

# **CONSUMER ATTITUDES TOWARD CAUSE-RELATED PRODUCTS: A STUDY OF JAPANESE CUSTOMERS AND BENEFICIARY-MADE ITEMS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Much research has been done on cause-related marketing activities implemented by for-profit businesses. However, researchers seem to neglect that the beneficiaries make specific products used in cause-related campaigns, and for-beneficiaries organizations also run specific campaigns. Further research, thus, needs to be done to understand and support these self-help efforts. This study investigated customer attitudes toward products made by people with disabilities – the direct beneficiaries of the generated incomes. By interviewing fifteen female customers in Japan, this study found that the participants had a somewhat positive attitude. They wanted to buy or had bought these kinds of products. The customers' perceptions of product quality were good. However, their perception of product types and production scale was not. The women's perceptions and behaviours, or their attitudes, were affected by several personal and environmental factors. A recent factor, the COVID-19 pandemic, seemed to add some situational impacts. Implications for expanding cause-related marketing theory and improving cause-related marketing activities from the beneficiary perspective were discussed based on these findings.

**Keywords:** Cause-related marketing, beneficiary-made product, Japan, female customers, qualitative method.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Societies always have unfortunate and unlucky people, such as people with disabilities or limited resources, who need external help and support. In response to this need, individuals and organizations often organize or participate in charity-related activities, such as volunteering, making financial donations, providing referrals, recruiting disabled people, and giving gifts (Peloza & Hassay, 2007). These individuals and organizations can also buy products given to charity causes by businesses to generate extra monetary resources. Much research has been done about these particular cause-related marketing activities, which helps provide many implications for active businesses (Hong et al., 2021; Lafferty et al., 2016).

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Nonetheless, this approach only implies the traditional yet narrow business-oriented definition of cause-related marketing, a company's marketing activities aiming at creating monetary earnings to give to a charity cause in cooperation with a non-profit organization (Christofi et al., 2015). However, researchers seem to have neglected that certain products used in cause-related campaigns or initiatives are made by the beneficiaries, the people with disabilities or limited resources (Torres & Momsen, 2004). In addition, they have not acknowledged that several companies and organizations adopting cause-related marketing are run by or centred around the beneficiaries. As a result, a study on this particular aspect of cause-related marketing is mainly missing. Further research on these self-help efforts will be helpful for these companies and organizations.

Regarding cause-related products, in particular, prior research has thoroughly examined the characteristics of the buyers, the products, the providers, the related promotional activities, and the external socio-cultural environment (Chéron et al., 2012; Kim & Johnson, 2013; Septianto & Garg, 2021; Urbonavicius et al., 2019; Zemack-Rugar et al., 2016). Nevertheless, many of these efforts adopted a quantitative method in which predetermined theoretical models and scales guided the research processes. As a result, the research outcomes were often predetermined and might differ from reality when observed by other studies applying qualitative methods (Bagheri et al., 2019; Ryu & Kim, 2016). The advantages of qualitative research methods, such as generating in-depth information (Given, 2008), should be further utilized to understand better customers' perceptions of and behaviours toward cause-related products, especially those made or sold by beneficiaries and their organizations. A thorough understanding of customer perceptions and behaviours (their attitudes; Breckler, 1984) can be a significant foundation for designing more effective cause-related marketing campaigns, including product selection, production, and promotion. In addition, customers' purchasing power and altruism can be expanded to the beneficiaries, beneficiary-made products, and for-beneficiary organizations to support their self-help initiatives.

Therefore, this study investigates customer attitudes toward the purchase of beneficiary-made products. The study adopts a qualitative rather than a quantitative method to understand this issue better and expand the current knowledge about cause-related marketing. The outcomes will also provide implications for managing and marketing beneficiary-made products of for-beneficiary organizations.

