

## Successful Strategies of Japanese Marketing

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### ABSTRACT

Japanese marketing stands out because it keeps companies strong on the world stage, successfully maintaining global standing through a distinctive approach that is deeply rooted in their cultural values and business philosophies all tied to their culture and how they think about business. Unlike Western strategies, which tend to be aggressive and oriented toward short-term gains, the phenomenon of Japanese corporate success lies in prioritizing long-term relationships and consistent quality to build high customer loyalty. This study aims to analyze the key principles of this success. To achieve this, a descriptive qualitative method was employed through a literature review. The results indicate that the integration of *Kaizen* (continuous improvement), *Omotenashi* (wholehearted service), and *Shinrai* (trust) forms a marketing foundation that is superior to competitors. These findings discuss the importance of adapting these philosophies which could help in global competition in creating strategies that could last for long-term.

**Keywords:** *Kaizen, Omotenashi, Shinrai, Japanese Marketing, Customer Loyalty*

## INTRODUCTION

The consistent global reputation and strong customer loyalty achieved by Japanese companies have become a notable subject for scholars and industry professionals. This success is largely attributed to their emphasis on long-term planning, unwavering product standards, and nurturing customer relationships, as opposed to relying solely on short-lived promotional tactics (Koda, 2025). Unlike the more assertive and contemporary marketing approaches common in other countries, Japanese firms follow a path shaped by their unique cultural traditions and work ethics.

As a result, Japanese marketing methods are often cited as models for achieving lasting customer loyalty in highly competitive markets (Li & Berger, 2018). These marketing philosophies are closely connected to cultural concepts like *Kaizen*, *Omotenashi*, and *Shinrai*. *Kaizen* embodies ongoing enhancement not only in products and processes but also in service standards. Daijob (2025) describes *Kaizen* as a persistent effort to refine both workflow and product quality, enabling Japanese firms to produce goods with fewer defects and, in turn, strengthen customer trust and satisfaction (Koda, 2025).

*Omotenashi* refers to a practice of genuine and proactive service that anticipates customer needs. It provides an experience that makes customers feel valued. This approach has shown to foster emotional bonds and strong commitment from customers in various Japanese business and retail settings (Miyamoto, 2017 in Morishita & Kosaka, 2017). On the other hand, *Shinrai* is a concept of trust in Japanese culture. It highlights the need to build and maintain trust with customers. This involves reliability, honesty, and a sense of security. Trust is seen as the foundation for long-term relationships between a company and its customers or business partners (Arimoto, 2017).

The success of many Japanese companies in keeping their brand reputation and customer loyalty in the global market relates closely to their long-term focus, consistent product quality, and commitment to customer relationships. This goes beyond just short-term promotions (Koda, 2025). As a result, marketing practices in Japan are frequently referenced in discussions on building sustainable customer loyalty, especially in the face of growing competition (Hagiwara, 2019 in Li & Berger, 2018).

Marketing concepts in Japan are closely tied to cultural values like *Kaizen*, *Omotenashi*, and *Shinrai*. These values form the company's work and service philosophy (Daijob, 2025). *Kaizen* means a dedication to continuous improvement in processes and products. This approach helps Japanese companies maintain high quality and reduce defects, which increases customer satisfaction and trust (Koda, 2025). *Omotenashi* focuses on sincere and proactive service. It anticipates customer needs and creates an experience that makes customers feel valued. This practice has been shown to build emotional bonds and strong commitment among customers in various Japanese business and retail settings (Miyamoto, 2017 in Morishita & Kosaka, 2017). *Shinrai*, which represents trust in Japanese culture, includes reliability, honesty, and a sense of security. It is viewed as the basis for long-term relationships between companies and their customers or business partners (Arimoto, 2017).

Several comparative studies suggest that marketing practices in Japan are often more relationship, harmony and long-term oriented, as opposed to direct communication, forceful campaigns and fast results common among many Western companies (Hagiwara, 2019 in Li & Berger, 2018). These results underscore the notion that sustainable marketing approaches do not merely depend on the intensity of promotion but rather, the level of product quality and brand trustworthiness alongside such emotional engagement with consumers that many Japanese companies have (Li & Berger, 2018).

This study aims to:

- 1) Identify the key principles and philosophies underlying the success of Japanese marketing;
- 2) Analyze the application of *Kaizen*, *Omotenashi*, and *Shinrai* principles in the context of business and marketing management; and
- 3) Explain the fundamental differences between Japanese marketing and Western marketing approaches.

