

# Customer Experience Affecting Human *Kansei*

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this paper is to explain the relationships and the meaning of the customer experience approach, which involves manufacturing and fabrication influenced by human *kansei*. This paper argues as follows; What are the products that appeal to the senses?, *Kansei* marketing, Customer Experience and *Kansei* Marketing, Customer Experience and Strategic Experiential Modules, Customer Experience and *Kansei* Quality, Relationships between the Information Processing of the Senses and Customer Experience, Relationships between Functional Benefits and Customer Experience, and Summaries of the Examples the manufacturer's product development capabilities constitute a source of the customers' experience, creating the customer experience of products, including lifestyles and culture.

**Keywords:** Customer Experience, *Kansei* Marketing, Strategic Experiential Modules, *Kansei* Quality, Consumer Information Processing

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## 1. What Are the Products That Appeal to the Senses

The world is flooded with lots of products and services. And consumers lead affluent and comfortable lives by using products they choose and purchase of their own free will. Therefore, in order to produce products that succeed in the market, it is important to understand as part of marketing activities and from the viewpoint of the users' senses as to how they are accepted, how comfortably they can be used and how their users feel when they use them.

In particular, the entire society has recently shifted to an emphasis on consumers and their lifestyles, and terms such as "*kansei* (perceived) value," the "age of *kansei* (sensibility)," "*kansei* (sensibility) society," and "*kansei* (sensibility) industry" have come into wide use as keywords in marketing. In other words, how consumers feel toward products – such as the workings of their five senses, their emotions, feelings, and moods, likability, preferences, comfort, ease of use, and the affluence of life – have often been considered as issues to be addressed in marketing [1].

What is "*kansei*"? Philosophically, this is a question difficult to answer, but if the term "*kansei*" encompasses the senses of human beings and the way they feel, it is becoming necessary for businesses to emphasize sensibility in product development and provide products that appeal to the senses of

consumers. If marketers say that they emphasize sensibility, some people would consider it as somewhat frivolous to do so. If one thinks as described above, however, products that appeal to the senses mean those that are attractive and valuable and are synonymous with products that sell well. Therefore, this suggests that developing products that appeal to the senses is an essential and fundamental issue to be addressed in product development and marketing [2].

Meanwhile, *kansei* quality means quality evaluated through the senses, and *kansei* products mean products in which *kansei* quality accounts for a large part of their attributes or those that are evaluated and consumed through the senses. It can also be said that all products are *kansei* products in the sense that consumers evaluate through their senses as to whether the total product quality (market quality) is good or favorable [3].

## 2. *Kansei* Marketing

In fact, it is a long time since the term "the age of *kansei* (sensibility)" was first used. The origin of the term can be traced back to around 1983, when Ogawa published *Kansei Kakumei* (The Sensibility Revolution) [4], and a Japanese translation of *Megatrends* [5], written by John Naisbitt, who put forward the concept of "high tech, high touch," came out. These were followed by *Shoshuron* (a theory of a mass of people divided into small groups) [6], proposed by Fujioka, and *Bunshuron* (a theory of a mass of people divided into

separate groups) [7] by the Hakuhodo Institute of Life and Living. The reason smash-hit products are not developed and the needs of consumers are becoming difficult to identify is that they consider their sensibility as important and are no longer satisfied with consuming in the same way as others. The argument that the mass of people had already disappeared and had become divided into small groups of people who shared the same sensibility only among themselves became the topic of conversation in the mid-1980s.

In addition, these developments led to the wide use of the term “*kansei* (sensitivity) marketing” in the marketing industry [8][9]. Furthermore, the term “*kansei* (emotional) consumption” was coined that referred to being based on feelings and moods such as “like or not” when consuming products and services rather than being based on rational decisions relying on social norms and values such as “good or bad” [10].

In the 1980s, waving the banner of “symbols” and “sensibility,” creators took the leadership in setting market trends and, partly because of the bubble economy, most of the products they developed sold well. And the stereotypical explanation that “they suited the sensibility of consumers” was given as the reason the products became hits, but after the 1990s this ceased to pass for an effective marketing method. But “*kansei* marketing” based not on the sensibility of creators and trend leaders but strictly on the sensibility and viewpoint of consumers, who are capricious and changeable, has gained importance. In this sense, it would be more appropriate to consider that we are now in a “new era of *kansei*” [11][12].

