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JAPANESE CUSTOMER SERVICE CULTURE AND DRIVING
FACTORS BEHIND IT

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Japanilainen asiakaspalvelukulttuuri ja siihen vaikuttavat tekijät

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Opinnäytetyön aiheena oli japanilainen asiakaspalvelukulttuuri ja siihen vaikuttavat tekijät. Opinnäytetyön teoriaosuuden pääosudeksi käytettiin Fons Trompenaarsin ja Geert Hofsteden kulttuuritutkimuksia, joista käytettiin vain aiheeseen oleellisia tekijöitä kuten Trompenaarsin teoriasta universalismia/partikularismia, individualismia/kommunitarianismia, neutraalia/affektiivista, spesifiä/diffuusia ja suhtautumista ympäristöön sekä Hofsteden teoriasta individualismia/kollektivismia, maskuliinisuutta/feminiinisyttä ja epävarmuuden välttämistä.

Näiden teorioiden jälkeen käsiteltiin Japanin uskontoja ja niiden vaikutusta japanilaiseen kulttuuriin sekä japaninkieltä. Lisäksi teoriaosuudessa käsiteltiin japanilaista liiketoimintakulttuuria ja siihen liittyvää etikettiä, jonka jälkeen tarkasteltiin japanilaista kuluttajakäyttäytymistä. Viimeisenä teoriaosuudessa päästiin itse aiheeseen eli asiakaspalveluun, jossa käsiteltiin itse aiheen ohella asiakasuskollisuutta ja kilpailun merkitystä asiakaspalveluun.

Tutkimusosio koostui sosiaalisessa mediassa ja sähköpostilla tuotetun kyselyn tuloksista. Kysely tehtiin maaliskuussa 2014 ja siihen vastasi 12 japanilaista. Kyselyssä kysyttiin japanilaisten mielipiteitä hyvästä ja huonosta asiakaspalvelusta, heidän reaktioistaan molempiin, omista kokemuksista asiakaspalvelijana sekä ostokäyttäytymisestä. Kyselyn tuloksia analysoitiin vertaamalla teoriaosuudessa tehtyihin löydöksiin.

Kyselystä selvisi, että japanilaiset haluavat asiakaspalvelun olevan täsmällistä, tyydyttävän asiakkaan ja että, asiakaspalvelija ymmärtäisi asiakkaan ongelman ilman, että sitä osattaisiin kunnolla selittääkään. Huonoksi asiakaspalveluksi nähtiin se, ettei asiakasta kuunneltu, he nolostuivat tai heiltä ei pyydetty vilpittömästi anteeksi. Japanilaiset tuntuivat välittävän asiakaspalvelusta ja totesivat sen vaikuttavan heidän ostokäyttäytymiseensä, mutta tuotteen laatu oli silti tärkeämpää.

Japanese customer service culture and driving factors behind it

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The subject of the thesis was Japanese customer service culture and the driving factors behind it. Fons Trompenaars' and Geert Hofstede's culture studies were handled as the main part of the theoretical part of the thesis, which of only the applicable factors were introduced. The applicable factors were Trompenaars' universalism/particularism, individualism/communitarianism, neutral/emotional, specific/diffuse and attitudes to environment and Hofstede's individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity and uncertainty avoidance.

After these theories religions of Japan and the impact of them to the Japanese culture and Japanese language were handled. Also in the theoretical part Japanese business culture and the etiquette involved were introduced and afterwards Japanese consumer behaviour was studied. Finally in the theoretical part of the thesis, the actual subject of customer service was handled with brief introductions to customer loyalty and competition and the impact they have on customer service.

The research part consists of the questionnaire results done in social media and by e-mail. The questionnaire was done in March 2014 and 12 Japanese answered to it. The questions in the questionnaire were about opinions on good and bad customer service, on their reactions to both, on their own experiences in working with customers as well as on their consumer behaviour. The results of the questionnaire were analysed by comparing them to the findings in the theoretical part.

It was found out from the questionnaire that Japanese wanted customer service to be precise, to make them happy and that customer servant understood the customer's needs without a proper explanation. Bad customer service was seen to be that customer was not being listened to, they were embarrassed or they were not sincerely apologised to. Japanese seemed to care about customer service and did feel that it affected their consumer behaviour but the actual product was still more important to them.

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1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis handles the subject of customer service culture in Japan. The country has third largest GDP in the world and the population of 128 million educated wealthy Japanese makes the markets in Japan interesting for companies (The website of The World Bank, 2014). This said, just a great product might not be enough for success. To succeed in consumer markets, it is vital to have sufficient customer service to keep the customers coming back, especially in Japan, as it has quite saturated markets. That is the reason this subject was found interesting to use as the topic for this thesis.

The theory concentrates on explaining the driving factors behind the Japanese customer service culture, such as cultural values theories by Hofstede and Trompenaars as well as Japanese business etiquette. It should be noted that not all parts or factors of the two theories are used but only those that are felt to have importance to the subject. The consumer behaviour in Japan is also introduced, but in this thesis the stress is more on to cultural values and how they affect customer service culture in Japan. As the competition in Japanese markets is fierce, its importance and pressure to customer service in companies is also introduced briefly with customer loyalty. It should be noted that in this thesis, the main stress will be in customers who are consumers but some of the introduced subjects can be used in business to business customer service as well as business to consumer customer service.

The research part for the thesis is done through an email and social media based questionnaire with Japanese consumers on what they find good customer service and on their experiences on customer service. They are also being asked on their own possible work experiences with customers.

2 PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this thesis is to get a good view of Japanese customer service culture and to study how it is. It seems that no one has written a bachelors thesis of the subject in Finland yet.

Finnish companies who are interested in going to the Japanese markets will benefit from this thesis in knowing how they should handle their Japanese customers and how the customer service works in Japan. This thesis is suitable for anyone who is interested in learning about the customer service culture and culture in general in Japan.

Readers of the thesis will get a general understanding of the Japanese culture and of the Japanese customer service culture in one compact book with variety of theoretical information mixed with the opinions of the current Japanese consumers. By knowing how the customer service works in Japan, companies might be able to increase their Japanese customers and keep the already existing ones. They might also find out what kind of service styles should be avoided to keep the Japanese customers coming back.

The researcher is close to the topic from several years of learning Japanese language and having been to Japan as an exchange student twice as well as having done her practical training there so she has a good basic knowledge of Japanese culture. After working in the customer service field, she has gotten a good view of how the Finnish customer service culture is and is greatly interested in studying other countries customer service styles.

2.1 Research objectives

As this project is not a plan but possible guidelines, the objectives will be in question form. To avoid confusion between the questions in the questionnaire of empirical part, these research questions shall be called research objectives. The research objectives for this thesis are the following which of main one is presented at first.

What are the typical features and driving factors behind Japanese customer service?

How are the companies able to keep the Japanese customers they may already have?

What are the main issues that one should realize of the Japanese customer service culture?

Why does the Japanese customer service differ so much? Or does it?

What needs to be known about the Japanese customer to be able to provide customer service wanted?

What are the typical features in Japanese consumer behaviour?

How does the Japanese customer service work in practice?

What does the Japanese customer expect from the customer service?

What does the Japanese customer think of as bad customer service?

2.2 Conceptual framework

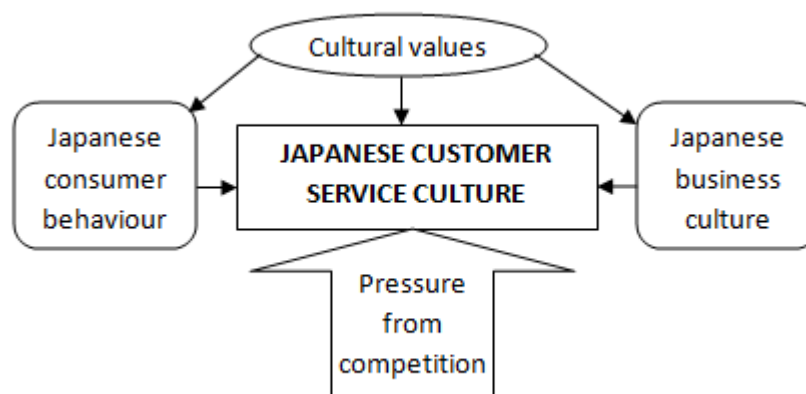


Figure 1. Perolainen, E. 2013. Framework: The relationship of cultural values towards Japanese Customer service culture, Consumer behaviour and Business culture.

The figure 1 represents the framework for this thesis and the relationship between the topics to each other. The basis of the theoretical part will be based on the cultural values in Japan which has effect on the Japanese business culture as well as con-

sumer behaviour and the customer service culture. Japanese business culture and consumer behaviour also affect on the customer service culture. The importance of competition will also be handled in the theoretical part of the thesis as it was felt to have a great influence on the customer service.

3 JAPANESE CULTURAL VALUES AS A DRIVER TO CUSTOMER SERVICE

3.1 Cultural values by Trompenaars

Fons Trompenaars is a Dutch theorist who developed the Trompenaars' model of national culture differences and has done 80000 surveys in 20 years to create the database for the theory (Karaian 2008). It is a framework for cross-cultural communication used in multicultural business and management consisting of seven dimensions. The dimensions are universalism/particularism, individualism/communitarianism, neutral/emotional, specific/diffuse, achievement/ascription, sequential/synchronic and internal/external which is referred here as attitudes to environment. These dimensions are used in problem solving whether it is between relationships, time or environment. In this study five of these dimensions are introduced as achievement/ascription and sequential/synchronic are left out. (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars 1997, 8.)

