

Multilingual Electronic Newsletter

多言語メールマガジン

かごしま南の風便り



Kagoshima Southern Wind Tidings

VOL.179

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Coordinator for International Relations (CIR) Column

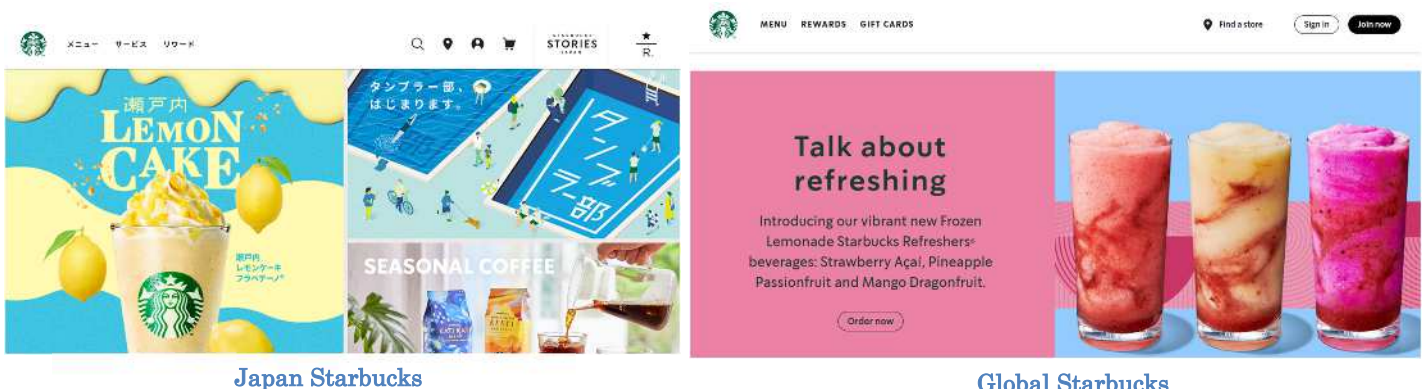
- Did you know? Differences between the East and West ●
— By Wong Yimin (CIR from Singapore)

Have you ever noticed that there seems to be a difference between native Japanese websites and Western ones? This topic came up during a casual chat, and I was intrigued.

Of course, this is just referring to a generalized trend and there will definitely be differences and exceptions within. But in general, it would seem that Japanese internet is designed differently, especially for e-commerce or sales websites.

Looking just at Japanese websites, they often have loud flashing banners, dense blocks of text, many columns, lots of tiny images and an overall cluttered, crowded look — vastly different from the minimalistic look of Western web design, often with a single focal point and fewer texts.

Why is this so?



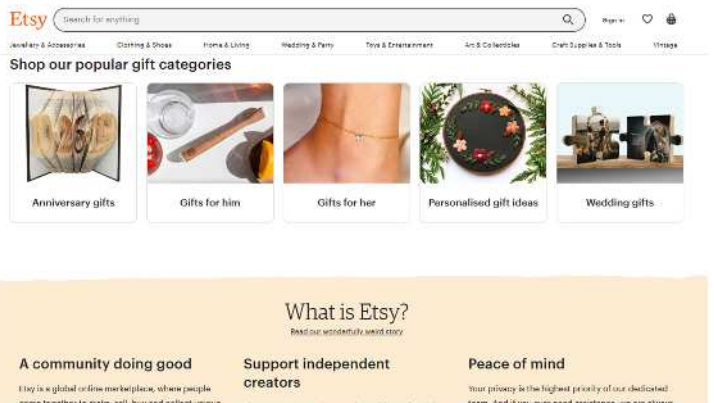
There are many theories around that seek to find out why this is so, but some of the more prevalent ones can be summarized into a few categories as below.

For the purposes of this article, Westerners are summarily defined as people from Europe and the countries settled by Europeans such as the United States, Canada, Australia and so on. On the other side, we will be looking at Japan under the umbrella of East Asian countries which also encompasses China, Korea and so on.

All in all, this is not a discussion of which is better or not, but is a reflection of the impact of cultural expectations.



Japan's shopping site, Rakuten



America's Etsy Marketplace

Cultural Psychology

In terms of how our brains process info, there has been research that suggest a general divide between the ways that Westerners and East Asians view the world around them.



Analytical vs Holistic Thinkers

Westerners on a whole tend to be analytical thinkers who focus more on individual objects and associated details.

On the other hand, East Asians tend to be holistic thinkers who tend to see the whole picture and focus on relationships between objects, leading them to see more about the context of any given situation.

This difference in processing information leads to different ways of presenting information in these two different cultures, where more information is habitually and preferentially presented in East Asian cultures compared to Western ones, and this also applies to the online context.