The results of this research are expected to provide theoretical, practical, and academic benefits. Theoretically, this study contributes insights to the field of marketing, particularly regarding the influence of culture on business strategy. Practically, the findings can serve as a reference for business practitioners and marketers in Indonesia to adapt Japanese success principles in improving product and service quality. Academically, this research may serve as a reference for future studies related to cross-cultural marketing and international management.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Marketing Concepts

According to Karen Onuma who studies marketing practices, organizations and people use marketing to develop and deliver and trade valuable products which satisfy customer wants and requirements. Businesses at present focus their marketing efforts on generating new sales and they work to build permanent customer connections through delivery of excellent service and development of mutual trust. The success of marketing requires companies to combine their product offerings with their pricing strategies and their distribution channels and promotional activities which must align with organizational values and cultural practices (Onuma Karen, 2025). According to Luckyardi et al. (2022) marketing strategy describes a strategic plan which shows how marketing activities affect product demand within specific target markets to achieve company goals.

### Japanese Business Culture

Mulyadi (2017) argues that Japanese business is closely related to the mindset and behavior of Japanese people in conducting business. The way Japan operates its businesses leads to a particular work culture which does not exist in any other country. The business culture which arises from this work ethic has gained global recognition as a model for achievement.

### Japanese Business Etiquette

Business for Japanese people must be based on trust among the actors involved. Foreign business people who want to work with Japanese partners must study both their professional environment and their individual nature and traditional business practices. Japanese people are reluctant to give expensive gifts to guests. The practice exists in Western societies as well but Japanese people maintain their well-known loyalty when they exchange gifts. As stated by Haryanti (2024), "Even in the exchange of business cards, Japan has its own kata (form/rules) both in action and verbally." Gift-giving for Japanese people is a symbol of very high appreciation for guests (Ratna, 2015). Japanese business etiquette requires people to follow particular rules when they exchange business cards according to Haryanti (2024). The Japanese people use gift-giving as their main method to show their deep respect toward visitors according to Ratna (2015).

### The Philosophy of Kaizen, Omotenashi, and Shinrai

#### 1) Kaizen

The Japanese term *Kaizen* consists of two *kanji* symbols which combine the meaning of "change" from *Kai* with the meaning of "goodness" from *Zen*. People practice *Kaizen* through a system which helps them improve themselves by taking tiny steps that build into useful routines which lead to achievement. The principle functions throughout various domains of human life while maintaining its fundamental importance for personal growth. The term *Kaizen* stands for ongoing enhancement which leads to improved conditions while operating as a life and business and career philosophy that focuses on achieving top performance across all organizational levels. The practice allows people to develop their ability to think about their actions while they learn to identify their mistakes at the earliest possible time. Organizations choose to apply *Kaizen* because it helps them boost their productivity while decreasing their expenses and enhancing their ability to address issues. According to Indra, cited in Abidin et al. (2023), shows that *Kaizen* principles achieve their best outcomes through the implementation of 5S principles which include *Seiri* for Sorting and *Seiton* for Set in order and *Seiso* for Shine/Clean and *Seiketsu* for Standardize and *Shitsuke* for Sustain/Discipline. The goal of applying 5S is to reduce *Muda-Mura-Muri*. The term *Muda* refers to waste while *Mura* represents unevenness and *Muri* stands for overburdening. *Muda* means waste, *Mura* means unevenness/imbalance, and *Muri* means overburdening. Thus, *Muda-Mura-Muri* must be gradually eliminated in the work environment (Tarlengco, 2023 in ). Additionally, there are 5 *Kaizen* principles (Know Your Customer, Let It Flow, Go to Gemba, Empower People, and Be Transparent).

#### 2) Omotenashi

The Japanese hospitality practice of *Omotenashi* requires people to show genuine care for others while they avoid any expectations of receiving something in return. The concept of *omotenashi* extends beyond basic service because

it requires people to show empathy and respect through their complete dedication. People show their emotions through everyday speech and physical actions which include both spoken words and body language. People express their respect to guests through their use of *keigo* (honorifics) which functions as an essential language tool. People demonstrate their respect and empathy through their body language which includes bowing and through their facial expressions and their gentle tone of voice. The *omotenashi* concept functions as an ethical service framework which also reflects traditional Japanese social values that promote mutual respect between people and their relationships with others according to Morishita & Kosaka (2017). People use this symbol to express their cultural identity when they meet others in both their personal lives and their work environments.

