information -questions at the start of the questionnaire.

As it can be seen from the appendix 1, there are five basic information questions in the questionnaire to research the qualities of respondents. Basic information is crucial especially because the questionnaire is published in social media. These questions can increase the validity of the research since they tell what kind of respondents have answered the questionnaire. The author added questions of whether the respondent is Osaka Gakuin University student, whether they are Japanese and whether they live in Japan, to map the respondents even better. The author relies on the fact that if someone can read the questions in Japanese and is willing to answer, why would they not answer honestly.

Since the questionnaire was conducted in Japanese language it has increased the validity of the responses. The questionnaire was unfortunately quite long because there had to be five basic information questions at the beginning. Other questions were modified many times and the number of questions was summarized to minimum so that the respondents would not get frustrated. The questionnaire was still a bit long because there were many multiple-choice questions.

Length of the questionnaire may have influenced the truthfulness of the responses. In Likert scale questions all answer options were presumed to be likely responses and this may have decreased the validity. Some respondents have answered those questions with strong opinions and wide distinctions between answers and others may have answered all options that they somehow agree on.

6   RESEARCH FINDINGS

The questionnaire was sent in three different ways. It was advertised publicly in Instagram in the author´s feed and story. It was sent directly to the authors Japanese friends from the exchange year and to Osaka Gakuin University International center officers by email. The officers were asked to advertise the questionnaire to the students. Therefore, it is impossible to know how many saw the questionnaire link and to calculate the response rate. However, these were the best options to reach the Japanese students. The questionnaire received 47 respondents, which is as expected and enough for this survey.

As it can be seen from the appendix 1, there are five basic information questions at the beginning of the questionnaire to define the respondents. 72 % of the respondents were female. Second question was about age. Author assumed that most Japanese students are in their early twenties and therefore age was divided into four categories. 38 % of the respondents were 18-20 years old, 43% were 21-23 years old, 11% were 24-26 years old and only 9% were over 26 years old. This clarifies the presumption and indicates that Japanese university students are quite young, mostly 18-23 years old.

Because the questionnaire was sent mostly indirectly to the respondents, the author also needed to add specific questions to increase the validity of the responses. 77 % of the respondents are students of the Osaka Gakuin University or have graduated recently. This means that there were also 23% of non-students. These responses can be from officers or other personnel at the school and therefore it is still quite accurate for the research. The author decided to accept answers from school officers because they are still suitable as target consumers and they have similar purchasing habits. The author also asked where the respondent lives and 94 % of the respondents lived in Japan. Most important question was whether the respondent is Japanese and only one respondent answered that he or she is not. Hopefully that person is a foreign teacher in the school and if he or she is not, the 2% does not affect the validity.

6. How important do you consider following attributes when choosing a candy product for yourself?　キャンディーを買うときどのような点を重視しますか。
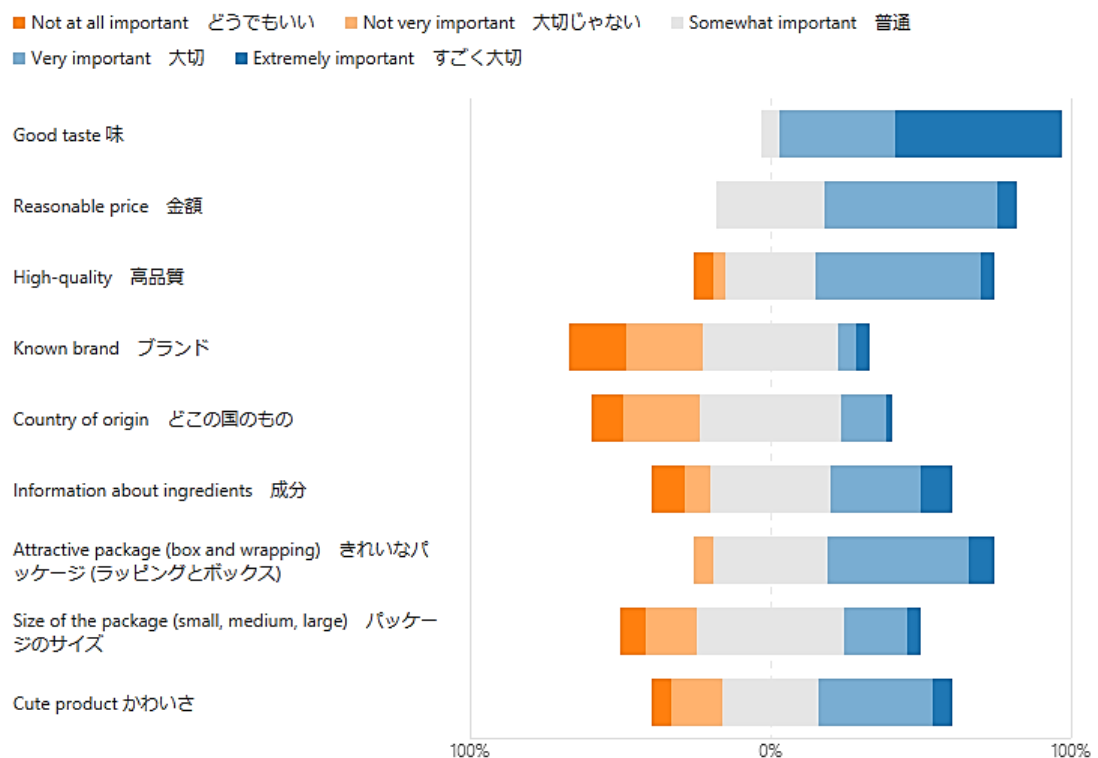
Figure 4. Question 6: How important do you consider following attributes when choosing a candy product for yourself?