Attitudes to environment

One of the basis's of cultural differences by Trompenaars theories is attitude to environment. The cultures are divided to those that believe that the environment affects them, as the world has more power than one person, and to those who believe that they are only affected by themselves. Japanese would be considered to those who believe that the environment affects them. (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars 1997, 10.)

Trompenaars gives out example on Sony's Walkman, how it was created so that customers could listen to music so that they would not disturb others. This is quite the opposite to the western thinking of the device: not to let other people's noises disturb the music one is listening to. Also the way how Japanese wear face-masks to not contaminate others, while westerners would wear the face masks not to catch diseases from the environment. Customer orientation seems to be natural to Japanese and to be directed by customers is not taken as a weakness but turned in to harmonious interaction. The term "kaizen" which means improvement is the usual philosophy used in Japanese business of never ending improvement (The website of Jim Breen's WWJDIC, 2013). This philosophy is also used in improving western inventions, which is mostly taken as copying by westerners. (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars 1997, 10, 145-146.)

Universalism and particularism

By universalism and particularism is meant the way how people perceive relationships. In universalist approach the relationship would not affect on the individuals thoughts on morals and in particularist approach the relationships would exceed. (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars 1997, 8.)

Trompenaars studies found Japanese to be mainly particularists, but their thoughts were universalists on the subject of corporation. This was studied on how different nationalities would react if their close friend was to get a health insurance from the company they were working for. If they answered that they would tone down their doubts on the friend's health and would help the friend rather than the company they would be considered as particularists. Trompenaars found out in other studies on the subject of universalism and particularism that Japanese were more particularists with acting for their friends benefit but in this case they would not. It was speculated by Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (1997, 38) that this was because the corporate group was felt more important than one friend outside this group.

Individualism and communitarianism

In individualist way of thinking, the individual is placed before the community and in communitarianist way of thinking the community is greater than a mere individual. Basically this cultural value determines how people relate to others. Often individualism is interpreted as how a modern society would be but the “Five dragons” of Asia, Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan, tell us that communitarianist cultures can have very modern societies too. (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars 1997, 8-9, 50, 52.)

According to Trompenaars studies, group’s decisions and actions are more important than individuals for communitarianist cultures. Japan being very communitarian, they would, for example, never go to negotiations alone but bring multiple persons with them. This way they could get better idea what the company wanted and not just one individual’s opinion on the subject. This brings us to the Japanese “ringi” which means that one decision will be heard by all participating employees and everyone must agree on it making the decision process time consuming. (Aaltola 1998, 30-31; Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars 1997, 60-61.)

Emotional and neutral

The emotional versus neutral aspect studies which cultures allow the individual to express their feelings. The cultures are divided into neutral ones that believe that the individual should work like a machine to be more efficient and the emotional cultures see work as a human affair and emotions should thus be part of business. (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars 1997, 9.)

According to Trompenaars it is not accepted in Japan to show your emotions openly on work related issues or to show negative emotions in general. 74 percent of Japanese said that they would not show in open if they were upset whereas 41 percent of Finnish said they would not. The neutrality has an impact on the Japanese way of speaking as well and it shows as not saying their opinions straight. This is part of the diffusiveness as well as they go around the subject. (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars 1997, 69-70, 73, 77.)

Specific and diffuse

Specific and diffuse relationships study whether the relationship needs to be there before doing business or how separate one keeps their working life from their private life. Specific cultures see that the relationship comes after the business and it is not so important while in diffuse cultures the relationship is a priority for doing business. (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars 1997, 9.)

The Japanese are more diffuse, which can be seen as they do not go straight to business with new possible partners but talk about general topics before going into the specifics. It is even considered as rude to start talking about business in the first meeting and one should wait until the client or superior starts on the subject (Leaper 2009, 118). Japanese enjoy having drinks and dinner in between meetings with the new partners, however not inviting the partners anywhere means that the Japanese are not interested at all in doing business with the partner (Aaltola 1998, 29). The diffuseness leads to terms not used in specific cultures such as acceptance time which means the time that will be used to discuss the changes before implementing them. This method is being used to get to know the possibly long-term partner without hastily making deals with someone who would not be a suitable partner and it is believed that outsiders should be introduced before making any deals or contracts. The diffuse culture can also be seen sometimes in the consumer behaviour as the Japanese would not enjoy the specific western products as they are not integrated in the society. By this is meant that buying a Japanese product would be considered as supporting the development at local society and economy. However, Japanese do adore foreign brands and some get status kick out of expensive foreign products. (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars 1997, 89-90, 93.)

3.2 Cultural values by Hofstede

Geert Hofstede is a social psychologist and a professor who created the cultural dimensions theory. In this theory there are five different dimensions which are power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity

and long/short term orientation. Hofstede's studies are considered as a standard in culture studies and this is also the reason why his theory was used also in this study (Brewer, Venaik & Zhu 2013, 361). In this study, three of the dimensions are introduced as power distance and long/short term orientation are left out.

Uncertainty Avoidance

Japan has the highest score in Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance index, meaning how they create rules and regulations so that there would not be any actions done outside of the organization's practice (Hofstede 2001, 147, 150). This explains the use of customer service manuals which are mostly used in restaurants or shops with young part-time workers who might not have high customer service skills (The website of Biglobe 2014). Uncertainty avoidance can be seen how the Japanese make decisions in groups, thus avoiding individual risk as described already in Trompenaars' individualism/communitarianism part (Hofstede 2001, 154). When the least amount of risks is taken in the working environment, the leader of the group, employer or supervisor, is least exposed to the risks and thus protected. This shows the connection of uncertainty avoidance and collectivism and communitarianism. (Foster 2000, 17.)

Hofstede (2001, 170) compared the results from De Mooij's (1998a, 1998b, 55-73, 2001) studies on consumer behaviour to his cultural value indicators and found out that countries that have high uncertainty avoidance buy products that are considered pure, or by using them one cleanses, such as mineral water, fruits, sugar and textile washing products. There was also more interest on purchasing precious metals or gems than stocks as their value is more stable. Also cars that were rather new than old were more popular as newer cars would be more reliable. People from cultures with high uncertainty avoidance would not paint their houses or do their wallpapers themselves but rather hire experts to do them. In the case of Japan, this could be explained with the reasoning that many Japanese do not use wallpapers or they live in apartment buildings and do not need to paint their houses themselves. They would also be less likely to purchase books or newspapers and the payment terms would be longer than in the countries with low uncertainty avoidance culture. Japanese however tend to read a lot as there are over 120 newspapers and over 3000 magazines printed (Pukkila 2002, 70).

Individualism and collectivism

Individualism and collectivism study if an individual stands for themselves or for a certain group. Japan got medium scores on individualism in Hofstede's study (2001, 213), meaning that it was not more individualistic nor collectivist, but it is mentioned that individualism is growing in there. Collectivist values however describe Japanese values better so they will be introduced. Most collectivist countries have high-context communication style, which means that not all has to be mentioned. For example, in comparison to Americans, who have highly individualist culture and low-context communication style, the contracts are shorter in Japan. This communication style can also be seen as the word "no" is rarely used and other polite ways of disagreeing are used instead of plainly rejecting. This would cause one to lose their face and it creates anxiety within the Japanese. The agreeing word "hai" means not just yes but more often "I heard what you said". So to dodge the need to use yes-no answers, it would be better to ask open questions from the Japanese. (Aaltola 1998, 32; Foster 2000, 20; Hofstede 2001, 212, 228.)

When comparing Hofstede's studies to De Mooij's (1998a, 1998b, 2001), it was found out that Japanese would be more likely to live in apartments or flats than in detached houses with gardens. They would not be likely to have pets or read as many books, but were enjoying TV more now than before. It was also found out that they would be more likely to rely on social network for information. (Hofstede 2001, 245.)

Masculinity and Femininity

Japan has high masculinity scores meaning that careers and money are highly looked on. Masculinity index studies how the gender roles show on emotional and on social grounds. (Hofstede 2001, 279.)

Hofstede found out from De Mooij's studies (1998a, 1998b, 2001) that in masculine cultures females would be most likely to be the ones who make food purchases while males did the main purchases. In Japan however the females or mothers of the family

would tend to be in hold of the money and thus do the shopping themselves for the family (Foster 2000, 15; Pukkila 2002, 76). It could be deduced from the study that Japanese would be more likely to buy foreign products, expensive watches and real jewellery in the need of showing off, which is considered very masculine. People from masculine cultures would be more likely to purchase business class seats when flying for leisure to show status. A study done by Weitzel (1999) showed that some designs on products correlated with Hofstede's cultural indexes. From this could be found that masculine cultures would not want to have expressive packaging, as it was more popular in more feminine cultures. Japanese consumers however enjoying their cute products, this might not be relevant. (Hofstede 2001, 311-312, 450.)

3.3 Japanese language

Japanese business life speaks and writes Japanese, so it is useful to hire a translator and prep them carefully before negotiating. The use of translator also puts the Japanese partner at ease as the Japanese do not often feel comfortable speaking in English. Even if one would be able to speak Japanese, it would be better to use English to lessen etiquette mistakes with the polite Japanese language. If one is staying in Japan for longer period it would be helpful to study the language for everyday life for one's own sake. It is not very similar to any other Asian language so knowledge of those might not be helpful, although there are many words that originate from foreign languages. (Foster 2000, 19-20; Pukkila 2002, 103-104.)

The Japanese language has three different politeness levels in speech which are used in verbs. First politeness level is used with those who are the same hierarchy level or unfamiliar; the second is lowering oneself when talking to higher hierarchy members and it is used with first pronoun; and the third is respecting manner to one from higher hierarchy and it is used when talking of actions of the other party. All of these structures are shown in table 1 for the word "eat". This polite language is called in general "keigo" and it is considered difficult to even natives. "Keigo" is taught in special courses with different bowing techniques to those who are going to work in the service area. (Pukkila 2002, 102.)