### 3. Customer Experience and *Kansei* Marketing

The notion of “customer experience” whose keyword is “experience” is attracting the attention of marketers mainly in the United States. Customer experience refers to customer value, which focuses on the experience customers have when they use particular products and services, and nowadays, expressions such as “Harley experience,” “Starbucks experience,” and “amazon.com experience” are often found on corporate websites and in the comments of CEOs.

The authors analyze cases in which Japanese businesses incorporate the creation of customer experience in their competitive strategy as they develop new products and businesses that emphasize the customers’ customer experience. The notion of customer experience itself is new, but examples of its application are found in many Japanese businesses, in particular long-established ones as well as local or traditional industries. The authors assume that one of the reasons for this is that the notion is psychologically supported by research in consumer behavior and that another is tacit knowledge acquired through business activities. On the other hand, the authors also believe that approaches using *kansei* quality and *kansei* engineering in fact may have something in common with the notion of customer experience [13].

Since there is no appropriate English word with the same

meaning as the Japanese term “*kansei*,” the latter is used without being translated as in “*kansei* engineering,” but what “experience” means is closest to “*kansei*.” Furthermore, what “customer experience” means is almost identical to “*kansei* quality” as described later. Moreover, since customer experience marketing aims to create products and brands that appeal to the senses of the customers, it means almost the same thing even if it is called “*kansei* marketing.”

The following sections first introduce the notion of customer experience so that it contributes to the creation of products that appeal to the senses and then discusses its relationships with *kansei* quality.

### 4. Customer Experience and Strategic Experiential Modules

Prof. Bernd H. Schmitt of Columbia University in the United States, the leading authority on customer experience marketing, defines experiences as private events that occur in response to certain stimuli (for example, those that are provided by marketing efforts before or after making a purchase) [14].

Therefore, customer experience does not refer to the private experiences gained in the past, but refers to the value that appeals to the senses of the customers when they experience companies and their brands, actually feeling something at first hand or becoming excited by something.

Customer experience is not the extrinsic value of products and services provided by businesses and their brands as mere customer services but their fundamental value as viewed from the standpoint of the customers. In customer experience marketing, the objective of marketers who aim to create customer experience is not to sell products and services simply as articles of commerce but to view consumption by customers in the context of their lifestyle and give meaning to such consumption by working on the senses and emotions of customers in the process of consumption [15].

Furthermore, Prof. Schmitt classifies customer experience into five modules as strategic platforms that are useful for marketing activities as shown in Table 1 [16].

Table 1. Strategic Experiential Modules Provided by Bernd H. Schmit.

Module	Contents of Customer Experience
sense	<i>Sensory experience value</i> that appeals to the five senses
feel	<i>Emotional experience value</i> that appeals to feelings and moods
think	<i>Intellectual experience value</i> that appeals to creativity and cognitive functions
act	<i>Behavioral experience value</i> that appeals to physical behavior and lifestyle
relate	<i>Relative experience value</i> that appeals to confirmative groups and cultural groups

Source: Schmitt, Bernd H. (1999) *Experiential Marketing: How to Get Customers to SENSE, FEEL, THINK, ACT, and RELATE to Your Company and Brands*, Free Press.

In this classification, he takes into account all comprehensive experiences associated with consumption by

customers. He does not simply examine products and services themselves but emphasizes the experiences gained by customers through consumption. This way of thinking is attributed to a particular way of viewing customers, and Prof. Schmitt has developed the argument of Morris B. Holbrook [17], who viewed customers as living creatures of reason and emotion and attached importance to the fact that consumption by customers was often affected by appeals to the emotions and so forth.

## 5. Customer Experience and *Kansei* Quality

### 5.1. If Viewed from the Psychological Definition of *Kansei* and Its Scope

The classification by Prof. Schmitt of customer experience into five categories using strategic experiential modules is based on cognitive science and social psychology [18]. “SENSE,” “FEEL,” and “THINK” correspond respectively to “sense,” “emotion,” and “recognition” – psychological modules in cognitive science. “ACT” and “RELATE” are assumed to correspond to “physical self” and “social self,” respectively, in social psychology. “Self” as referred to in social psychology means what one looks at when one recognizes oneself objectively.

If based on these psychological modules, one can examine

the relationships between customer experience in marketing and *kansei* quality in product development and quality management. Clarifying the relationships between the two means that the knowledge of *kansei* quality and *kansei* engineering that has so far been acquired mainly in Japan can effectively be used for design quality to create customer experience.

The term “*kansei*” is interpreted in various ways as exemplified by its philosophical, epistemological, and psychological definitions. In particular, *kansei* can be regarded as something sensory or irrational as opposed to being based on reason and intelligence. A wide range of research in *kansei* is conducted as typified by *kansei* marketing, *kansei* science, *kansei* engineering, and *kansei* design, but most of these studies have been pursued in the field of cognitive psychology in the form of research on approaches to the human mind and the processing of events there using information processing theory [19].