The questionnaire consisted of three types of questions which were about product preferences towards candies in general, specifically about Makeidon candies and then questions about Japanese gift-giving culture. Questions six and seven were general questions about Japanese consumers' behavior towards candy products (see appendix 1). The author decided to use rating scale of importance with question six to find out which attributes consumers value most.

Figure 4 shows that Good taste was answered as extremely important by 55,3% and therefore it was by far the most important factor. Reasonable price by 57,4%, High-quality by 55.3%, Attractive package by 46,8% and Cute product by 38,3 % were answered as very important, making them and Good taste most valued attributes of candy products. Attributes Known brand and Country of origin by 25,5% were rated as not very important. The gaps between answer options' percentages were not broad. Many

respondents also answered the middle option which is unfortunate since it cannot be analyzed effectively.

7. What are the most important features of a candy package? パッケージで何が大切ですか。
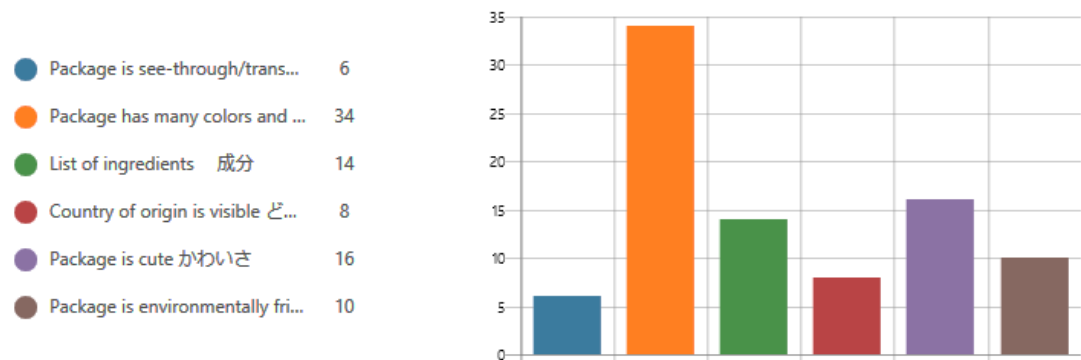
Figure 5. Question 7: What are the most important features of a candy package?

Question seven was specifically about package design and attractiveness. The respondents had the choice of choosing multiple answers to this question because author wanted to find out which options are chosen the most. Figure 5 shows that majority of the respondents said that most important feature of candy package is package's colors and images. Secondly, list of ingredients and cuteness were valued. This question also confirms the same point as previous question did about country of origin being in the least important features. Only six respondents answered that transparent package is important.

8. In your opinion, does these attributes describe Finnish products? Select how much you agree on these attributes.　フィンランドのものについてどうおもいますか。
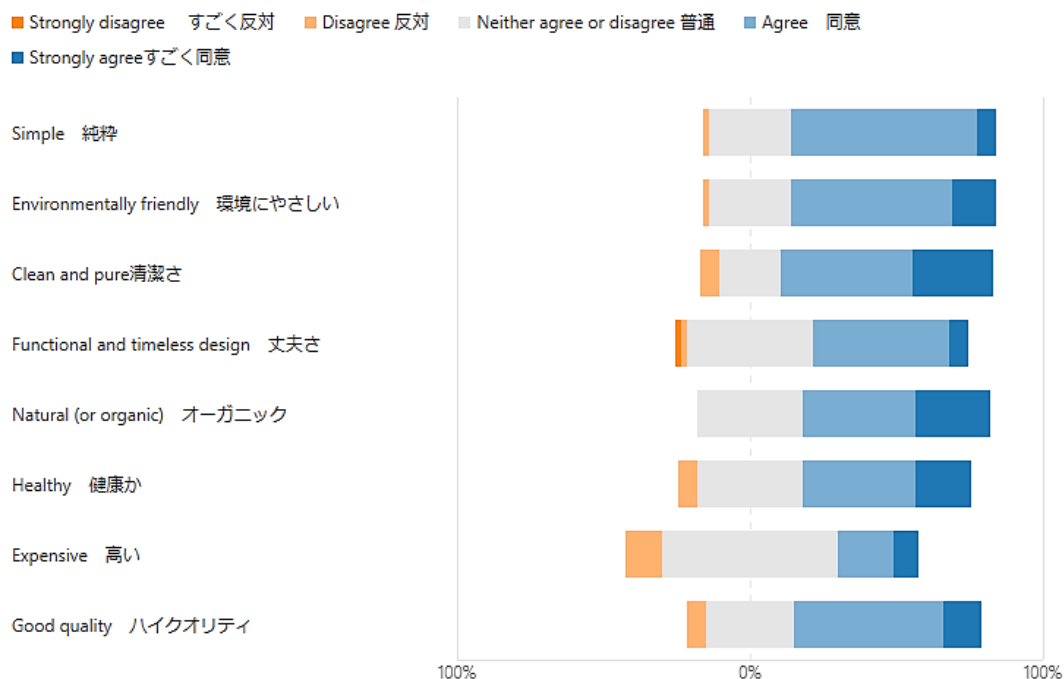
Figure 6. Question 8: In your opinion, does these attributes describe Finnish products?