Table 1. Perolainen, E. 2014. Table of examples of Japanese polite language.

Dictionary form	“Teineigo” – polite language	“Kenjougo” - lowering oneself	“Sonkeigo” - lifting the other
Taberu (eat)	Tabemasu	Itadaki	Meshiagaru

In Japanese culture it is important to add the word “san”, loosely translated as mister or miss, after the Japanese surname to show respect. The gender or marital status does not have any difference to the suffix. If the status or title of the other person is known it is usually added after the name or without the name but with “san”, for example “buchou-san” for senior manager or Kumei-kachoudairi for deputy manager Kumei. Without adding it would mean that the person in question was under one hierarchically and is considered very rude. One should never add “san” to own name. (Aaltola 1998, 34; Foster 2000, 21; Pukkila 2002, 103.)

3.4 Religious values

If asked, many Japanese would answer that they are not religious, but the culture and values in Japan are highly influenced by religion as well as in other Asian countries. The influence can be seen in everyday life and in working environment. Religions in Japan are not institutionalized as in west and one could say that the religions would be more similar to life philosophies than religions as almost no-one claims to believe in just one religion in Japan. Most Japanese are born and get married in Shinto or Christian style, live by the Confucian teachings, party the traditional parties based on folk religions and are buried in Buddhist way. (Foster 2000, 13-14; Pukkila 2002, 85-86.)

Confucianism is the leading philosophy in East-Asia and the beliefs are based on hierarchy between relationships (Hofstede 2001, 114). This leads to the habit of promoting those who are older or have been working in the same company for longer periods as in western cultures those who are suitable would get the promotion (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars 1997, 107). Other than hierarchy, age or seniority Confucianism emphasizes rituals, family, groups, loyalty, obligation and education. These can be seen in Japanese bureaucracy, awareness of etiquettes, respecting ones

parents and appreciating education. With elderly people, younger ones are silent and respectful and loyalty to employer and one's group cannot be broken easily. Etiquettes and rituals such as bowing, using polite Japanese language "keigo" and exchanging business cards are thus part of Confucianism. (Foster 2000, 14; Pukkila 2002, 89-90.)

Shinto beliefs are based on keeping the harmony and cleanliness. If one loses their cool in negotiations or does not fit in the group in school, there won't be another chance later. As a Japanese proverb says the nail that sticks out will be hammered down and this is used so that no-one works too individually, even prime ministers who are too bold are changed to another one soon. Shinto can be practiced only by Japanese and only Japanese can be Shintoist. (Pukkila 2002, 86, 88.)

Buddhism has had a very deep impact on Japanese culture and mentality. For example, a person who knows flower arrangement, tea ceremonies, gardening as well as martial arts is the icon of Zen Buddhism. Japanese have often family graves in the vicinity of a Buddhist temple and many have Buddhist home altars for the deceased. Buddhist values include personal sacrifice, hard work and patience that can be seen in the business culture as well. (Foster 2000, 14; Pukkila 2002, 88-89.)

Loosing face is a very common concept in most Asian countries and it originates to religious values. One loses their face after being disgraceful and when face is lost, one loses the respect gained. Disgraceful actions are decided by the group which is influenced by the actions. Asian cultures are often called shame cultures and western cultures sin cultures based on the religious beliefs. Hofstede said also that cultures are divided into shame and guilt cultures which of shame cultures are collectivist cultures and guilt cultures individualist as in shame culture you need an audience but in guilt cultures one knows themselves if they did something wrong. (Hofstede 2001, 212; Pukkila 2002, 85.)

4 JAPANESE BUSINESS CULTURE AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

4.1 Japanese business culture in general

The Japanese take seriously the local culture where business is done and do a lot better in assimilating to local culture than most western companies do (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars 1997, 4). At first glance Japanese culture could be seen as similar to western societies due to the high living standards and technology, but that would be a mistake. Japanese love to take the good parts of foreign cultures and sculpt them to fit the Japanese society. Harmony, hierarchy, group-mentality and rituals are the base of Japanese business culture and individuality is not appreciated. One could say that without a group you are nothing. (Pukkila 2002, 93, 97.)

The collectivist culture can be seen in the way how Japanese companies are grouped. There are thousands of trading companies in Japan which of the largest are called Sougou Shousha, general trading companies, which again belong to their own keiretsus. Keiretsu is a Japanese business model which is bank-centred financing system (Park & Yuhn 2012, 261). Greatest of Sougou Shoushas are Itochu, Sumitomo, Marubeni, Mitsubishi and Sojitz. It is considered easier to enter the Japanese markets through general trading companies than entering to the markets alone as they are in control of half of the exports and have many connections. This is the case especially if the company is relatively small and does not have an international brand to help enter the markets on their own. (Aaltola 1998, 30; Keegan 2004, 14; Pukkila 2002, 40, 43.)

Japanese corporate cultures are driven by the idea of being similar to family. Having an equal relationship is not important but the relationship to one's higher and lower ranks in the group is. Older employees are usually in leading positions and the relationships between seniors and juniors is idealised to be similar to siblings showing respect and loyalty to the senior and assistance and fairness to the junior. However, the relationship between employees and employers is very strict (Aaltola 1998, 29, 33). One should always lower themselves in front of the people from the higher hierarchy group to make them self look better in front of the others. Relationships are

depended on obligation to the other and then again gratitude of that leading to favours. Relationship to the corporation has traditionally been long-term and devoted but it has been changing recently as youngsters have been more interested in leisure than creating careers. There were 2 million “freeters”, people who are not full-time employees or freelancers, in 2002. The figure has however decreased to 1.8 million in 2010 (The website of Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare). (Foster 2000, 16; Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars 1997, 159; Leaper 2009, 106; Pukkila 2002, 83, 98.)

Status or wealth in Japan is not flaunted to others as it is considered to be foolish and it could lead into losing one’s face. Everyone knows the hierarchy inside a company and CEO of a large company can be noticed from platinum cards to best clubs, having season pass to expensive golf clubs and going to leisure and shopping holidays abroad. From attire one’s status can be seen from expensive pens, belts or watches. (Pukkila 2002, 97-98, 105.)

Japan having very masculine culture, most of the higher positions are held by men and females have not been getting very far in business. This is however changing slowly but surely. Before it used to be that the Japanese females joined the company, hoping to find a husband and then resigned after marrying. Now on the other hand females often remain working after marrying and getting children and make 40 per cent of the whole workforce. Many foreign companies in Japan have also been hiring young academic women as they are multilingual, social and career oriented. Basically, a very intelligent and active woman from a highly respected university could become highly ranked and valued in Japanese society. Unfortunately, most Japanese females tend to work only in certain feminine fields and are working only as part-time or temporarily. It is difficult to find Japanese women in real authoritative positions in Japanese business organizations. Western females on the other hand are almost always treated as an equal business partner and are not expected to behave like the Japanese women do. (Aaltola 1998, 33; Foster 2000, 15; Leaper 2009, 110-111; Pukkila 2002, 97, 143.)

Japanese have very precise concept of time in business and in general. Deliveries should be early and appointments precise. A few minutes lateness from a meeting

should be informed in beforehand and delay of more than 5 minutes should be explained and apologised. The Japanese work average of 55 hours a week even though the office hours would be from 9am to 5-6pm. Most often stay until 7pm and if the boss tells that one should stay overwork or come on weekend, it is impossible to refuse if one wants to stay at the company. In the official figures the overtime might not be shown as the Japanese might not claim their overwork hours but do it for free. It has also been considered rude to leave before your boss leaves, or come in the morning after them. If superior asks to join some after work karaoke or drinks it cannot be refused or it could have some serious effects on one's position at work. (Aaltola 1998, 31; Foster 2000, 17; Leaper 2009, 105-106, 117.)

However, the employee's rights have been changing as the employees demand less hours and more paid holidays and the working hours have been decreasing a few percentages per year. Even though the weekly hours are common timetables, it does not particularly mean that the Japanese are efficient or the whole work hours are used working. The long working hours are mostly correlating hierarchy and habits that have been long practiced; also meeting customers outside of the office can be time consuming. (Aaltola 1998, 31; Foster 2000, 17; Leaper 2009, 105-106, 117.)

As mentioned previously in Trompenaars cultural values, Japanese do not reveal their true emotions in business. To keep the harmony balance, and not to lose one's face, the Japanese divide their thoughts in "tatemae" and "honne". "Tatemae" means official stance or public position and expresses politeness, modesty and it avoids conflicts. It is thus used in formal situations such as in the office, with superiors and in public places. "Honne" on the other hand means the real intention or motive and expresses the real thoughts of Japanese and is used in more spontaneous situations. If one expresses their "honne" to a higher rank person or to someone they are not very close to, they are seen as inconsiderate. This is why often people of high ranks only hear half-truths. If one disrupts the harmony, they won't be given another chance so it is better to be patient and not get nervous. (Foster 2000, 18-19; The website of Jim Breen's WWWJDIC 2013; Pukkila 2002, 96-97.)

4.2 Japanese business etiquette

Etiquette in Japan is very important and can be difficult to understand for foreigners. However one can manage with accustomed manners if they are not too arrogant. One must always be aware of who is who and what is whose relation to the other as the hierarchy is everything in Japan. (Aaltola 1998, 32.)