Given its exploratory nature, this study chooses an economically developed yet academically unfamiliar country, Japan, as its context. With its economic development level and collectivistic society structure (Hofstede et al., 2010), Japanese people have a suitable philosophical background to engage and involve themselves in cause-related activities. However, research on cause-related activities in Japan is limited (Chéron et al., 2012; Sasaki, 2019). Studies on beneficiary-made products are largely missing. As a result, prominent issues involving this country's poor, aging, and disabled populations lack some essential keys to be successfully addressed (Chen et al., 2016; Miyahara et al., 2018). This study and its findings will help improve future cause-related marketing initiatives, particularly those involving beneficiaries and for-beneficiary organizations in Japan. Other developed and developing countries can also refer to Japan's experiences in creating and promoting similar cause-related marketing operations.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

*Product* types and values are essential to customers' attitudes in cause-related marketing. People are more likely to buy a cause-related product if there is a fit between the product and the cause (Chang et al., 2018; Das et al., 2016; Hamiln & Wilson, 2004). For example, milk and chocolates better fit the Red Cross food campaigns than printers and MP3 players (Melero & Montaner, 2016). However, the fit is apparent at two levels: consistent and complementary fit (Chang & Liu, 2012). For instance, mobile phones are consistent with the "digital gap reduction for children in remote areas" cause but complementary with the "medical research on radiation effects" cause. When product-cause-fit is considered, utilitarian products (utilitarian values) may be purchased more often (Melero & Montaner, 2016). Nonetheless, when customers' sense of guilt or gratitude is recalled, hedonic products (hedonic values) may be irregularly consumed (Septianto & Garg, 2021; Zemack-Rugar et al., 2016). The purchasing intention can further be facilitated if the products are especially needed by the customers (product involvement) (Lucke & Heinze, 2015; Youn & Kim, 2018).

The hedonic or utilitarian value of the cause-related products can also help determine their *price* (Strahilevitz, 1999). For example, people are more willing to pay a higher price (i.e., make a more considerable monetary contribution) for hedonic "frivolous luxuries" (e.g., a hot fudge sundae or a luxury cruise) than for utilitarian "practical necessities" (e.g., a roll of paper towels or a new washing machine). Often, a reference price should be introduced to customers to help anchor their purchasing behaviour (Briers et al., 2007), although there is evidence to advocate setting a premium price (Subrahmanyam, 2004).

Regarding their *distribution channels*, cause-related products can be found at specific retailers, such as donated second-hand products shops (Chattoe, 2000; O'Callaghan, 2019). Alternatively, they are sold through the channels of businesses involved in cause-marketing campaigns. In the latter case, the fit between the brand and the cause serves as a facilitator of customers' purchasing behaviour (Bigné-Alcañiz et al., 2012; e Silva et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the role of brand credibility is less significant (Lafferty, 2007). However, involvement with a cause can help improve customers' attitudes toward the brand (Lafferty & Goldsmith, 2005).

Concerning *promotion*, it is helpful to adopt a specific positive framing method of the message about the cause to strengthen customers' purchasing intentions (Bester & Jere, 2012; Han & Lee, 2022). Information about the campaign's goal is also appreciated (Das et al., 2008). Above all, the persuasiveness of the promotional message should be carefully conceived and delivered (Majumdar & Bose, 2018).

However, customers' perceptions of and behaviours toward cause-related products are not homogeneous. Many factors can affect these perceptions and behaviours.

*Externally*, customers in different cultures think, feel, and behave differently when cause-related marketing is involved (Kim & Johnson, 2013; Lavack & Kropp, 2003). For example, while personal pride influences US customers, Singaporean customers are directed by communal Confucian values (Kim & Johnson, 2013; Subrahmanyam, 2004). Customers' attitudes also differ regarding the context of the cause: domestic or international (Knowles & Sullivan, 2017; Robson & Hart, 2019). People seem to prefer giving to local charities rather than overseas charities.

Similarly, influencers closer to the customers, such as friends and family members, seem to have more impact on people's engagement with charity activities than the influence of distant celebrities (Dean, 2020).

*Internally*, customers' perceptions and behaviours are differentiated by their characteristics. For example, it is widely known that women have more favourable attitudes toward cause-related products than men (Moosmayer & Fuljahn, 2010; Ross et al., 1992). Age, education, income, personal religious belief and practice, and political involvement can also overtly distinguish customer attitudes, although the impacts of these factors may differ among various socio-cultural and geographical contexts (Chattananon et al., 2008; Cui et al., 2003; Rajan et al., 2008; Schlegelmilch et al., 1997). From a covert perspective, perceived guilt, pride, or scepticism can lead customers to engage or disengage in charitable causes (Coleman et al., 2020; Urbonavicius et al., 2019). Similar effects can also be seen concerning awareness, personal values, customer-brand, and customer-cause fits (Bigné-Alcañiz et al., 2012; Broderick et al., 2003; Gupta & Pirsch, 2006; Hyllegard et al., 2010). However, as these factors have a covert nature, it is difficult, or even impossible, for marketers to identify and control them effectively.