Questions 8-11 were about specifically Makeidon company's candy products (see appendix 1). In question eight (figure 6), the differences between answers were not wide. Author decided to add all those question options since, referring to the theory, those were predicted to be the factors that Japanese consumers value about Finnish products. From figure 6 one can see that target consumers valued simplicity the most, they agreed by 63,8% that Finnish products are simple in a positive way. The respondents strongly agreed also on Clean and pure and Natural features. Environmentally friendly by 55,3% and Good quality by 51,1% were also agreed by many respondents. The question was probably not designed in the best way since all answer options were quite truthful features of Finnish products and the respondents mainly agreed on them and there was not much divergence. Most disagrees were on Expensive attribute by 12,8%, which is a good thing since it means that the respondents do not consider Finnish products as too expensive.

9. Which of the following candy flavor categories would you most likely want to buy? 何をキャンディーの味買いたいですか。

● Berry flavors　ベリー味	24
● Special flavors (coffee, chocol...	17
● Exotic flavors, sour or fresh (gi...	3
● Sweet flavors (cotton candy, c...	20
● Traditional flavors (fruit, pepp...	12

Figure 7. Question 9: Which of the following candy flavor categories would you most likely want to buy?

Figure 7 shows which candy flavor categories respondents would most likely want to buy. Some of the respondents answered multiple options, but the ones who chose only one category, they usually chose Berry flavors or Sweet flavors (for example cotton candy, coca cola). Berry flavors were answered by 32% and Sweet flavors by 26% of the respondents. Special flavors (coffee, chocolate) were also answered by 22%. Those categories were taken from Makeidon's website. Berry flavors was most popular option chosen by 24 respondents, which means approximately half of the respondents. This confirms that the Japanese consumers are interested and excited about berries.

10. Which one of the following berry flavors would you buy? どのベリー味のお菓子を買いたいですか。

● Blueberry　ブルーベリー	19
● Strawberry　イチゴ	27
● Raspberry　ラズベリー	20
● Lingonberry　リンゴンベリー	8
● Cloudberry　クラウドベリー	3
● Blackcurrant　ブラックカラン...	2
● Sea buckthorn シーバックソ...	2
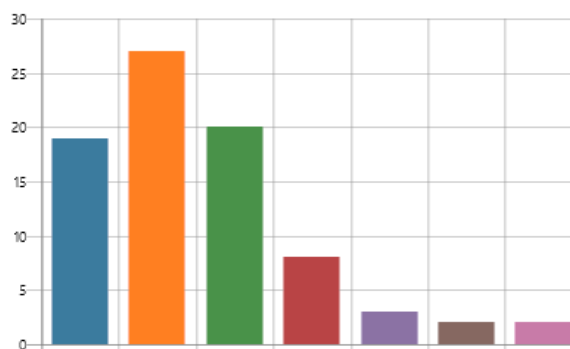
Figure 8. Question 10: Which one of the following berry flavors would you buy?

Since many of the Makeidon candy flavors are berry flavors and berry flavors were presumed to attract Japanese consumers, the next question figured out the most attractive berry flavors in candy products that target respondents would want to buy. The respondents could choose multiple answer options. Figure 8 shows that 27 answered