When introducing in Japanese business culture, firstly one should bow and then shake hands if offered. Normally Japanese do not touch each other but shaking hands is common when dealing with foreigners. First names are not used but Japanese often call their foreign business partners by first name as they are most likely easier to pronounce and remember. Names should be introduced clearly while giving one's business card with both hands with Japanese text facing the receiver. Business cards are vital in Japan, not only businessmen carry them but almost every adult. One should also bow a bit when receiving a business card. The business cards should be in both English and Japanese to make it easier for the Japanese to know how to pronounce names. After receiving the business cards it is good idea to keep them on the meeting table in the same order as the Japanese are sitting to keep up with everyone's names. It is important to remember everyone's names as polite and trustworthy partner never forgets their business partner even if they met only once. Also just looking at the cards and commenting politely before putting them away in a case is possible. It would be a great etiquette mistake to just put the business card away straight after receiving it and not even look what it says. As the status is hard to know by just seeing the other it is good to exchange business cards to see how to speak to the other and what the angle to bow would be. It would be great mistake to use wrong politeness level to the other. (Aaltola 1998, 31, 33; Leaper 2009, 118; Pukkila 2002, 101, 103.)

Introducing oneself can be complex in Japan and it is always preferable to have an introducer to create new relationships more easily. This is because Japanese companies do not usually answer to contacts from unfamiliar people because of the diffuse culture mentioned in Trompenaars cultural values. If the introducer is respected and the party getting introduced to the third party is in debt to the introducer, they are more likely to start some business together. When the introduced parties have gotten

mutual understanding they start communicating and meeting frequently, even if not to talk business but just to greet their possible partner, again because of the diffuse culture. If the trust is broken due bad quality of the products or lag, it might be hard to save the relationship. (Pukkila 2002, 100-101, 103.)

Dress code for business is very conservative. Men wear dark suits with white shirts and restrained ties. Dark socks, polished shoes, neat hair and nails are also preferred. In the summer men wear short sleeved shirts and ties are optional. Women wear suits or pants, classical accessories and neat makeup. (Pukkila 2002, 104-105.)

Good choices of topic would be one's personal interests or hobbies and to show your interest to Japanese culture. It would be better to not show it in an over the top manner as that would make the Japanese need to belittle their culture in politeness. Also a good topic would be one's business as this would help the Japanese to learn more about who they might be partnering up with. It is against the etiquette to talk about subjects such as Second World War, nudity, minorities or other subjects that criticize Japan or embarrass them. Politics or other debatable events should also be avoided as well as personal matters such as family life or income. (Aaltola 1998, 32, 35; Foster 2000, 24-25.)

4.3 Japanese consumer behaviour

Consumer decisions are driven by social and functional needs, for example, people need clothes for functional reasons but fashion is driven by social needs. While functional needs are the same for everyone, social needs are bound to the local culture. (De Mooij 1998b, 58-59.)

Consumer demand covers 60 percent of Japan's national income and is the core of the economic development. The Japanese however do not spend as much money as they are waiting for the prices to decrease and are afraid of losing their jobs. Still, foreign luxury brands Louis Vuitton, Bulgari and Chanel get most of their income from Japan as the Japanese are well-known for their quality awareness and adore foreign luxury brands. Cheaper stores have become more popular as of late, but good

looking high quality brand products have their markets. (Pukkila 2002, 11-12, 79, 125.)

It actually seems that brand department stores and cheap chain stores are doing well but the mid-price foreign shops selling mid-quality consumer goods are not doing as well in comparison and are often left unnoticed. Good example is the French supermarket chain Carrefour which stopped their business in Japan after only four years. The reason for Carrefour not succeeding in Japan was also studied to be that the Japanese do not usually do one-stop shopping. This means the way of purchasing different products in one store, which is the selling point for these stores. (Doishita, Haddock-Fraser & Poole 2009, 328, 344.)

E-commerce has been growing in Japan from the start of the new millennia; in 2001 the growth percentage was 80, but it has been slower in comparison to other countries (Callorda, Katz & Koutroumpis 2014, 36; Pukkila 2002, 157). Now over 70 percent of the Japanese population use the internet. The number has grown approximately 20 percentage points in about ten years, and 500 US dollars is used online per capita in a year (Heewon & Yangjin, 2009, 80; The website of About.com: E-commerce, 2014).

Japanese love everything that is new or cute. Japan being the country where the French popular young wine Beaujolais nouveau is sold most after France and cute objects can be found anywhere of anything. Even the most functional objects such as construction site signs are done in a cute way and thus humanised. The packaging and the condition of the product are very important in consumer products. If the packaging is broken or otherwise faulty, the Japanese logic says that the product is also. This way of thinking comes simply from the fact that Japanese companies invest in development of quality production which goes as far as packaging. (Leaper 2009, 30; Pukkila 2002, 125-126.)

In western countries many believe that less is more when giving selling speeches to consumers. In Japan however this does not stand. Japanese consumers need to be assured with long explanations and specifications on products to be sure if they want to purchase or not, just a nice image or memorable advertisement might not be enough.

Japanese consumers demand highly developed innovations and the service has to be up to the same level. (The website of Random Wire 2013; Doishita, Haddock-Fraser & Poole 2009, 329.)

In 2000 MIPRO, Manufactured Imports Promotion Organization, did a research on Japanese consumers' opinions on imported goods. They found out that two thirds from the respondents did not care if the exact same product was from Japan or abroad if the quality and price were suitable. On the other hand half of the respondents said that they had been sometimes disappointed in the quality of foreign products and were worried about product safety issues. If the foreign product had a well-known brand, they were popular and third of the respondents said that they liked especially the foreign products design. (Pukkila 2002, 126.)

Japanese consumers were found to value the quality of food products as much as any other consumer products. It was found that especially freshness, domestic products and health issues were valued in food products and the Japanese were ready to pay more for great quality. Interestingly, the consumers were interested in daily promotions but were turned off by continuous low prices. This might be due to the strong image of quality products being more expensive than those of low quality. (Doishita, Haddock-Fraser & Poole 2009, 333.)

The study done by Doishita, Haddock-Fraser and Poole (2009, 340) found some differences between different gender consumers. Men were found to be bound to purchase more ready-made meals and long opening hours of the shops were important as women purchased more fresh food and were drawn to bargain offers. This could be simply explained through the cultural gender roles. As mentioned before, traditionally Japanese men work long hours so the stores they buy food from need to be open till late in the evening and after long day of work they might not be interested in cooking. Traditionally females in Japan are house-wives or work less hours so they have more time to cook the meal from scratch.

5 JAPANESE CUSTOMER SERVICE CULTURE

5.1 Customer service in general in Japan

The word for customer is “kyaku”, but in customer service situation two honorifics are included in the word: “o” in the front of the word to mean honourable and “sama” in the end of the word for the polite way of referring to mister or miss (The website of Jim Breen’s WWWJDIC 2013). So the word comes to “okyakusama”, honourable mister/miss customer. Truly, the customer is treated like a god, not as a king as in western countries, starting from the way they are called (Leaper 2009, 167; Pukkila 2002, 132).

If the customers are treated like gods, the customer service should then also be of high quality as the products themselves too. Everything that is given to the customer should be double checked to not have any mistakes, also personal interactions or appearances. As part of the Japanese culture, bows are a must when customer makes purchases or sometimes just when entering or leaving the store. Customer service does not only mean the service gotten in the store when purchasing but also supply, after sales marketing, technical support, spare parts services, packaging and the condition of the consumer goods, detailed Japanese product description and manual as well as return policies. (Foster 2000, 28; The website of Japan Intercultural Consulting 2012; Pukkila 2002, 132-133.)

In retail customers are always greeted with “irasshaimase” which derives from the polite word of being or coming, meaning simply welcome. Sometimes this is just shouted to get the customers enter the shop and not just for the customers already inside. The shop clerks voice can be very nasal just to carry over loud noises or music just to get attention. The greeting is also used to show the customer that staff has noticed them and are ready to serve them. It is common to include this greeting into a customer manual for every time a customer enters the store. The clerks will do everything they can to help customers find the suitable product, deliver it as agreed and if it is not found, there will be copious amounts of apologies. Companies also wrap the

items nicely, some simply but many use different wrapping papers and make the wrapping look very luxurious. (Leaper 2009, 167; Stenberg 2011, 165.)

Japanese answer immediately to customer feedback and they often call or visit their customers even though there is nothing important to inform. If one does not react to feedback fast, it is possible that the customers would leave. Japanese would not trust someone who would be getting direct feedback and not react to it. It would be recommendable to answer to feedback within the day of receiving it just to inform that the feedback has arrived and it will be dealt with from now on. It is also better to answer positively to any inquiries to keep up the appearances than bluntly just inform that it is not possible. After sales services with technical support is the key in retail as in industry. Of course return policies usually do not cause any problems, as if there is any fault in the product it usually causes losing face of the store and manufacturer. Just to be sure on the condition of the product many exporters have checkups before shipping and after the product arriving. This could be efficiently done by having own representatives in the country who could also be in charge of the customer service. (Foster 2000, 28; The website of Japan Intercultural Consulting 2012; Pukkila 2002, 112, 133.)

If there are any problems discovered in the feedback it is important to react right away, as to any feedback as mentioned. It is always better to apologize than explain problems away. It does not matter to the Japanese whose fault it was and by apologizing a lot can be saved. After apologizing it is good to give the impression that the reason for the problem will be solved and further such problems should not arise. (The website of Japan Intercultural Consulting 2012.)

As explained previously in Japanese business culture, Japanese are very careful with time management and require others to be so as well. If any deadlines or delivery dates are given, they should be taken seriously and quite literally. The Japanese customer could be arranging other schedules around the given dates and being late from this could be a deal breaker. This is why the date given should not be too optimistic but a sure date when it would be possible. (The website of Japan Intercultural Consulting 2012.)