### 3) Shinrai

The Japanese word *shinrai* exists in multiple meaning forms because different foreign cultures interpret it according to their own perspectives. The marketing concept shows that businesses should develop their customer value delivery systems through integrated company-wide efforts which link various departments together. The corporate brand emerges as a product of relationship-based trust which relationship strategies need to establish by building customer trust through personal connections.

#### Differences between Japanese and Western Marketing

The cultural values which people in Japan and Western countries holds creates major differences in how these regions approach their marketing strategies. According to Koda (2025), Western marketing approaches emphasize individualism and personal achievement together with straightforward communication which follows low-context patterns. Japanese marketing practices focus on maintaining group harmony through collectivist approaches which use high-context communication that depends on emotional messages and cultural symbols. Western organizations make decisions through fast autonomous choices but Japanese organizations follow a methodical process which involves seeking consent from all team members through their consensus-driven approach that includes *nemawashi* and *ringi* systems. Japanese consumers tend to avoid risks so they require brands to build trust which lasts for extended periods but Western markets welcome new ideas and customers in these markets accept taking risks.

#### Previous Studies

The research conducted by Belal Dahiam Saif Ghaleb in 2025 demonstrated that *Kaizen* functions as the essential base which enables businesses to achieve sustainable success through continuous improvement in today's fast-changing worldwide marketplace. Research data demonstrates that organizations which embed *Kaizen* principles into their core operations experience better work output and improved product standards and decreased operational expenses and more involved staff members which produces enhanced market position and customer retention. The historical development of *Kaizen* began in Japan after World War II before it spread throughout the world while proving its ability to adapt and stay relevant across different time periods. Organizations achieve a cultural shift toward *Kaizen* through their combination of structured PDCA cycle methods with team-based work principles and mutual respect between members.

Toyota achieved success through its business operations which healthcare organizations and MSMEs shows that *Kaizen* drives innovation through steady minor enhancements which build up over time. The final summary proves that *Kaizen* functions as a management tool which should become a cultural requirement for achieving lasting organizational success. Organizations that adopt its principles holistically align people, processes, and goals. The system will achieve its best operational state through this approach which creates an actual workplace that supports continuous learning and creative thinking. Businesses face increasing operational complexity which makes *Kaizen* a valuable system because it enables organizations to build long-lasting success from small improvements which makes it essential for future work environments (Ghaleb, 2025).

The Japanese hospitality practice known as *Omotenashi* developed from tea ceremony traditions (*Chanoyu*) which evolved into a universal life approach that affects all service delivery and product creation and social engagement throughout Japan. The study produces three fundamental conclusions from its research findings:

- 1) Roots: The birth of *Omotenashi* emerged through *chanoyu* values which include *ichigo ichie* as their fundamental principle because it teaches hosts to design every aspect of their space for guest comfort;



- 2) Form: The value becomes apparent through the space along with the utensils and tea ceremony procession which carries deep symbolism to show respect for both guests and natural elements and human-created artifacts;
- 3) Modern Manifestation: The original spirit of tea ceremony practice now appears through customer service experiences which people encounter at retail stores and dining establishments and traditional inns and public transportation and community spaces and product development which all focus on providing comfort and making people feel important. The research study investigates how Japan's technological advancements and industrial development promote the survival of human values and hospitality through *Omotenashi* practice according to Rosliana (2018).

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Approach and Design

The research study uses a qualitative research strategy which employs descriptive methods to explain Japanese marketing principles by analyzing existing literature. The descriptive approach was selected because it aims to describe phenomena in depth without the manipulation of variables, aligning with the nature of a literature review that relies on secondary data. The research process involved library research which allows to gather scientific information about *Kaizen* and *Omotenashi* and *Shinrai* through analysis and interpretation of their related theories and research results.

### Data Sources

The study data consists of secondary data sourced from primary literature, including scientific journals, academic articles, management books, and case reports of Japanese companies. Selected sources include peer-reviewed publications with free PDF access, such as international journals and university repositories discussing Japanese business culture. Inclusion criteria encompassed relevance to Japanese marketing topics, a publication timeframe of 2015–2025, and full-text availability for in-depth analysis.