strawberry, 20 answered raspberry and 9 answered blueberry, and those three berries are usually the most known. Those answers were not a surprise, but this question also informed that the Japanese consumers were interested in lingonberry.
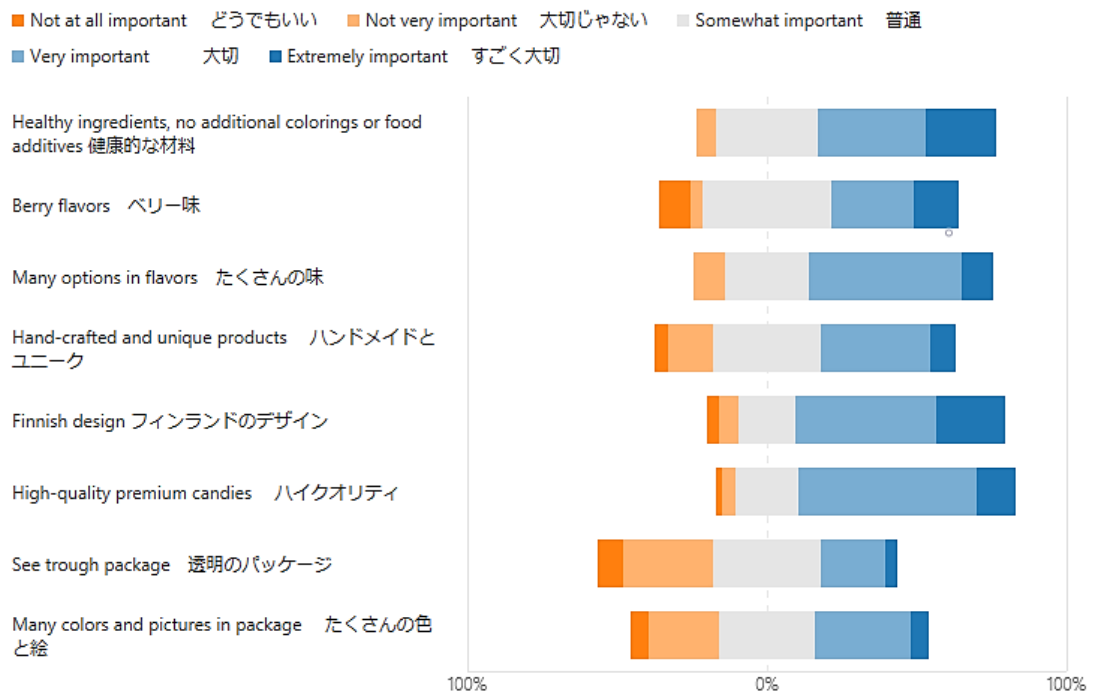

Figure 9. Question 11: How important are the following attributes of Makeidon candies if you would buy them for yourself?

Figure 9 shows that Healthy ingredients and Finnish design were rated the most as extremely important by 23,4% of the respondents. Other significant results were that High-quality was again rated as very important by 59,6% and Many options in flavors by 51,1% was also appreciated. Many colors and images in the package were rated as one of the least important features of Makeidon candies. This result is controversial to question seven (figure 5) where the package was by far most important feature of candy product. From this outcome the author can come into conclusion that maybe Makeidon candies' current package design is not very attractive as it is not as many times rated as important attribute. On the other hand, it can mean that with this product the Japanese respondents valued more the quality, healthy ingredients and Finnish design of the candy over the package design.

Figure 10. Question 12: From where do you buy food gifts most often?

Last three questions (see appendix 1) were designed to figure out Japanese gift-giving culture. To question 12 (figure 10) the respondents answered that they buy food gifts most often from department stores by 36%. Special gift shops were answered by 34% of the respondents. Because gift-giving is important to Japanese consumers, they appreciate the selection in department stores and special gift shops. Result from this question was as expected.

Figure 11. Question 13: Would you buy Makeidon candies as a gift?

Probably the most important question regarding this thesis was the question of whether the respondent would buy Makeidon candies as gifts. From figure 11 one can see that 91% of the respondents would buy Makeidon candies as gifts. This means that Makeidon company could have demand in Japanese consumer market, at least within the survey's target population. The presumption of Makeidon candies being suitable for gifts in Japanese consumer markets were proven true.

14. How important do you consider the following attributes when you are choosing a candy product for someone as a gift?　ギフトを選ぶときどのような点を重視しますか。
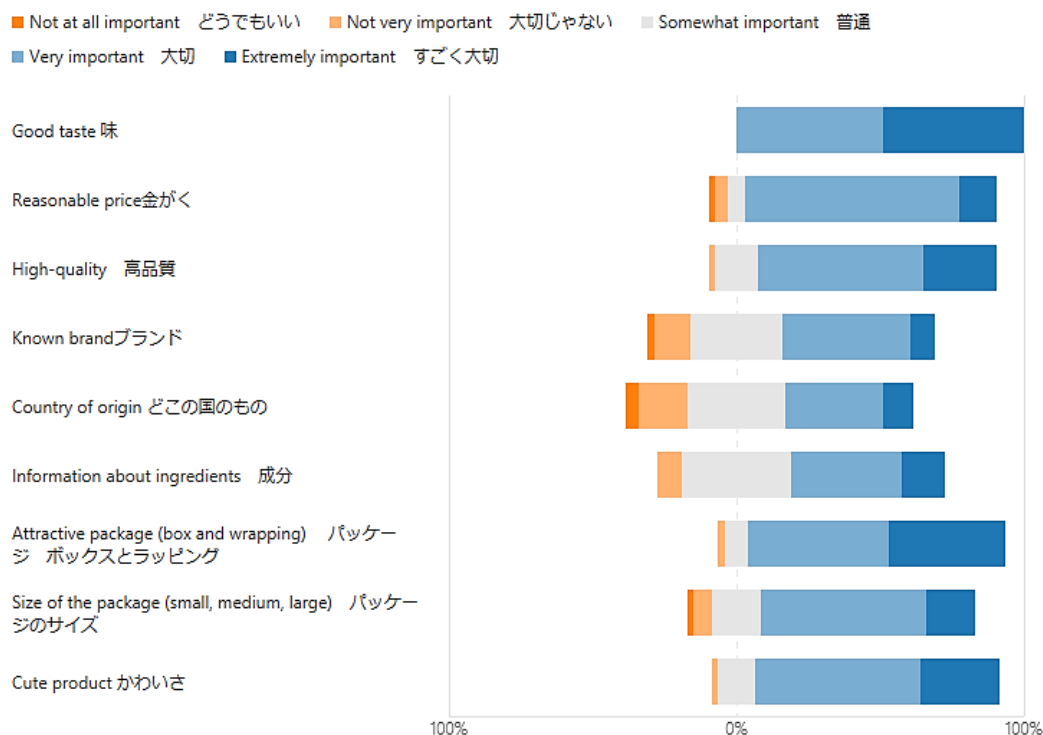
Figure 12. Question 14: How important do you consider the following attributes when you are choosing a candy product for someone as a gift?