After-service is important to see if the customers were satisfied with the product and if everything is going well. This is also a great opportunity for selling other products and to deepen the relationship with the customer. Japanese companies usually have some mandatory visits to the customers after the sales and after-service is usually handled this way. (The website of Japan Intercultural Consulting 2012.)

The visits are good with new customers because Japanese do not trust someone who only makes phone calls or sends emails. As time consuming that this can be, it proves results. When meeting with the customers, the workers can meet other new people and the customers are informed of other products or services they could be interested in and are able to give direct feedback. This gives the opportunity to hear the customer's needs and creates opportunities for the add-on sales. This way of customer service has a built in place in the Japanese culture and it probably would not work in other countries. (The website of Japan Intercultural Consulting 2012.)

5.2 Competition and customer loyalty

Japan's markets are highly competitive and all competitive advances should be taken advantage of. Japanese companies are constantly monitoring their competitors to see what they are up to. This also helps knowing what the consumers are looking for. It is impossible to succeed in Japan if the marketing is not well targeted and competitors are not monitored frequently. More often than not foreign products have to be modified to the Japanese consumer's preferences. Trends change fast in Japan so just a mere desk study would not be sufficient enough as it would be better to have direct contact with the Japanese consumers. For foreign companies it would be better to have local experts to help. (Pukkila 2002, 129, 132, 134.)

When a company keeps their customers happy, there is a great possibility that the customers will come back and thus become loyal customers. It is understandable that prior customers lead to some savings on finance as less marketing is needed and price increase might not be as big of an issue than to new customers. Loyal customers also provide mouth to mouth marketing which, as said earlier, is something that Japanese would prefer as a collectivist culture. To keep the customers happy, the

product or service needs to be as wished by the customer and if the customer service is better than competitors, the possibility of customers using the company's products or services again increases. (Aydin & Özer 2005, 910.)

As services usually vary and might not be easy to measure, if at all, it is harder to evaluate customer service opposed to product quality. This said, services are regarded as one competitive advantage that differentiates one company from another. There have been done several studies that found positive relationships with services and repurchasing, recommendation as well as turning down other similar companies. These former three are all concepts that create loyal customers and thus can be said that positive customer service effects on loyal customers. (Aydin & Özer 2005, 912.)

If there are several identical services or products on the market, it is possible that the consumer will be using the same as previously preferred one. Even price change would mostly not have an effect on the customer as uncertainty usually is larger factor on consumer behaviour than price, especially with Japanese as they had the highest scores on uncertainty avoidance in Hofstede's studies. (Aydin & Özer 2005, 915.)

One factor also affecting the Japanese's uncertainty avoidance would be trust. If one has continuous positive experiences with a company's services or products, they create trust relationship to the company. By trust is meant that the customer can rely on that the quality of the product or service is constant and all that is promised by the other individual verbally or in written statements is held on to. Other characteristics related to trust would be honesty, reliability, fulfilment, competence, quality, credibility and benevolence. (Kantsperger & Kunz 2010, 5-6.)

6 METHODOLOGY

6.1 Research method

In the project part of this thesis there is information from the Japanese consumers on what they feel is good and bad customer service, have they ever met such customer

service, how did they react to it, if they have experience on working with customers and did they have customer service manuals as well as if they felt the customer service had anything to do with their buying behaviour. The answers to these questions will be gone in to further detail from now on.

There are two types of research methods used, quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative research revolves around numbers rather than words and the results in such studies are often shown as tables or graphs. The data can be thus measured by using mathematical or statistical methods. (Alreck & Settle 1995, 44, 452.)

Qualitative research on the other hand handles verbal data and it has to be analysed and defined by the researcher using their own judgment. The results of preferences, images, perceptions and evaluations can be showed in ratings, rankings, graphic features or in some other similar way. (Alreck & Settle 1995, 114, 452.)

This study is done by using qualitative methods as the study is done by written questionnaire through social media and emails. The questionnaire has both open questions and yes/no questions whereas quantitative methods would have made the questionnaire, for example, so that there was a statement and the respondent had to choose from 1-5 whether the statement was true to them or not. Japanese might not be willing to say any extremes as it is against harmony. They would most likely not choose the best or worst choice in a survey as it would be considered too harsh and emotional. (Bindl, Eggert, Laroche & Ueltschy 2007, 413, 418.) This is the reason the researcher chose not to use scales of 1 to 5 or such questions and chose to use open questions and yes/no questions. Qualitative methods are used because it was felt to be more relevant for the study's theme and style and it was felt that quantitative data would not give the answers to the study that were needed for the research objectives of the study. As the study is done in descriptive design, qualitative methods were felt to be more natural to this design.

Questionnaire was chosen for this project as the researcher felt the need to have the answers as written answers and not verbal as they would have been if interview was used as a research method. If the answers were in written form it was felt that there would be less misunderstandings done linguistically. Whenever a survey is done and

controlled by one person, it is called questionnaire. Firstly in questionnaires, the subject is introduced to the respondents, the middle part consists of the actual questions to measure the topics of the questionnaire in relevant order and the final part consists of other data of the respondents so they can be grouped if needed and then compared to other groups. (Alreck & Settle 1995, 143.)

The data gathered from the questionnaire will be descriptive rather than predictive as the questions will be made so that the respondents will describe their previous consumer behaviour based on their experiences and the behaving pattern will be expected to be continuous. By descriptive data is meant that the data is accurate and answers are based on confidence. Predictive data on the other hand is based on guessing and intentions. (Alreck & Settle 1995, 29.)

6.2 Population and making the questionnaire

The research method used in this thesis was a written questionnaire through email and social media. The questionnaire was done in Japanese so the meaning of the questions was completely understood and no misunderstandings were left to happen. The questionnaire had a greeting in the beginning to explain the meaning of it, what it is for and why, and the term customer service was explained so the respondents would not be misguided. There were 25 questions of the subject and four questions about the respondent. Twelve of the questions were yes/no answers and thirteen were open questions where the respondent had to describe or explain themselves. Finally there was an open place to write anything else that the respondents wanted to say and a thank you note.

Firstly when the preliminary questionnaire was done, it was checked for Japanese mistakes by a professional Japanese teacher and native, who gave some pointers with the questionnaire as well as corrected the mistakes. There was critique on the amount of open questions, as the teacher found that the respondents might find them too troubling to answer, but the researcher wanted to keep them to get the respondents ideas and opinions for the results.

The researcher posted a Facebook status asking for volunteers who would be interested to answer the study. There were 13 Japanese commenting on the post of agreeing to answer the questionnaire. One of the commenter's noted that they could spread the questionnaire to other Japanese as well. The questionnaire was then sent by email to two respondents and the others found it from a public Facebook note where they then answered using Facebook's chat function. The researchers email address was also written in the prefix of the questionnaire if any of the respondents wanted to answer using email rather than chat. The respondents had approximately three weeks to answer and most of the replies came during the first week.

The answers from the questionnaires were gathered into one blank answer sheet in Word and the respondents' answers were grouped by sex and age using different colours and bold text fonts. This made the answers anonymous and easier to read and analyze. The answers were analyzed with using the information found in theoretical part of the thesis and by using the researchers own judgment.

All in all, there were 12 responses by the end of March which of seven were females and five were men. Most of the respondents were from eastern Japan but one was from north Japan, one from Fukuoka and one was near the capital Tokyo. All of the respondents were over 18 and oldest were over 50 years old. The respondents are grouped as older and younger, females and males, younger males and older males as well as younger females and older females. In the groups, there were two older men, three younger men, three older female and three younger females. One respondent was 30-40 year old and she was introduced as a working adult as she belonged to neither younger nor older group of females. In this context, older group's respondents are those who answered to be over 40 and younger are those who said they were under 25 years old. The wording older and younger thus does not mean that over 40-year olds are old according to the researcher but older than those who were under 25.

As the questionnaire was placed on view to the researchers friends in Facebook and not for the whole population of Japan, the results would only be taken as basic and simplified information on the Japanese consumer behaviour and how Japanese react to customer service. As one of the Japanese respondents sent the questionnaire to

some other affiliates of theirs, the questionnaire got slightly more views than the researcher could have provided. The fact that there was only one respondent, who the researcher did not know personally, proves that it was more easier to get answers from those whom were personal contacts of the researcher than outsiders.

6.3 Validity and reliability of the study

The reliability might be biased due to all respondents, except for one, taking part were acquaintances of the researcher. This was seen how most of them were somewhat international and had ideas how customer service outside Japan was. This gave the answers some perspective on how the respondents felt about Japanese customer service in comparison to other styles. However, this was seen as an interesting, and quite unexpected, point to the questionnaire's answers.

If the respondents did not know who the researcher was, there might have been less responses and it could have taken longer to gather enough responses. The answers could have been less descriptive as the respondents would have not had the need to please the unknown researcher. On the other hand, the answers might have shown more opinions of regular Japanese consumers.

The people taking part were from both sexes and of different age groups so different kind of consumer's opinions were heard. The respondents' age groups were however quite strictly divided in university students or young adults' opinions and over 40 year olds opinions. Only one respondent was in the age range of 30-40. If there would have been more respondents of this age group, the results might have shown more variety. Since Japan has more of older people than younger, due to the low birth rate, older consumers' opinions are still quite important.

The research objectives of finding out the typical features and driving factors behind Japanese customer service were introduced in theoretical part of the thesis to be cultural values by both Hofstede's theories as well as Trompenaars'. The questionnaire results supported some of the main factors also. Japanese customer service differed due to unique consumer behaviour and due to the uniqueness of the Japanese culture.

From the responses of the questionnaire could be seen that some values in customer service seem to be international, but some are specific to Japanese culture or to cultures similar to Japanese culture. The values will be introduced in more detail in chapter eight.