In summary, customer attitudes toward cause-related products are related to four primary elements of marketing: product, price, distribution, and promotion. Many external and internal factors can further determine their attitudes. Customer attitudes and the impacting factors will be further examined in the empirical research.

### 3. METHOD

#### 3.1. *Sample*

Informed by observations of previous studies in Japan and other countries, this study focused on female individuals since they have stronger intentions to participate in cause-related activities than their male counterparts (Chéron et al., 2012; Moosmayer & Fuljahn, 2010; Ross et al., 1992). This undertaking was suitable for the study's exploratory nature and would help reduce unnecessary efforts and resources.

The participants were purposefully selected among acquaintances of the researchers to ensure diversity in age and occupation (purposeful sampling) (Palinkas et al., 2015). The basis of the selection was the encounters shared by the researchers and the participants via work and volunteer activities. Some participants later introduced their acquaintances to the researchers to be interviewed (snowball sampling) (Noy, 2008).

In total, fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted over six months, from November 2020 to April 2021, to collect the data (Table 1). All interviewees currently resided in a prefecture in the West of Japan, the Kansai region. Hyogo, the prefecture involved, was the epicentre of the devastating Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake in 1995 (Oishi et al., 2017). Hyogo's residents got much help from people in other prefectures in Japan and other countries worldwide. Thus, they had experiences and inclinations to receive from and give to charitable causes, which was relevant to this study's purpose.

**Table 1: The Participants**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Time of Interview</b>
1	70s	Nurse	November 2020
2	60s	Retiree	November 2020
3	70s	Non-governmental organization manager	November 2020
4	50s	Office worker	November 2020
5	50s	Office worker	November 2020
6	50s	Research assistant	November 2020
7	40s	University lecturer	December 2020
8	50s	University lecturer	December 2020
9	30s	University lecturer	December 2020
10	30s	Office worker	December 2020
11	40s	Office worker	January 2021
12	70s	Retiree	February 2021
13	60s	Retiree	February 2021
14	20s	University student	February 2021
15	20s	University student	February 2021

### 3.2. Interview Content

The interviews were undertaken to gather information about Japanese customers' perceptions and behaviours (or their attitudes) concerning beneficiary-made products. The information collected involved the products themselves, their prices, distribution methods, promotional activities, and other environmental and personal factors surrounding or belonging to the customers. These elements were chosen based on the earlier review of the literature (Bester & Jere, 2012; Forbes & De Silva, 2019; Kim & Johnson, 2013; Moosmayer & Fuljahn, 2010; O'Callaghan, 2019; Subrahmanyam, 2004). They represented the four principal components of marketing (4Ps) and the affecting factors of customers' attitudes. Thus, the interview was theory-driven, and the sample of 15 participants was adequate (Francis et al., 2010; Guest et al., 2006). However, the point of data saturation (Saumure & Given, 2008), where no new information appeared, was also reached by the 15<sup>th</sup> participant. After that, the data collection was concluded.

Three different types of products were included: directly purchased, crowdfunded (similar to group buying, customers pay to help establish a business and then receive their products and services as returns), and auctioned (Forbes & De Silva, 2019; Sasaki, 2019; Urbonavicius et al., 2019). These products' purchasing methods represented the primary channels of acquiring beneficiary-made items available. Their inclusion in the interviews helped retrieve most information about customers' attitudes. However, these three types of products or purchasing methods were investigated simultaneously to compile as much data as possible. A comparison of customer perceptions and behaviours related to these three products was not considered since their natures, such as prices and distribution channels, were different.

### 3.3. Interview Process and Data Analysis

An interview began with a question about the participant’s behaviours (Have you ever bought such a product?). In cases where the participant had experiences with one product or more, she was asked about the reasons behind the purchase(s), the product(s), their price(s), distribution, and promotion. Otherwise, she was provided with fabricated examples, which the researchers selected after a preliminary netnography study (Xun & Reynolds, 2010) of the products available in the market (Table 2). These products were made by people with disabilities and sold via respective channels. There also were for-beneficiary organizations behind these people. The interview was then continued in the same way.