Japanese-style pamphlet

It is common to have few or no obvious focal points, but organization can be seen through contextual relationships.

As such, more often than not websites end up being like a Japanese-style pamphlet where a maximum concentration of information without a focal point is squeezed efficiently into the smallest space with no wastage.

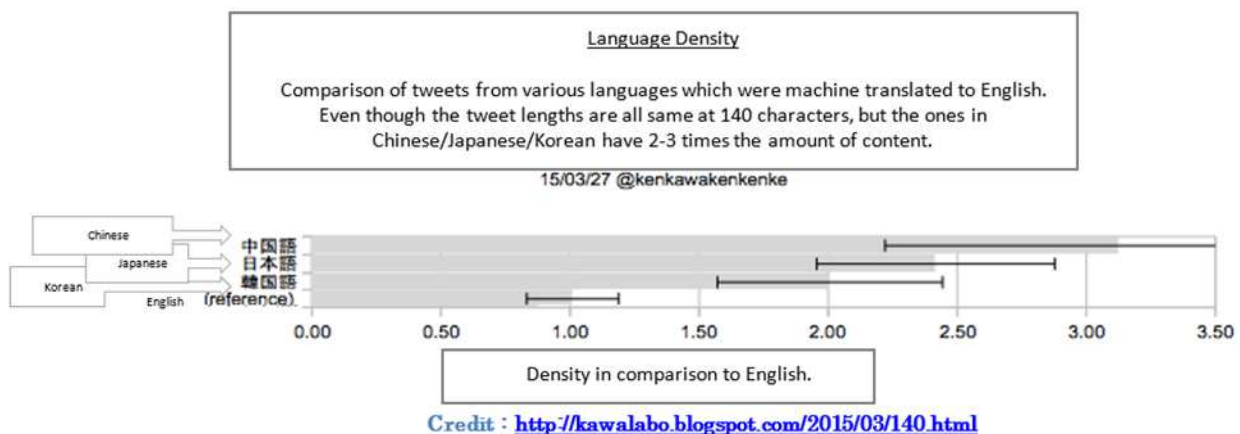
Language

In terms of language, Japanese is an ideographic language and ideas are represented with specific graphic symbols whereby each kanji character has its own meaning.

On the other hand, English is an alphabetic language, where it comprises a set of letters that do not mean anything on their own, but can be rearranged to form meaning.

What this means is that a lot of information can be compressed concisely into a few characters, and this enables Japanese to be more comfortable with processing a lot of information in a short period of time and in a small space.

This allows a packed webpage to not look overwhelmingly cluttered to them, but instead to be efficiently filled with information.



Consumer Web Psychology

It has also been suggested that Japanese users are naturally more risk-averse and have been found to prefer content heavy sites.

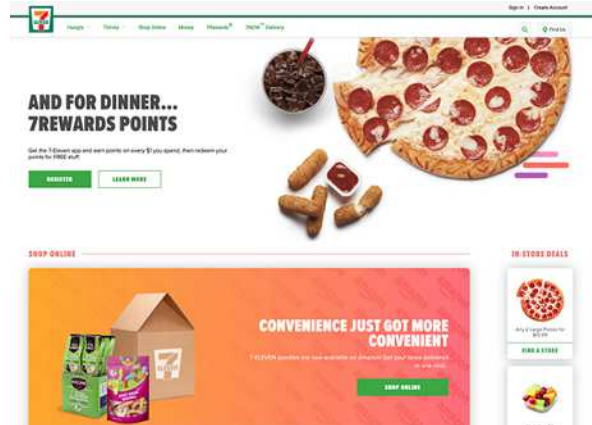
This is in particular for consumers purchasing things online, where the more information and data is available upfront, the more assuring and trustworthy it is perceived to be.



On the other hand, Western users expect to be able to form an emotional connection and to have simple but impactful content that taps into people's desires and motivations.



Japan's 7-Eleven



America's 7-Eleven

Technical

On the technical side, Japan has a mobile legacy left over from their history, where mobile web development on flip phones started much earlier than the rest of the world.

Back then, the tiny screens made it such that the screen space is very small and the way sites had to be designed to cram content into this small space is said to continue to influence the way things are now.



Even though the web access landscape has changed vastly since then and gradually more sites are slowly adopting a more global look, but many sites in Japan still remained the same as before.



Yahoo! Japan, 2014



Yahoo! Japan, 2023

Conclusion

This idle pondering led to this jaunt down an unexpected rabbit hole and it is interesting to learn something new.

There is definitely more to this topic, but for a start it is fascinating to see how culture has such an effect on the way information is presented and perceived, and this increased understanding will aid in increased cross-cultural understanding. Neither approach can be said to be better, just different.