Typical features of the Japanese consumer were found out to be quality-conscious, price-conscious, as they waited for the prices to be cut down but at the same time bought luxury brands, and they enjoyed cute and new products. Foreign designs were popular but simultaneously the quality of the foreign products was being doubted. Sex of the consumer also affected the consumer behaviour as women bought more fresh ingredients than men, as they bought more ready-made foods.

The main issues to be realized of the Japanese customer service culture were that the service has to be just as good as the product being sold and customers should be treated like gods. Staff should always react instantly to customer feedback and to any problems found and try to fix them to show their appreciation to the customer. If suitable to product and customer, after-sales services were a must. Japanese enjoy it for relationship building and it was a good opportunity for selling any add-ons. The other five research objectives will be introduced and answered after the questionnaire results in chapter nine.

7 RESEARCH FINDINGS

7.1 Customer service styles

Firstly in the questionnaire there was a question to ask what the respondents thought customer service meant to them. There was an explanation what the concept meant in the questionnaire but to find out if the respondents still understood it as it was meant, this question was needed.

Many replied that customer service played a great role with the customer's feelings, to make them happy, satisfied and relaxed. To provide this kind of service, the per-

sonnel were perceived to think from customer's point of view. Customer service was also connected with the atmosphere, in creating it and making it comfortable and peaceful. Customer service was felt as something fast, exact and it made the customer feel rich and gave trust that could not be bought with money and it was also thought to be included in the price of the product. There was also opinion that while customer service was important in shops and restaurants, it was not the most important part. One respondent, who was a working adult, said that the service providers were the face of the company and showed the effort the company made for their customers.

Second question was what the respondents thought good customer service was. The main answer seemed to be that good service providers could sense what the customers wanted without them actually verbally announcing it. This shows the Japanese communication style as it is high context communication where most matters are not said out but the other person is supposed to understand it from the context. The personnel were expected to understand customer's point of view and help them with their troubles and give them their own opinions. For the customer service to be actually good, it had to surpass normal service of course and "motivate the customer spiritually". By this the respondent meant that if he was feeling down and went to a restaurant for example and saw how hard the staff was working, he felt he had to do his part too. This clearly shows how collectivism works in Japan's society. From a person who is from individualist culture might not appreciate such simple acts but for young Japanese male this felt as something worth mentioning. Naturally smile during service and making the customer pleased was seen as good customer service. Here too, the Japanese need to seek peace and harmony was seen as important to good customer service. Timing the service was also felt as important, as the Japanese wanted help only when they needed and felt annoyed if staff was too clingy.

When asked if the respondents had ever had especially good customer service, all but one said yes. The respondents were then to describe a situation where they got good customer service. The experience of great customer service was described that they were surprised by the quality of the customer service and were not expecting to receive such good service. Older women felt pleased that they got help with questions

that were not even connected with the business and got help even if their requests were a bit difficult for staff.

Surprisingly, younger females mentioned how they liked the polite wording and the way of taking the customers mistakes as the company's fault. One young female described going out eating with friends and one of her friends read the name of a dish wrong and was very embarrassed of the mistake. Their waiter handled the whole situation in a way that did not embarrass her further or make a fool out of her but relaxed her and made them enjoy the rest of their time in the restaurant. This sort of need to neutralize the emotional situation suits the Japanese way of dealing with strong emotions. As Japanese are always trying to save face too, the staff did not make the customer lose their face but left them feeling positive of the whole experience in the restaurant. This also explains how the staff took customers fault to themselves.

The way of providing service online or by phone was also praised for its convenience as well as long working hours, which are very important for busy working Japanese. From the respondents only two said that they did not go to the same store again but the reasons were simply that they did not need their services or the experience was so recent that there had not been chance to go again. This shows how good customer service leads to customer loyalty as most of the respondents had used the services of the companies they had described.

As well as there was great customer service, most of the respondents had also had bad customer service as well. Two said that they had not experienced bad customer service which of one commented that she had experienced some service that she was not completely satisfied with but it was not completely horrible so she chose no. Those who had experienced bad customer service described it as staff not working from their heart. They were sulky or greeted the customer only because they had to in prospect of the customer manuals.

Not taking the customer in to notice or not listening carefully enough was seen as a negative point. If the staff did not notice the customer in a restaurant and they had to shout for the waiter to come, they felt embarrassed. This could lead to losing face

which is something the Japanese never want to experience. One respondent explained how she wanted to redesign her house's entrance but the contractor did not take any notes how she wanted it to be and made it completely the opposite of the desired way. As mentioned before, making the customer wait was also a negative point for the busy Japanese.

When asked how their experiences could have been improved, some of the answers were quite intriguing; an older female said she wanted the staff to fake their smiles and greetings to be happy but a younger male said that it was better to not be greeted at all than get a half-hearted greeting. As Japanese have usually valued these greetings and they have deep roots in the Japanese tradition and culture, it could be that the younger generation does not take interest to them as much as the older generation. It would have been interesting to ask whether these two would have agreed with each others' opinions.

The customers also wanted apologies if there were any mistakes instead of denials or to be left waiting. Only one respondent said that he used the services of the business which of service he was not satisfied with. He explained that he goes to the same restaurant since the food is good and the service depends on the staff.

7.2 Problems and giving feedback

From the twelve respondents nine had returned products and seven had made complaints. None of the older men had done any complaints to stores and this could have something to do with the traditional gender roles of Japan. As said in the theoretical part of this thesis, traditionally men have been those in the family who make the money but women are the one who use it. Most likely females would be more interested in what kind of products they purchase and what kind of service they receive. Also the other older male respondent was the only one who said that he went to the store, which of customer service he was not pleased with, again, so it could be that he is an easy to please customer who would probably not make complaints even if he was not completely pleased with the stores or their products. Most likely those who had no experience in returning products or making complaints wanted to avoid show-

ing negative emotions and showed their dissatisfaction by not returning to the store or not purchasing the products of the company anymore.

When asked how the experiences of returning goods or making complaints were, most of the respondents said that they were good, as they were treated well and the service providers listened to them, were polite and tried to make them as pleased as possible with the outcome. This would be mostly done to keep the customer coming back and to save the company's face as returning products is usually connected with negative feelings. Only one young male said that he was not treated well even though the product being returned was broken from the beginning. As there was only one comment like this, it can be seen as an exception to a rule.

The amount of the respondents who had given feedback of any sort to a store or a company was divided to seven who had and five who had not. The ones who had given feedback were of both sexes and the age did not matter. As normally Japanese want to keep the balance of harmony many would not tell their opinions out loud. In this case too five out of seven had given feedback in written format. This is why many restaurants offer questionnaires at the end of the meal or near the register to be filled after payment. The written feedback is good method as many Japanese do not want to say straight out if there are some problems due to the neutral way of dealing with their emotions. The way of writing out their opinions carefully rather than saying it out loud can be thus seen as an easier option.

The two respondents who had given oral feedback were both females, one older and one younger. The younger female had given positive and negative feedback to different stores. Where she gave positive feedback, the staff had wished to see her again in the store and when she did come back again they remembered her. As said before in the theoretical part, a trustworthy business partner never forgets their partner and this could be linked to customer service also. Where she made complaint, she was apologised to and the staff said the matter would be taken care of but she was not sure if it was just empty words or if they really did improve their service.

The older female had given negative feedback and she felt that the regular staff had a very bad response to her feedback, so she had asked them to call their manager. The

manager had then apologised humbly which pleased her. As mentioned in the theoretical part, companies can save a lot by apologising. Japanese customers prefer apologies to explanations and it is highly possible that the other staff might have tried to explain than just simply apologised which then annoyed the customer.

Two of those who had left written feedback said that as they did not give out any contact information, there was no reaction from the stores but the other commented that staff was happy to receive feedback anyways. Two other males who had given written feedback were pleased with their replies which were fast, polite and showed gratitude, even if there was a problem in the beginning. The way how the feedback was handled reflects the same as described before in theoretical part. Customer feedback was to be handled fast and polite to keep the customer loyal to the company. From this can be seen that this way of handling feedback is the best method to keep the customers happy.

One adult female however felt very troubled of the outcome of her feedback as she had given anonymous feedback in the official webpage of a company. She was recognized from her unique feedback and the store manager and staff involved in the case had come to visit her home with handmade sweets. She felt this action was totally unnecessary as she had just given out her opinion to improve the service. It could be that the store manager and staff wanted to save their face by going this far but ended up only annoying her. From this can be seen that it could be harmful to business to go too far in pleasing customers, as everything needs to be in balance.

7.3 Own experiences with customers

From twelve respondents eight had their own experience of working with customers. What they described as a memory of their best service involved of taking care of customers needs as an individual and listening carefully. Two described how they had helped customers who were handicaps, one young female described how she had worked in a tavern and tried to customize her way of serving the customer, whether they were drinking quietly alone or wanted to have a good time. One young male described being a helper in wedding ceremony and when there was some trouble with

the ceremony continuing as planned, he did his foremost of making the ceremony go on as it should have. One female had work experience as an interior advisor and she had many meetings with the customers on a daily basis and had to listen carefully to their needs and preferences.

The customers' general reaction was the same, as they were happy with the service. Some just simply smiled to the staff; some promised to come again and did. Customers even went as far as saying that they came back because the respondent was working there. One young male who had helped a customer with wheelchair received a letter which he still keeps as his treasure and the customers of the respondent who was an interior advisor went as far as asking her to visit their house to see how it turned out.