**Table 2:** Product Examples

<b>Purchase channel</b>	<b>Example</b>
Direct purchase	Cookies
Crowdfunding	Restaurant foods
Auction	Paintings

After the inquiry about her behaviours and perceptions, the participant was prompted to talk about those of her family members, friends, and other acquaintances whom she knew. This undertaking aimed to reveal the environmental and personal factors that might affect the participant. The context of the cause, domestic or international (Knowles & Sullivan, 2017; Robson & Hart, 2019), was also presented when appropriate.

All the interviews were implemented in Japanese and recorded with the participants’ permission. After their conclusion, the researchers analysed the content of the interviews (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008) using the raw recordings. The audio files were used rather than the textual transcriptions to keep the contents and contexts of the interviews intact. The textual transcriptions alone might eliminate the contexts and the nonverbal contents of the interviews (Wellard & McKenna, 2002). A deductive process was followed to identify the issues included in the coding scheme: products, prices, places of purchase, promotion methods, environmental factors, and personal factors (Nowlis et al., 2002).

The coding process was carried out manually in an Excel file and included three phases. First, the two researchers analysed one interview to define and familiarize themselves with the analysis method. Second, the two researchers worked independently on the remaining interviews, resulting in two different outcomes. Third, the first researcher combined these two sets of outcomes, using the significant points identified by both researchers. The final list of issues was agreed upon to ensure the reliability of the outcome (Kassarjian, 1977). The second researcher later transcribed parts of the interviews to illustrate the related points. The first researcher then translated the quotes from Japanese to English (translation – back-translation) with the help of Google Translate to present here. This researcher also adjusted the translated quotes to improve their readability. An independent researcher fluent in both languages finally checked and approved the original text and the translation to ensure their appropriateness.

## **4. RESULTS**

### **4.1. Products**

Regarding products made by beneficiaries, the participants especially cared about three issues. The first issue was the connection of the products with the participants' needs or interests. Food products like bread and cookies might be bought and consumed regularly. Others, such as art products, might not. In addition, the availability of alternatives was also a point of concern.

*Participant 1: It does not matter who made [a product], whether they are people with disabilities or not. Suppose I like its colour or design, [I may buy it].*

The second issue involved the products, including product range, type, safety, quality, and quantity. Overall, the participants did not worry about the safety of the products, including foods, because people with experience and responsibility carefully supervised the production. They particularly appreciated the products' quality because these products were often handmade, and the materials or ingredients were carefully selected. However, the participants were aware that the range and quantity of the products might be limited.

*Participant 2: I am really impressed with the abilities of disabled people concerning art products or paintings.*

*Participant 3: I think it is interesting to buy products that cannot be found elsewhere.*

*Participant 7: Cookies are easy to make. Chocolate is not. They need to heat the raw ingredients and then cool them down. [However,] there are experts and supervisors there to help them. Without these people, it may be impossible for disabled workers to make the products from the beginning. [Moreover,] such supporters' appearance also ensured the final products' safety and quality.*

The third issue is related to the makers of the products. The participants were concerned about the number of people with disabilities who could work independently and efficiently. Due to the limitations of the people making the products, the speed and scale of production might be too slow and small to produce large and frequent amounts of products. People with specific disabilities might only be able to produce plain and pre-created products after repeated practice. The production process, thus, would take extra time, and the productivity might be insignificant. However, some people with disabilities are very talented and creative artistically, such as in their drawings.

*Participant 10: Art products made by people with disabilities are unique, aren't they?*

*Participant 14: How could people make these beads? Aren't they special?*

### **4.2. Prices**

The participants did not care much about the prices because of their infrequent or irregular purchasing. However, they knew that the prices varied according to the specific products. In addition, some participants declared that they might not consider a product's price much if its purchase was meaningful to the recipients of the charity funds.

*Participant 10: I may buy a product if the price is acceptable.*

*Participant 11: I bought [the product] without thinking about [its price].*

#### **4.3. Places of Purchase**

The participants informed the researchers about particular places of purchase, such as city halls or train stations. These were designated places about which not everybody knew. If they did not frequent the stores' routes, they might not know about their existence. Overall, the participants described their places of purchase as small in terms of size and product options. The other channels, crowdfunding and auction, were almost neglected due to their impracticality.