Figure 12 shows that Good taste by 48,9% and Attractive package by 40,4% were rated as extremely important attributes of candy products when purchasing the product as a gift for someone. Those attributes were also rated as very important many times. This verifies the presumption that the Japanese value the appearance of gifts. They value box and wrapping of the package. Price by 74,5% and High-quality, Size of package and Cuteness were all by 57,4% rated as very important attributes. Country of origin and Known brand were rated most times as not very important attributes. Similar answers were seen in the question six (figure 4) which surveyed those attributes when consumers are purchasing items for themselves. Repeatability of main points of answers increases surveys' reliability. Results from this question and question six can mean that the Japanese respondents prefer those attributes in products.

With almost all questions the answers were scattered and there were no distinct majority among responses, responses were diverse. The Japanese consumers valued all

answer options and only few attributes were answered as not important. This means that there were not wide differences between preferences. This was predicted since all the answer options were positive and presumed attributes and the aim was to distinct most valued attributes from multiple good options.

From questionnaire's results the author found out that the Japanese consumers did not see attributes Known brand and Country of origin as most important product qualities. In the theoretical part those aspects were also viewed as attributes that Japanese value, but the questionnaire was in incongruity. It does not mean that Japanese consumers do not value those attributes, it just means that they value certain attributes more. This outcome means that for example regarding the package design the company should not emphasize on those qualities, but instead focus on cute or beautiful package with colors and images and maybe highlight the ingredients or quality of the products.

7 CONCLUSIONS

The following subchapters summarize the main findings from the theoretical part and the empirical research. Supporting research questions How does consumer behavior studies relate to this thesis and What factors influence consumers' behavior in general and in Japan, were answered in the theoretical part. The four factors influencing consumer behavior (cultural, social, personal and psychological) helped the author to understand consumer behavior in general and therefore also describe Japanese consumers' characteristics.

In the theoretical part of this thesis the author found out some main attributes of Japanese consumers. Below is a short summary of those findings to be able to contrast them to the questionnaire findings. From the theory author found out that Japanese consumers value healthy foods and they demand for high-quality. They also give importance to detailed products and beautiful package design. They value environment-conscious products and appreciate cuteness.

The theoretical part pointed out that Japanese consumer markets have strong gift-giving culture, which gives many opportunities for products that are suitable as gifts. Good example of gift is food like sweets. Japanese prefer products with natural ingredients. There are some specific products with high market potential in Japan like natural products, organic foods, berry-based products and foods that introduce Finnish culture. Finnish berries and other gifts of nature are popular in Japan now. Japanese see Finnish products as high-quality and they appreciate the image of clean and environmentally friendly Finland.

The questionnaire results are summarized in the following subchapters. Supporting research questions; Which characteristics are typical for Japanese consumers and What product qualities are important for Japanese, why do they choose to purchase certain item, were discussed in the theory as well but with the questionnaire results the characteristics were possible to be pointed out. The questionnaire answered also to research question of What kind of candies does Japanese prefer to purchase.

From figures 4 and 5 one can see that when the Japanese target consumers are buying candy products, they value package design, good taste and reasonable price and they also expect the product to be high-quality. Because the questionnaire was about candy products it was obvious that good taste was rated as important. The Japanese consumers have aesthetic values and they appreciate detailed and beautiful package design with colors and images. They value products that are wrapped beautifully, and the package is cute and attractive. Beside the appearance of the package they prefer a list of ingredients in the package.

The questionnaire (figure 9) also figured out which attributes of specifically Makeidon candy the respondents appreciate, and most answered were high-quality, healthy ingredients, flavor options and Finnish design. This indicates that they see Makeidon candy as high-quality product with natural ingredients and Makeidon candy is suitable for the Japanese consumers' product preferences. The qualities that the respondents appreciate in Makeidon candy are similar as what they appreciate when buying candy in general.