When asked if the work place had any customer manuals the group was divided in half. The four who had manuals were all young doing part time jobs where the manuals are mostly used. The respondents however felt that the manuals were about basic matters and a young male even went as far as saying that the manual could not be used in real situations so it was the same as garbage. Young females commented that the manuals were mostly about greetings, how not to talk private matters in front of customers and how to deal with difficult customers without being impolite.

As said, the customer manuals were about phrases used in customer service in Japan and not about actions as much. This could be because of the nature of the part time job but it could also be the main part of the manuals in general. Phrases and greetings are highly important in Japanese culture and it could be that if they were not said correctly, customers could get upset. Generally these part time jobs using customer manuals were not difficult jobs, they were mainly restaurants and taverns, and the job was meant for young people who may not have had wide working experience.

7.4 Consumer behaviour

Lastly in the questionnaire there were questions of the respondents' consumer behaviour. Most of the respondents would buy a good product even if the service was bad

as only three said that they would not. There were comments from an older female saying that she would make complaints to improve the service as well as comments from young females saying that it depended on the product. One said that if she absolutely needed it, she would buy it. The other young female said that if it was concrete product she would buy but if it was hotel or restaurant where she would have to deal with the service, she would not use her money there.

To opposite dilemma of buying a bad product if the service was really good, most said that they would not buy again from there. An older female said that it was more difficult to improve the product than it is to improve the service. Young female was wondering if the product next time would be the same or different and would it make any difference to her buying behaviour. She came to the conclusion that even if the service was really good she would not buy again especially if it was something she could buy elsewhere. This reaction might be because of the way Japanese consumers want to buy only the best and the competition is very fierce. Even though the product was more important to most respondents, nine out of twelve said that customer service made a difference to their consumer behaviour.

In the end there was place to write anything else that the respondents wanted to say. There were comments how the respondent felt that there was some imbalance as sometimes the service was way over the top than it was needed and one commented how the service even differed inside Japan. He said that in Tokyo, most of the staff will not call out for customers and in Osaka the staff would be even obnoxiously loud. An older female also commented that she felt the service to be better in Japan than abroad as there is no habit of tipping in Japan as there is in some other countries. This clears out also how one young male described that the price of the product included service already. In some other countries where tipping is usual, it could be that the customer service would be done to get tips whereas in Japan this is unheard of. An older male described his favourite restaurant, an ethnic restaurant, which had more relaxed atmosphere than in normal Japanese restaurants. This was because the waiters would not be always looking at the customers if they needed anything and he would have to ask for water instead of being poured automatically. He felt that in Japanese restaurants he could not relax under the eye of the waiters.

8 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The theoretical part of this thesis described two cultural dimensions theories by Fons Trompenaars and Geert Hofstede. From these theories could be found out that Japanese were emotionally neutral, thought the environment had an impact on them and not vice versa, they were group thinkers and identified themselves as groups more than as individuals and they would be loyal to a point for their friends and family, unless it was about greater group such as the company they worked for. They also were very precise on rules and tried to avoid mistakes as well as had masculine values. Japanese religions and believes had created the need for harmony and the fear of losing face as well as the Japanese values on hierarchy. Japanese language highlighted hierarchy with polite speech forms and titles. The business culture and etiquette then derived from these values and believes. Consumer behaviour in Japan described the need to show in society that they afforded luxury brands although the humble Japanese would not brag about it and chose also cute products as well as foreign goods. Medium priced stores were found not be as popular as high quality department stores and very cheap stores. Japanese customer service makes the customer feel like a god and not a king as in some cultures and the customer was wanted to have as a long-term customer by keeping in contact with them and keeping them satisfied by acting fast. The connection of good customer service and customer loyalty as well as the impact of competition was finally studied in the last part of the theoretical part of the thesis.

The research findings showed that many customer service values seemed to be universal. It could be said that most customers universally would want the service providers to make them feel happy and pleased to use the company's services by trying to please the customer and listen carefully to find out what their needs and problems might be. Smiling staff would usually create happy customer as the mood of staff can catch up to customer quite easily, even subconsciously. Happy customer servant makes happy customers.

There were however values that could be precisely important for Japanese or at least not that important to all cultures worldwide. For cultures that have religious holidays to keep the business closed, 24 hour stores nearly anywhere in densely populated ar-

eas of Japan might seem quite extravagant. To understand the popularity of them, one must understand the lifestyle of a regular working Japanese and the business culture in Japan. If a person's working hours are longer than expected, these stores and the ability to use services in Internet or by phone is vital.

Customers from low context communication cultures would not care if staff would not understand their needs without communication. On the contrary it could intimidate the customer as they were not expecting the other person to know without communicating before. While many foreigners might not enjoy staff being clingy or following them closely in a shop, they may not be annoyed from it. For a very low context communication culture the customer might even like that staff tries to help them as much as they can to make the search for the right product easier.

People from individualistic cultures would probably not be inspired from seeing staff in restaurant work hard as the collectivist Japanese might. The Japanese polite language is also something that is specific to countries that have this specific linguistic feature. Of course in other countries and cultures politeness is something that is strongly connected to good customer service, but there is only a point where it can go and some customers can be even annoyed if they are talked too politely if they feel it is said insincerely.

What annoyed especially the Japanese in customer service or made it bad was found to be embarrassment, making the customer wait and explaining mistakes. For most cultures one would probably not find it too embarrassing to raise their voice to call the waiter to table, depending on the occasion of course. For shy Japanese who usually do not want to stand out from the crowd and do not want to lose their face in front of others, this could be a deal breaker. Losing one's face is strictly tied to Japanese culture by religious or philosophic ideas. If one loses their face it could lead in a worst case scenario to being abandoned from their social group.

As said previously, due to the busy lifestyle of Japanese people, they do not want to be left waiting as they could use their precious time better than just sitting around waiting. For a culture that does not have fast pace of living, waiting could be used as social gathering and everyone would already be used to it but for Japanese it is terri-

ble. Already mentioned in the theoretical part of the thesis, when there are some troubles Japanese do not want to hear explanations why it is so but simply want to be apologised for. When large companies, politicians or even celebrities make large mistakes in Japan, there is a press release for the apologising.

The gender roles in Japan seemed to make an impact to the customer behaviour and making complaints. The older males had not made any complaints but it would be interesting to know if their possible spouses had done them instead. It could be said from this finding that possibly it is harder to please female customers than it is older male customers. One older female commented in the consumer behaviour part that she would rather give complaints to try to improve the service. Complaints as an individual could only go so far in improving the service but not the actual product as it is difficult for one person. The way how one adult female described the staff going overboard on apologising their mistake by coming to her house was also quite unbelievable. What the females wanted to do was improve the customer service, which is the idea of “kaizen” as introduced in the theoretical part of the thesis being the philosophy of never ending improvement. Due to this philosophy, Japanese companies take customers complaints seriously and benefit from them. As only one respondent mentioned anything outrageous as the story of the manager and staff coming by her home, it could be seen as an onetime mistake. However, another respondent had commented that even though he felt that Japanese customer service was good in general, sometimes the staff went a bit overboard on trying to please the customer and he felt that there needed to be more balance.

From the consumer behaviour part could be seen the same as said in theoretical part. Japanese consumers value their good quality products and do not settle for less as most respondents would not buy products even if the service was really good. It was however commented that if the service was important part of the product it would matter more, like staying in a hotel or eating in a restaurant with poor service. Still most of the respondents did answer that customer service did matter to their consumer behaviour but it could be seen that it was the most important factor. Most likely if the product was seen as good or sufficient but the service was bad or not satisfactory to the Japanese customer, they would just go and find another store with the same or similar product and purchase from there. As there are many stores of the

same field in large cities for shopping, it is only natural that the competition is very high and consumers can be quite fickle.

What the Japanese customers seemed to want was more balanced customer service and not to be constantly under the observation of the staff. One respondent did not like that sometimes the shop clerks were too clingy and one enjoyed the customer service provided by non-Japanese more as they left him alone. Japanese wanted the service to be precise, to make them happy and to be understood without communication or even if they could not describe what they wanted specifically.

It is highly possible that some respondents wrote their answers thinking that they had to explain Japanese culture to an outsider and chose answers that they thought would be interesting for the researcher. It is also possible that the respondents wrote their answers using “tatemae”, the polite and neutral way of expressing their thoughts, instead of writing their real ideas and opinions, “honne”. Also some of the answers felt kind of out of place and it was felt that the respondent chose the easy way out by choosing their answers so that they did not need to answer the open questions or answering to them in the shortest way possible. It could be just plain laziness of the respondent or they felt the compulsion to answer the questionnaire as they had already said that they would in Facebook.

9 RECOMMENDATIONS

Dealing with people from different cultural backgrounds is always a bit of a challenge whether the person is of a similar cultural background or from somewhere completely different. In this chapter, there will be some guidelines when dealing with Japanese customers in Finland or in Japan and the last research objectives of the research are answered in a concise way.

For a company to keep their Japanese customers loyal to them and their products, the company has to have great customer service besides a great product. Japanese should be served in a way that is fast and does not leave the busy Japanese hanging on. The

staff should stay positive and smile sincerely even if the customer was not the most easiest to deal with. If the customer gave any feedback, it should be taken into notice and not ignored and if the Japanese customer had any questions, whether connected to the business or not, it should be answered to. If the answer was unclear, it would be better to at least tell the customer that the company or the staff would find out the answer and if needed, the customer could be contacted later with the answer.

To be able to provide customer service that is preferred by the Japanese, companies must know that the Japanese are used to get the best and if they are not pleased, they might just go to the next store to see if the service is better there. Employees need to stay humble with Japanese and be ready to take criticism or feedback and learn from it. As Japanese might not be willing to give out criticism face-to-face, an opportunity to give out anonymous feedback should be provided.