So, the next time if you see a Western site and note the minimal clean design, or if you visit an East Asian site and experience the dizzy array of information, now you know that there's actually a reason behind it!

Activities of the Governor

● 11 July: Visited and exchanged opinions at Hai Duong Province, Vietnam ●

A courtesy visit was paid by Mr. Tran Duc Thang, Secretary of the Hai Duong Provincial Party Committee in Northern Vietnam, with whom we signed a cooperation agreement in 2019.

Afterwards, opinions regarding collaboration and cooperation were exchanged based on the agreement. This includes topics such as securing human resources, technical cooperation in agriculture and promoting investment in Hai Duong Province.

Regarding human resources, we aim to create matching opportunities between related organizations in order to send human talents from Hai Duong Province to Kagoshima Prefecture. For technical cooperation in agriculture, we propose to have Kagoshima's effective agricultural technology to be shared with technical staff in Hai Duong Province. Overall, we mutually confirmed to promote collaboration and cooperation moving forward.



- 11 July: Top sales of prefectural products were held at Hanoi, Vietnam ●

We visited Aeon Mall Long Bien and the Hanoi branch of the Akuruhi Group, a local company that handles many Japanese food products. During the visit, we toured the stores and exchanged opinions with the representatives.

The Governor introduced Kagoshima's rich ingredients such as Kagoshima wagyu beef, marine products like yellowtail, amberjack and unagi (Japanese freshwater eel), and other products including shochu liquor and black vinegar. He also showcased the charm of Kagoshima's internationally-recognised traditional crafts such as Oshima Tsumugi silk pongee and Satsuma ware, and requested cooperation in increasing the exports of such local produces and goods.

The representative of Aeon Vietnam, North Division commented that they could feel the potential of sales channel expansion for marine products such as unagi.

In addition, the sales representative for Akuruhi also commented that they are particularly interested in Kagoshima black pork and the sweetened seasonings here, and would like to consider visiting Kagoshima's production areas in future for more discussions.

The potential for market expansion in Vietnam with its rapid economic growth was once again realised through the various opinion exchanges at each store. With this in mind, we will continue to work towards expanding the exports of prefectural products.



- 13 July: A collaboration agreement was signed with Vietnam National University of Agriculture ●

A visit was made to the Vietnam National University of Agriculture in Hanoi and a collaboration agreement was made with the university in order to secure and develop human resources.

According to President Lan of the university, if Kagoshima Prefecture is able to provide the information of job vacancies, they are able to nurture and send out talented human resources as a result of this agreement.

According to the Governor, the agriculture sector is flourishing in Kagoshima Prefecture and we would like to put in our utmost effort to contribute to the development of Vietnam by having such human talents come to Kagoshima, learn the agricultural techniques here and bring that know-how back to Vietnam.

The agreement includes clauses where Kagoshima Prefecture is to provide information to the university regarding recruitment needs, and the university will recruit the appropriate human resources and provide the necessary education.

We look forward to being able to assist in the stable securement of Vietnamese human talents in future.



International Relations of Kagoshima

- 17-30 July: Visit to Kagoshima by Japanese language students from UOW College Hong Kong ●

The Kagoshima International Association hosted students from UOW College Hong Kong who are studying Japanese language. Over the course of 2 weeks, they enhanced their learning of Japanese via workplace experiences such as in-house broadcasting at commercial facilities and from Japanese cultural activities.





Website of Kagoshima Prefectural Government: <http://www.pref.kagoshima.jp/>



Editor's Note (International Affairs Division, Kagoshima Prefectural Government)

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How did you find this month's edition of Kagoshima Southern Wind Tidings?

We as editors will continue to strive to have this prefectural multilingual newsletter be a bridge of information that connects Kagoshima with everyone.



「Kagoshima Southern Wind Tidings' bulletin board」 is looking for the following content!

☆Kagoshima Photo Gallery

We would like to invite you to send us photos that remind you of Kagoshima, or photos of Kagoshima that you might have seen overseas. Please also attach a brief description along with the photo. (e.g. a mountain of volcanic-ash bags)

☆Knowledge about living in Kagoshima

Please share with us information related to life in Kagoshima. (e.g. delicious ways to enjoy fried fish cakes, or how to deal with volcanic ash.)

We also welcome any other information that you would like to share with our readers.

▲▽▲▽ Inquiries ▲▽▲▽

International Affairs Division, Tourism, Culture and Sports Department

Kagoshima Prefectural Government

10-1 Kamoike-shinmachi, Kagoshima City, Japan 890-8577

TEL: +81-99-286-2306 / FAX: +81-99-286-5522

↓ Email

English : cir1@pref.kagoshima.lg.jp

Korean : cir3@pref.kagoshima.lg.jp

Japanese : minami@pref.kagoshima.lg.jp

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