The questionnaire (figure 6) pointed out how the Japanese consumers see Finnish products. Most agreed attributes were simple, clean and pure or natural, environmentally friendly and good quality. Since respondents also answered that they appreciate the fact that Makeidon candies are Finnish products, it means that they appreciate the image of Finnish quality product. The respondents did not see Finnish products as very expensive which is positive. Due to the author's experience in Japan she also knowns that the price level is quite similar in Finland and Japan.

The respondents were asked to answer what kind of specific candy flavors they are interested in buying and this question was formed due to supporting research question What kind of candies does Japanese prefer to purchase. Many answered berry flavors (figure 7) as well as sweet flavors such as coca cola or cotton candy. Also, coffee and chocolate flavors were popular answers. When it comes to specific berries (figure 8), the Japanese consumers were a bit skeptical towards more unknown berries. They mostly were eager to buy strawberry, raspberry and blueberry flavors and after that lingonberry also got answered by some of the respondents. Makeidon offers many flavor options but this result indicates that probably berry flavors and particularly those most rated ones could gain interest. Beside berry flavors also sweet flavors like chocolate/cacao flavor could sell well.

In the theoretical part this thesis introduced that Japanese have strong gift-giving culture and it is certainly one reason why Japanese appreciate package design. Consumers want gifts to be wrapped beautifully because the package is part of the gift. When asking about most important attributes of products when buying them as gifts (figure 12), the respondents answered that they appreciate reasonable price, taste, high-quality, package design and cuteness of products. These answers are similar as answers when respondents were asked what they value in a product when they are buying it for themselves (figure 9).

The questionnaire (figure 10) informed that the Japanese consumers most likely buy gifts from gift shops or departments stores, which indicates that they appreciate the selection of gifts those stores offer. For Makeidon it could be potential to seek market area from those special stores since the products are unique and attract demanding customers.

The research was done to point out consumer preferences of Japanese consumers and what product qualities they appreciate. The purpose of this research was to find out whether those product preferences match the attributes of Makeidon candies. The outcome was reached with the help of the supporting research questions and they were helpful in conducting the research. There were many supporting research questions but the final one of Does Japanese consumers gain interest in buying Makeidon products was especially important. From the results one can see that the Japanese respondents are interested in buying Makeidon candies.

Package design, high-quality and cuteness were some main attributes that stood out. The respondents also answered that they would buy Makeidon candy as a gift (from figure 11 one can see that only four respondents answered that they would not) and therefore the research was successful. The Japanese consumers see Makeidon candies as suitable for gifts and therefore Makeidon candy's product qualities match the qualities that the Japanese respondents valued.

Questionnaire results pointed out that Makeidon could promote especially berry flavor candies and emphasize that the candies are high-quality, they have natural ingredients and they are Finnish products, because those attributes were highly valued. Finnish country image is positive and regarding the research results Finnish products could have great potential. Presumptions that Japanese consumers have of Finnish products match the qualities of Makeidon candies, which means that Makeidon could promote their products as unique Finnish candies and gain interested with the Finnish image.

The research was successful, findings from the theoretical and the empirical research were in line. The questionnaire outcome was as hoped, and main product preferences were summarized in the previous subchapters. This thesis answered to main research problem which was about what qualities in case company's candy products gain the interest of Japanese consumers.

8   RECOMMENDATIONS

The thesis gives valuable information for the case company Makeidon. Other companies can also benefit from the research because this thesis describes Japanese consumers' product preferences in general and gives outline for anyone who plans to enter Japanese market. For further study points if the company is entering Japanese markets, they could do more specific research of target consumers and send the questionnaire for larger target group with more exact questions. Larger number of responses would give more reliable results if the questionnaire was conducted again to more extensive target population.

Market entry strategy would be next step to enter Japanese markets. The company could for example contact Business Finland organization and try to get market opportunities in Japanese food exhibitions or market places. The Japanese market opportunities now -chapter informs that the interest in Finnish products in Japan is increasing and Finnish boom is a rising matter. Also, the Economic Partnership Agreement supports business with Japan.

The products are already suitable for Japanese market, but regarding the research results some modifications could be done. Makeidon could promote their products by using the Finnish image more and include it in the marketing or the package design. Most beneficial flavors are berry flavors and the package could include a bigger picture of berry to catch the eye of the consumer. Now the packages have pictures of berries, but the images are a bit unclear since the image has also boughs which can make it fuzzy. In authors opinion clearer picture of a berry would be more appealing and give a cute image which Japanese like. The products could be made even more appealing for Japanese consumers by for example adding more pictures of ingredients, colors, different shapes of candies or more sizing options for packages. For example, strawberry flavored candies could be made of strawberry shaped candy molds.