The Japanese customers expect the customer service to be as good as the product is, polite and fast. They would mostly expect the customer service to make them feel happy and relaxed. The expectations might be less when the Japanese are dealing with foreigners but to serve them in a way that is similar what they are used to, would be a positive surprise to them and leave good impression. With good impression, it could be that the Japanese stays loyal to the company and would tell others about their experience as well to spread the good word. Japanese consumers rely heavily on others opinions, so if their friend or colleague would recommend any store, restaurant or product, they would be likely to look on to it themselves too. This is due the collectivist behaviour of the Japanese.

Japanese customer service in practice is polite, fast and the customer is tried to please as much as possible. Customers should be greeted with smile and talked to in a clear way. One should never embarrass the customer and even if the customer did something embarrassing, the personnel should take the fault and try to lighten the situation to lessen Japanese customer's embarrassment.

Japanese think that customer service is bad when the personnel is not working earnestly and does not smile. If the customer is left waiting without any explanations the Japanese will not trust the company and find another store or company that provides

similar products and services. Understandingly, the staff that does not listen to the customer enough or does not take their wishes into consideration is also felt to give bad customer service. Japanese customers should always be dealt with a smile, apologies if anything unexpected happens and listened to for their needs.

If a company has business-to-business connection with a Japanese company, it would be good to have a contact person in the company who had an understanding for Japanese culture and business style. If they just have Japanese consumer customers this is not needed. Japanese customers are used to similar customer service as in Finland, but are expecting more smiles and politeness from the personnel. The main ideas one must remember of Japanese customer service is the importance of feedback and taking it seriously to keep the Japanese customers and to apologise when needed. It is better to apologise and show gratitude to Japanese customers more than less. As with any customers, a company should never take Japanese customers for granted but make them want to come back for more by providing them with satisfactory customer service.

10FINAL WORDS

When the idea for the thesis was decided in December 2013, the whole subject was thought to be all clear, but it really started to unfold itself when the writing process started. The research found out that there could be several other interesting ways to look at the subject and many interesting parts to add on to the theoretical part and more questions to be asked from the respondents to go deeper in to the subject and find out more. However, if all interesting parts would be added, it would take double the time to write the thesis and the thesis would become much longer. Something that could be interesting to study on the subject of Japanese business could be the use of social media in business and marketing to Japanese customers.

Many of the sources were found out to be quite old and this was commented on during the second seminar in early February. New sources were however hard to find and at times it felt that there were none available. There are reliable sources on the

subject of customer service and some can be found on Japanese customer service but one must look carefully to find them. Of course some material could be applied and the questionnaire helped a lot. The theoretical part of the thesis was completed during February and the questionnaire was done right after it.

The response of the questionnaire was quite overwhelming since eleven commented on the first post of making the questionnaire that they were interested and 27 liked the post. Those who liked the post were not tagged to the questionnaire post, but only those who had commented were as it was felt that commenting shows more interest than liking, as it takes more effort. Seven of those who were tagged to the questionnaire post actually responded and four others came from the International Center where the researcher had done her practical training. One came from a friend who was asked to answer to it directly to create more balance on the age structure. It was suggested to use fewer responses and some of the responses were quite short and did not bring anything new, but as there were more responses it could be seen which answers were common and thus could be seen as main factors. The help from International Center could be seen as the Japanese way of being indebted, as the researcher had worked without any monetary compensation. Now it could be seen that the researcher is indebted to the International Center once more and she is going to try and give back after graduation.

Now that the thesis is completed in May 2014, the writing process took roughly half a year which was quite all right. The researcher had wanted to complete the thesis earlier but the writing process and finding the right time to write, delayed completing the thesis earlier. Even though the process was slower than expected, the thesis was completed within sufficient period of time.

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JAPANESE QUESTIONNAIRE

日本のカスタマーサービスについて

私の名前はEmmaPerolainenです。現在、サタクンタ応用科学大学の4回生です。卒業できるように卒業論文を書いています。テーマは「日本のカスタマーサービス文化」についてです。

このアンケートでは「カスタマーサービス」の意味は「色々な会社・店・レストランなどのお客様と接すること全て」です。

このアンケートの質問に答えるときは、いろいろ日本国内で経験したカスタマーサービスについて考えてください。特によいサービスと悪いサービスをうけた時のことを思い出してください。その時のあなたの反応やその後の行動について考えてください。

このアンケートの全部の質問に答えてください。質問の意味や他にも意味が不明なところがありましたら、私に聞いてください。他に日本語の間違いなども教えていただけましたら勉強になります。また回答で分からないことがありましたら、こちらからまたお伺いすることがあるかもしてません。もちろん、皆さんの名前、他の個人情報は一切卒業論文に書きません。

このアンケートには遅くとも3月の終わりまでに答えてください。

1. 貴方にとってカスタマーサービスは何ですか？
2. 貴方にとって良いカスタマーサービスはどのようなものですか？
3. 特に良いカスタマーサービスを経験したことがありますか？
①はい(質問4へ) ②いいえ(質問7へ)
4. その経験のどこが良かったと思いますか？

5. もう一回同じ店に行きましたか？

①はい（質問7へ） ②いいえ（質問6へ）

6. いいえと答えた方は、なぜですか？

7. 悪いカスタマーサービス経験したことがありますか？

①はい（質問8へ） ②いいえ（質問13へ）

8. 経験がある方、どこが悪いと思いましたか？

9. 店員はその悪い印象を消すために何をすればよかったと思いますか？

10. もう一回同じ店に行きましたか？

①はい（質問11へ） ②いいえ（質問13へ）

11. 10番に「はい」と答えたなら、なぜですか？

12. 今後の経験は前回よりよかったですか？

13. 返品したことがありますか？

①はい ②いいえ

14. 返品に商品に関するクレームを店にしたことがありますか？

①はい ②いいえ（質問16へ）

15. 返品及びクレームに対する店の反応はどうでしたか？

16. 店員にカスタマーサービスについてフィードバックしたことがありますか？

①はい（質問17へ） ②いいえ（質問18へ）

17. ありましたら、それに対する反応について教えてください。

18. お客様と接する仕事・バイトしたことがありますか？

①はい（質問19へ） ②いいえ（質問23へ）

19. 自分がした中で一番よかったと思うサービスについて教えてください。

。

20. お客様の反応はどのようなものでしたか？

21. その仕事・バイトではカスタマーマニュアルがありましたか？

①はい（質問22へ） ②いいえ（質問23へ）

22. ありましたなら、どのようなものでしたか？

23. 商品がよかったけどサービスが悪かった場合は買いますか？

①はい ②いいえ

24. 商品が悪かったけどサービスが良かった場合には次回も買いますか？

①はい ②いいえ

25. カスタマーサービスは貴方の買い物に関係ありますか？

①はい ②いいえ

26. 年齢を選んでください

①18-22歳 ②23-25歳 ③26-30歳 ④31-40歳 ⑤41-50歳 ⑥51歳-

27. 日本での出身

28. その他のコメントここに書いてください。

ありがとうございました！

ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF QUESTIONNAIRE

On Japanese customer service

My name is Emma Perolainen. I am currently studying my fourth year in Satakunta University of Applied Sciences. To graduate I am to write a thesis and my thesis' theme is about "Japanese customer service culture".

In this questionnaire the meaning of "customer service" is "everything when dealing with customers in all sort of companies, stores or restaurants".

When answering to the questions of this questionnaire please think about your experiences with customer service inside Japan. Please try to remember especially those times when you experienced especially good and bad service. Please think your own reactions and actions involving those experiences.

Please answer to all questions of this questionnaire. If you do not understand some questions meanings or there is anything else that is unclear, please ask from me. If there are any other Japanese mistakes it would be helpful if you informed me. If I do not understand your answers or I have any further questions, I might contact you to ask further questions. Of course, any personal information will not be written in my thesis.

Please answer to this questionnaire at latest by the end of March.

1. What is customer service to you?

2. What is good customer service to you?

3. Have you experienced especially good customer service?
 1. Yes (to question 4) 2. No (to question 7)
4. What do you think made the experience so good?

5. Did you go to the same store again?
 1. Yes (to question 7) 2. No (to question 6)

6. Those who answered no, why did you not go again?
7. Have you experienced bad customer service?
 1. Yes (to question 8) 2. No (to question 13)
8. Those that had experience, what made it so bad?
9. What could have the personnel done to make the experience better?
10. Did you go to the same store again?
 1. Yes (to question 11) 2. No (to question 12)
11. Those who answered “yes” to number 10, why did you go again?
12. Was the next time better than the first?
13. Have you ever returned goods?
 1. Yes 2. No
14. Have you ever made any complaints to a store?
 1. Yes 2. No (to question 16)
15. How did the staff react to any complaints or to goods being returned?
16. Have you ever given feedback on customer service?
 1. Yes (to question 17) 2. No (to question 18)
17. If you have, please tell about the reaction to feedback.
18. Have you ever had any jobs or part-time jobs that included customer service?
 1. Yes (to question 19) 2. No (to question 23)
19. Please describe the time when you gave the best service you could have.
20. How did the customers react to it?
21. Did the job or part-time job have a customer manual?
 1. Yes (to question 22) 2. No (to question 23)
22. If it did, how was it?

23. If a product is good but the service is bad, would you buy?

1. Yes 2. No

24. If a product is bad but the service is good would you buy again?

1. Yes 2. No

25. Does customer service have anything to do with your consumer behavior?

1. Yes 2. No

26. Please choose your age

1. 18-22 2. 23-25 3. 26-30 4. 31-40 5. 41-50 6. 51-

27. Residence in Japan

28. Please write your other comments here.

Thank you very much!