*Participant 3: The number is limited, but there are small shops. They display and sell products made by people with disabilities at certain corners [in certain places].*

*Participant 10: If [the foods] are delicious, I may buy them given the shops are conveniently located along my frequent travel routes. Otherwise, I will not bother to go [if the shops are elsewhere].*

#### **4.4. Promotion**

Similar to other types of products, the participants received information about goods made by the beneficiaries through a variety of channels, such as from their acquaintances, friends, and family members (e.g., participants 1 and 7), catalogues sent to their offices (e.g., participant 4), social media (e.g., participant 9), and radio and TV (e.g., participants 1 and 10). The participants usually got the information passively. They hardly ever searched for the information on their own. One participant (participant 11) did try to locate the store that sold a product she received as a gift after checking its label. Her behaviour, however, was rare. It should be noted that the label was the most immediate promotion tool for a product (Coderoni & Perito, 2021).

*Participant 5: I would not know about these products if my friends and colleagues did not tell me.*

*Participant 11: Oh, I thought that [the product I received as a gift] was delicious. So, I checked the label, [found the shop's location, and visited it.]*

#### **4.5. Personal Factors**

The participants' purchasing behaviours were affected by several personal factors belonging to two large groups. The first group included some commonly universal factors, such as age, income or savings, education (especially education about disability), past purchase experiences, family conditions (e.g., marital status, number of children, and children's ages and education), shopping habits, lifestyle, price awareness or consciousness, trust or tendency to trust, and perceived values (e.g., money, health, and relationship). For example, older participants whose children were independent individuals (e.g., participants 1, 2, 3, and 12) seemed more generous with their spending on beneficiary-made products. On the other hand, younger participants (e.g., participant 8), whose children were dependents, were more reluctant. In the following quotes, the participants used the cafés as their spending targets because they would later receive products and services at said cafés as returns.



*Participant 1: [For a café to be established by a person with disabilities through crowdfunding] I can probably pay up to 100,000 yen. If it is done by someone I know, I can do that much.*

*Participant 4: It is difficult. I do not give money [for a café to be established by a person with disabilities through crowdfunding] ... I may give some if I am asked to, but I will not do this voluntarily. I guess that is what the wealthy do [not me].*

The second group consisted of altruistic factors, such as awareness of contemporary social issues, the definition of and experiences with charity and donating, and personal relationships with people with disabilities. For example, participants 1, 2, 3, and 10 had experiences with volunteer activities and, thus, had spent considerable amounts of money for charities, donations, and other causes. Participant 7, whose acquaintances worked in facilities for people with disabilities, purchased beneficiary-made products sold at bazaars organized by these facilities. In the following quotes, one participant has donated a lot of time and money to various causes. Another participant spent her money on a documentary, and that documentary was the product she received, in part.

*Participant 2: I have seen how hard these people [people with disabilities] work. Even though their products are more expensive than the regular ones, I still buy these products.*

*Participant 10: I had given money [via crowdfunding] before ... I paid for the production of a documentary about the disposal of animals, such as dogs. I love animals, so I support such things. I gave them 10,000 yen.*

#### **4.6. Environmental Factors**

The participants' purchasing behaviours were also affected by many environmental factors. First, many participants said they thought people in Western countries had more robust cultural and social support systems than Japanese people (e.g., participants 1, 8, 9, and 11). The reasons for this belief were mainly attributed to the differences in religions and geography (Japan being an island nation and isolated). According to the participants, citizens in Western countries follow Christianity, which is thought to be more generous and active with charities, donations, and volunteer activities. They considered Japanese people, who follow Shintoism and Buddhism and do not have immediate cross-border neighbours, to be less generous. Japan's social norms and values have shaped its citizens' perceptions of and behaviours toward people with disabilities and their products.

*Participant 8: I have lived and travelled in the UK. I think it is more common in the UK [than in Japan] that people help the disabled or that the disabled are out in the streets ... I feel that Japanese people are very wary [of donations]. We do not know where the money will go to or how it will be spent.*

Second, the participants saw little difference among people in different regions of Japan regarding their attitudes toward charity activities. However, they thought that people in disaster-hit areas, who had previously received help, would be more tolerable and charitable (e.g., participant 2). This observation further supported the impact of the personal factor of earlier experiences.

*Participant 2: I want to [support causes outside Japan]. When we were affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake [2011] and the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake [1995], we received a lot of help and donations worldwide. So, if there are opportunities, I would like to support [people outside Japan]. We appreciated this previous help.*

Third, the participants knew that there were many options for giving to others, such as direct donation, product purchase, and crowdfunding donation (e.g., participants 4, 5, 6, and 8). In other words, purchasing beneficiary-made goods is considered just one of many activities employed to help people. However, the participants did care about the origin of the cause, whether inside or outside Japan.