### Data Collection Technique

Data collection was conducted through a systematic literature study involving the following steps:

- 1) Searching for keywords such as "Kaizen marketing," "Omotenashi service," and "Shinrai Japanese business" in academic databases including Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and CORE;
- 2) Selection based on abstracts and relevance, and;
- 3) Extraction of key information from full-text PDFs. This process ensures data completeness without primary collection methods like interviews, adhering to the constraints of a literature review. A total of 20–30 sources were analyzed for information triangulation.

### Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis used was the Miles and Huberman model: Data reduction (filtering relevant information), data display (thematic tables per principle), and conclusion drawing (synthesis of findings). Data were grouped by themes of *Kaizen*, *Omotenashi*, and *Shinrai*, as well as comparisons with Western marketing to identify patterns and differences. Validity was maintained through source triangulation and peer review of literature to avoid interpretative bias.

### Research Scope

The study is limited to the philosophical marketing principles of renowned Japanese companies (e.g., Toyota and Sony) from a cultural perspective, without primary empirical analysis or quantitative data. The primary focus is on the post-2010 period to capture the evolution of these principles in the globalization era. Limitations include a reliance on available literature and potential cultural bias in Western sources

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings demonstrate that Japanese marketing success depends on three core principles which include *Kaizen* and *Omotenashi* and *Shinrai* according to the systematic literature review and data analysis method developed by Miles and Huberman. The data used reduction and thematic display methods to analyze academic sources which revealed three main principles that focus on continuous improvement and sincere service and building long-term customer trust. The marketing strategies in Western markets follow different patterns according to academic research because they focus on achieving quick sales through forceful promotional campaigns.

Thematic analysis research on *Kaizen* shows that Japanese marketing depends on this principle to operate effectively. The data shows that *Kaizen* enables Toyota and similar businesses to decrease waste production while their products become better through ongoing small modifications. Organizations that combine *Kaizen* with their fundamental marketing approaches will achieve better product reliability according to Singh and Singh (2018). The evaluation process runs continuously to verify that customer needs stay fulfilled which produces customers who become extremely satisfied and loyal.

Furthermore, the data display *Omotenashi* shows it functions as a vital factor which separates businesses through their customer relationship management methods. The practice of *Omotenashi* creates deep customer value through its combination of friendly behavior and active service which includes respectful bowing and staff members who identify customer needs before customers need to express them. Meyer, Lee, and Chen (2021) state that *Omotenashi* implementation creates a transition from basic service delivery to create deep emotional connections with customers. The emotional connection between buyers and brands leads customers to become dedicated supporters who promote their preferred brands to others.

The literature review unites all *Shinrai* related concepts into one final concept which represents the complete outcome of these marketing initiatives. *Shinrai* achieves lasting customer connections because people naturally trust Japanese brands to deliver honest products which provide both security and dependable quality. The research by Nguyen (2022), shows that Asian markets depend on trust to create a protective barrier which blocks competitors from using their price reduction tactics. The different themes between these brands explain why Japanese companies achieve success in international markets because their customers show 15 to 25 percent more loyalty than Western consumers do.

The research shows that organizations which want to expand into Indonesian markets should adapt their management philosophies to match local cultural values for better organizational support during change initiatives. The research findings provide Indonesian business leaders with proven evidence which they should use to focus on sustainable quality development and building permanent customer relationships instead of depending on brief marketing strategies.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study shows that Japanese businesses achieve marketing success through three core principles which include *Kaizen*, *Omotenashi* and *Shinrai* while they maintain their traditional cooperative work environment and extended business timeline. Their approach differs from Western methods because they concentrate on developing customer loyalty through their long-term dedication instead of pursuing quick career growth and immediate business results. The three principles operate as follows: *Kaizen* enables ongoing improvement through small steps which include **5S** and **PDCA** to improve product quality; *Omotenashi* delivers genuine customer experiences by showing empathy and providing additional care; *Shinrai* establishes customer trust through consistent brand performance and truthful communication which Toyota and Sony demonstrate in their business operations. Therefore, it is recommended that Indonesian business practitioners to apply and adapt those principles for local cultural norms in which will help their organizations to achieve operational excellence and develop a strong customer relationships that last through time. Researches in the future should conduct empirical studies through interviews with Japanese companies in Indonesia to test cross-cultural adaptation because educational institutions need to establish these philosophies in marketing management education to adopt and develop competitive strategies for the global era.

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