The author recommends the company to consider advertising candies as gifts because their uniqueness is appealing for especially gift markets. Japanese consumers prefer quite small packages when they are buying candy and if they are buying candy as a

gift, they prefer individual wrapping. Individual wrapping would be one option to consider, but it is not very environmentally friendly. One option could be to offer many flavor options in quite small packaging and advertise them as great gift options for different occasions like someone's birthday or career promotion as an example. Japanese are eager to give gifts in many occasions.

9 FINAL WORDS

It is beneficial for future career to learn how to conduct empirical research. This was the first time the author created an online survey and if she would have had more experience making them it might have been designed a bit different way. With this questionnaire there were no distinct lines between answer options. More distinct responses would have made better results to analyze because now the results did not provide a clear majority.

Making the questionnaire was challenging because it was written in Japanese language. It took a lot of time to check that the Japanese language was correct and understandable. The author was in Japan in year 2016 and therefore it was a long time ago. It was still a good idea since making questionnaire in Japanese increased the understandability of the survey. The author is pleased of her accomplishment of creating the questionnaire in Japanese.

The thesis project started in 2018 and the theoretical part was complete then. After that there were a long break from studies since the author wanted to concentrate on her job career. She continued thesis in 2019 fall with the empirical research. The author is disappointed about the break in between, but she was productive when she wrote the thesis. The break affects validation of this thesis and the sources were not the newest since there were no time to do the theoretical part again. The author was also satisfied with those chapters and did not want to modify them. Fortunately, the author was able to find also newer sources and current articles which improved the thesis.

One of the difficulties in making thesis was to be able to summarize paragraphs without unnecessary sentences. The author thinks that she improved with this aspect during the process but still needs to practice this more. The author is satisfied that she learned how to write professional English and next learning point would be to learn how to summarize more efficiently. Writing about two subjects, consumer behavior in general and consumer behavior in Japan, made the theory quite long but it was also interesting to write. The subject was challenging, it was difficult to border the topic and only write about beneficial subjects.

This thesis was interesting to write but sources of this subject from this aspect were difficult to find. There were not many sources about what kind of products Japanese consumers value or what attributes they appreciate in food products. Many sources were only about Japanese culture and not consumer behavior. Also, many sources were in Japanese language. One important learning point was that the author still learned how to find reliable sources and produce professional text.

It was fascinating to include knowledge from the exchange year in Japan and to notice that the observations made during the year were still true and that Japanese consumers are a unique consumer market. This subject was interesting and that is why the author chose it even though it was quite challenging to make the research. The author is satisfied with the theoretical part because it was confined well, and the information was useful for the empirical part. The questionnaire results were also satisfactory, and the author is proud that she received enough responses to the survey. Overall the author is satisfied of the thesis and proud that she was able to collect useful information to the theoretical part and create the questionnaire which gave successful research results of a unique subject.

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Survey of Finnish candy products for potential customers.
フィンランドのキャンディーについての質問です。

こんにちは皆さん！ちょっといいですか。

わたしの名前はロッタ　ラントウネンです。フィンランド人です。わたしは大学生で、五年生ですから今卒業論文をします。論文でわたしをたすけてください。
お願いします。

このアンケート調査は日本人のためですからみんなさん質問にこたえてください。　この卒論はMakeidonのキャンディーについてです。　この会社はフィンランドのキャンディー会社でキャンディーは高品質でヘルシーでハンドメイドです。このアンケートは5分で終わります。

本当にありがとうございます。

英語で同じ
Dear everyone,
My name is Lotta Lantunen and I am a Finnish student. I study International Trade in Satakunta University of Applied Sciences (SAMK) in my fifth and last year of studies.

I am doing my thesis now and need help from you. The thesis studies Japanese consumers and the interest they have in Finnish candy products. This survey is conducted for case company, Makeidon, which is a Finnish candy company. The company wants to find out if Japanese have interest towards their candy products.

I am very grateful for your participation. Answering is anonymous and it only takes approximately five minutes. Thank you very much!

Background information: 情報

1

Gender 男の人ですか女の人ですか。 *

○ Male 男の人

○ Female 女の人

2

Age 年齢 *

○ 18-20

○ 21-23

○ 24-26

○ 26 or over

3

Are you a student at Osaka Gakuin University? 大阪学院大学の学生ですか。 If you have graduated recently, also answer yes. 卒業して一年未満のひとも　はいと答えてください。 *

○ Yes　はい

○ No　いいえ

4

Where do you live? どこに住んでいますか。 *

○ Japan 日本

○ Finland フィンランド

○ Somewhere else 何処か別

5

Are you Japanese? 日本人ですか。 *

○ Yes はい

○ No いいえ

Following questions are related to Japanese consumer behavior towards candy products.