*Participant 4: A person with an average income can buy cookies or postcards in an old-fashioned way within their means ... If the prices [of the products] are reasonable and the purchasing methods are familiar, many people will want to buy them ... We have been more familiar with buying things than donating money. I think it is different in other countries, where donation culture is deeply rooted.*

Fourth, the participants stated that the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted or might influence their behaviours. Some older participants (e.g., participants 1, 2, 12, and 13) told the researchers that due to COVID-19, most events relating to people with disabilities and their products were cancelled. Unfortunately, this reduced the chances for supporters to buy the products and for makers to sell their goods. In addition, some younger participants (e.g., participants 14 and 15) said that they lost their part-time jobs due to the pandemic and thus might not have extra money. This fact undoubtedly weakened their intentions to buy extra things, including products made by people with disabilities.

*Participant12: Since last year, there have not been many [sales] events due to the COVID-19 pandemic.*

## 5. DISCUSSION

Research on cause-related marketing has often suggested that customers may want to buy a product associated with a cause if the product and the cause fit (Chang et al., 2018; Das et al., 2016; Hamiln & Wilson, 2004). Other research has postulated that the product must meet customer needs in order for it to be considered (Lucke & Heinze, 2015; Youn & Kim, 2018). This study on beneficiary-made products in Japan supports the latter proposition. Beneficiary-made products, like other products, must first and foremost be able to satisfy the needs and wants of the customers. Although several altruistic values (motivated by outsiders) may be taken into account in certain circumstances (Joo et al., 2016; La Ferle et al., 2013), the egoistic values (motivated by oneself and close persons) will determine the customers' purchase and consumption behaviours.

This observation is further supported by the fact that customers' purchasing behaviours are affected by the prices of the beneficiary-made products if these products are to be consumed regularly. Price perception is further influenced by the customers' characteristics, such as age, income or savings, and family conditions (Chattananon et al., 2008; Cui et al., 2003; Rajan et al., 2008; Schlegelmilch et al., 1997). Thus, altruistic reasons did not drive the participants to make purchases in the long term. Guilt and pride seemed not to affect these Japanese customers, though previous research in

other contexts indicated that these feelings did play a part in customers' purchases (Coleman et al., 2020; Urbonavicius et al., 2019). In addition, the locality of the cause (domestic or abroad) (Knowles & Sullivan, 2017; Robson & Hart, 2019) seemed not to influence Japanese customers, either.

Moreover, the lack and unpopularity of the distribution places and promotion information might also affect Japanese customers' attitudes toward beneficiary-made products (Gartner, 1993; Sanjuán et al., 2003). Perhaps, if the information and distribution network was expanded, more customers would know about these products and buy them more frequently. Furthermore, modern yet unconventional distribution methods, such as crowdfunding and auction, were not favoured. This fact seems to be the reality of charity donations in Japan (Sasaki, 2019).

The difference between customers in Japan and their counterparts in other countries might involve different mindsets. Specifically, the customers interviewed in this study regarded Western customers as more tolerant and generous when purchasing cause-related products. Given a lack of actual cross-cultural experiences, Japanese customers might feel inferior to people in the West (Harada, 2009). Alternatively, they might try to be modest, influenced by their culture and traditions (Yamagishi et al., 2012). This finding demonstrates the influence of cultural background (Kim & Johnson, 2013; Lavack & Kropp, 2003; Subrahmanyam, 2004) on customer behaviours concerning beneficiary-made products.

### ***5.1. Theoretical Implication***

From the customers' perspective, beneficiaries of causes are not only receiving charity from businesses. They also make and sell products to help themselves (Torres & Momsen, 2004). However, due to their limited abilities and resources, the product range is not extensive, the prices may be a little bit high, the sales points are limited, and the promotional efforts are weak and inefficient. Adding other significant factors inside and outside potential customers, beneficiaries in particular and for-beneficiary organizations, in general, face many problems with their cause-related marketing. Although their self-help activities are much appreciated, external support from for-benefit businesses seems inevitable (Christofi et al., 2015).