どのようなキャンディーをかいたいかの質問です。

6

How important do you consider following attributes when choosing a candy product for yourself?　キャンディーを買うときどのような点を重視しますか。 *

	Not at all important　どうでもいい	Not very important　大切じゃない	Somewhat important　普通	Very important　大切	Extremely important　すごく大切
Good taste 味	○	○	○	○	○
Reasonable price　金額	○	○	○	○	○
High-quality　高品質	○	○	○	○	○
Known brand　ブランド	○	○	○	○	○
Country of origin　どこの国のもの	○	○	○	○	○
Information about ingredients　成分	○	○	○	○	○
Attractive package (box and wrapping)　きれいなパッケージ (ラッピングとボックス)	○	○	○	○	○
Size of the package (small, medium, large)　パッケージのサイズ	○	○	○	○	○
Cute product かわいさ	○	○	○	○	○

7

What are the most important features of a candy package? パッケージで何が大切ですか。 *

- ☐ Package is see-through/transparent (cellophane wrapping)　　　透明のパッケージ
- ☐ Package has many colors and images　色合いや写真
- ☐ List of ingredients　成分
- ☐ Country of origin is visible どこの国のものか
- ☐ Package is cute かわいさ
- ☐ Package is environmentally friendly material　環境に優しいかどうか

Following questions are related to case company Makeidon's candies.

この卒論はMakeidonのキャンディーについてです。

8

In your opinion, does these attributes describe Finnish products? Select how much you agree on these attributes.　フィンランドのものについてどうおもいますか。 *

	Strongly disagree すごく反対	Disagree 反対	Neither agree or disagree 普通	Agree 同意	Strongly agree すごく同意
Simple　純粋	○	○	○	○	○
Environmentally friendly　環境にやさしい	○	○	○	○	○
Clean and pure清潔さ	○	○	○	○	○
Functional and timeless design　丈夫さ	○	○	○	○	○
Natural (or organic) オーガニック	○	○	○	○	○
Healthy　健康か	○	○	○	○	○
Expensive　高い	○	○	○	○	○
Good quality　ハイクオリティ	○	○	○	○	○

9

Which of the following candy flavor categories would you most likely want to buy? 何をキャンディーの味買いたいですか。 *

☐ Berry flavors　ベリー味

☐ Special flavors (coffee, chocolate, mint-chocolate, cream caramel)

☐ Exotic flavors, sour or fresh (ginger, menthol, eucalyptus)　生姜味　サワー味　メンソール味

☐ Sweet flavors (cotton candy, coca cola)

☐ Traditional flavors (fruit, peppermint)　伝統的

10

Which one of the following berry flavors would you buy? どのベリー味のお菓子を買いたいですか。 *

☐ Blueberry　ブルーベリー

☐ Strawberry　イチゴ

☐ Raspberry　ラズベリー

☐ Lingonberry　リンゴンベリー

☐ Cloudberry　クラウドベリー

☐ Blackcurrant　ブラックカラント

☐ Sea buckthorn シーバックソーン

11

How important are the following attributes of Makeidon candies if you would buy them for yourself?　もし買うならどのような特徴を重視しますか．*

	Not at all important　どうでもいい	Not very important　大切じゃない	Somewhat important　普通	Very important　大切	Extremely important　すごく大切
Healthy ingredients, no additional colorings or food additives 健康的な材料	○	○	○	○	○
Berry flavors　ベリー味	○	○	○	○	○
Many options in flavors　たくさんの味	○	○	○	○	○
Hand-crafted and unique products　ハンドメイドと ユニーク	○	○	○	○	○
Finnish design フィンランドのデザイン	○	○	○	○	○
High-quality premium candies　ハイクオリティ	○	○	○	○	○
See trough package 透明のパッケージ	○	○	○	○	○
Many colors and pictures in package たくさんの色と絵	○	○	○	○	○

Japanese have strong gift-giving culture. Answer questions regarding your own gift-giving

日本ではギフトをよくあげる習慣があります。このMakeidonのキャンディーはギフトに適していますかすか。

12

From where do you buy food gifts most often?　どこでギフトを買いますか。*

○ From a convenience store (e.g. 7eleven)　セブンイレブン

○ From a grocery store　スーパー

○ From stations (train and subway -stations)　電車駅前

○ From department stores 百貨店

○ From special gift shops　ギフトやさん

13

Would you buy Makeidon candies as a gift?　Makeidonのキャンディーをギフトとして買いたいですか。*

○ Yes　はい

○ No　いいえ

14

How important do you consider the following attributes when you are choosing a candy product for someone as a gift?　ギフトを選ぶときどのような点を重視しますか。 *

	Not at all important　どうでもいい	Not very important　大切じゃない	Somewhat important　普通	Very important　大切	Extremely important　すごく大切
Good taste 味	○	○	○	○	○
Reasonable price金がく	○	○	○	○	○
High-quality　高品質	○	○	○	○	○
Known brandブランド	○	○	○	○	○
Country of origin どこの国のもの	○	○	○	○	○
Information about ingredients　成分	○	○	○	○	○
Attractive package (box and wrapping)　パッケージ　ボックスとラッピング	○	○	○	○	○
Size of the package (small, medium, large)　パッケージのサイズ	○	○	○	○	○
Cute product かわいさ	○	○	○	○	○