Nonetheless, too much focus on the cause while neglecting to actual needs of the customers may not be a profitable marketing strategy, especially in the long term. A fit among the three primary elements of cause-related marketing, the cause, the products, and the customer needs, must be seriously considered in future initiatives. More insights gathered from qualitative research attempts (Bagheri et al., 2019; Ryu & Kim, 2016), thus, are needed to understand other unknown facts about cause-related marketing.

### ***5.2. Practical Implication***

To date, cause-related marketing activities have often aimed at exploiting customers' altruistic tendencies to sell cause-related products (Coleman et al., 2020; Joo et al., 2016; La Ferle et al., 2013; Urbonavicius et al., 2019). Although it proved helpful elsewhere, this tactic cannot be adopted permanently or long-lastingly, particularly in the Japanese market. The reason is that customers are conscious that they have other needs to fulfil and other options to consider daily.

Therefore, for customers to purchase beneficiary-made products more regularly, managers and marketers of for-beneficiary organizations must make these products satisfactory alternatives. Here, utilitarian products like bread and cookies are more appropriate than hedonic products, including artistic items (Melero & Montaner, 2016). For-beneficiary organizations may focus more on these utilitarian products to increase their sales. However, the production scale must be carefully calculated to ensure a consistent and suitable quantity of products provided to the market. A cooperative agreement, such as licensing or franchising, with the established makers of existing products, the for-profit organizations, can also be considered. For example, social franchising initiatives (Kalargyrou et al., 2020; Sivakumar & Schoormans, 2011) can be expanded to include the formation of branch units focusing on the production of certain products that people with disabilities can make. In this case, the for-profit organizations' expertise and experiences and the for-beneficiary organizations' workforce can be utilized. Nonetheless, the continuation of production, in which the number and regularity of a qualified workforce are necessary, must also be guaranteed.

A more focused marketing strategy may be alternatively considered with small-scale production units, particularly in Japan. Specifically, although women are more generous and tolerant about purchasing cause-related products (Chéron et al., 2012; Moosmayer & Fuljahn, 2010; Ross et al., 1992), they do not all share the same intentions or inclinations to buy. It is recommended that older women (50 years of age or above) with larger disposable incomes, more stable lifestyles, and fewer burdens should be mainly targeted. Nevertheless, approaching this market segment requires carefully selected communication and distribution methods. Specifically, since older women may not be familiar with modern technologies (Xie et al., 2012), hardcopy promotional materials must still be prepared, including leaflets and catalogues, instead of relying on social media, which is more relevant to younger customers. In addition, the number of selling places must be increased. The existence of these stores must also be better informed and communicated to targeted populations. The potential of cooperative agreements with local supermarkets or stores can also be further assessed.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This study investigated Japanese customers' attitudes concerning products made by people with disabilities – the direct recipients of the generated income. It was found that the participants, specifically the female customers, had a somewhat positive attitude toward these products. They wanted to buy or had bought these kinds of products. The customers' perceptions of product quality were good. However, their perceptions of product types and production scale were not. The women's perceptions and behaviours, or attitudes, were affected by several personal (e.g., age, income or savings, family conditions, lifestyle, and previous experiences) and environmental (e.g., social values, social norms, and alternatives to causes) factors. A recent factor, the COVID-19 pandemic, seemed to add a situational impact.

The findings of this study advocate a long-term and more sustainable strategy for cause-related marketing. Instead of exploiting Japanese customers' short-term or immediate altruism, cause-related marketing should aim to make beneficiary-made products satisfactory alternatives to be purchased regularly. In addition, they should focus on the right market segments, not the whole market of all customers, to increase their effectiveness.

This study, however, could not avoid some limitations. The first limitation involved the sample. Only fifteen women living in a prefecture in Western Japan were interviewed. Opinions of other customers, such as those residing in other prefectures or regions and those being male, were not included. As a result, the intracultural diversity of customer attitudes toward beneficiary-made products in Japan could not be identified. In addition, the second limitation of the study, related to the research scale, was that only the customers of said products were investigated. Contributions from managers and other stakeholders on the supply side, the for-beneficiary organizations, were not examined. Consequently, gaps between the opinions of the customers and those of the managers or makers could not be revealed.

Future research may expand the range of this study to include different groups of customers to see whether other potential segments of customers, in addition to older females, can make the purchases. In addition, future research may examine the opinions of representatives on the managerial side to see whether there are misunderstandings of the customer market. These attempts will help further assist cause-related marketing initiatives to create a better and sustainable livelihood for people with disabilities, particularly those in Japan.

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