If seen from the viewpoint of the psychology of information processing, *kansei* can be interpreted as a series of information flows (senses → perception → recognition → emotion → expression) that arise after information is received by the human senses through external stimuli such as products and services as shown Figure 1.

Research in methodologies for developing products and services by interpreting *kansei* as described above and making the most of its concept is also under way [20][21].

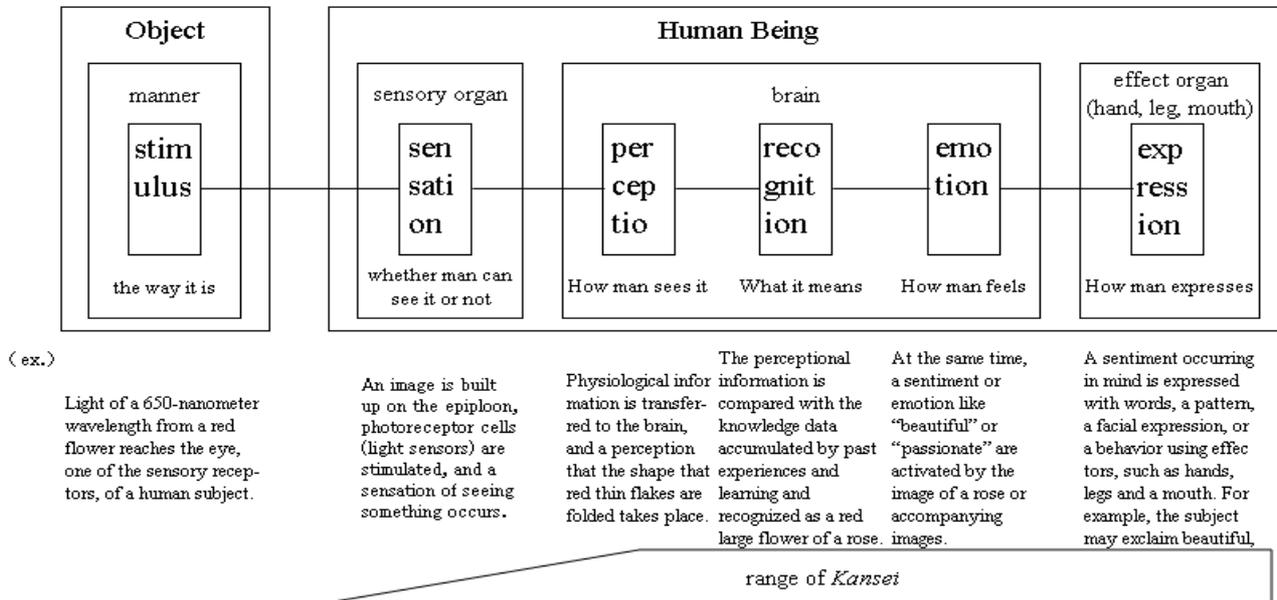


Figure 1. Definition and Scope of *Kansei*.

Source: Nagasawa, Shin'ya, ed. (2000), with H. Jinghu, et al., Product Development Relating KANSEI – Its Methodology and Practice –, Japan Publishing Service Co. (in Japanese), p.6, Figure 1-1.

### 5.2. Analysis of *Kansei* Quality

This section analyzes *kansei* quality. *Kansei* quality means quality that appeals to the senses or quality that is evaluated through the senses [22]. In terms of quality as evaluated based

on how customers feel subjectively, terms such as “market quality” and “perceived quality” are identical in meaning to *kansei* quality, but if based on the psychological modules mentioned above, *kansei* represents a series of processes from the judgment that a rose consists of many thin red petals with

each of them piled on one another (perception) to the one that it is a large-flowered red rose (recognition) to the expression of feelings such as “beautiful” and “passionate.” For this reason, the term “perception” is used in marketing in the sense of how consumers feel subjectively, but in the psychology of information processing, it is more appropriate to use recognition than perception and *kansei* than recognition.

**5.3. If Viewed from Quality Elements in Commodity Science**

In commodity science, meanwhile, one way of classifying the quality elements of products is to divide them into three categories: primary quality, secondary quality, and tertiary

quality [23]. Among the quality elements, *kansei* quality can be defined by developing this theory, as shown in Table 2.

If automobiles are taken as an example, the primary quality is the quality that can objectively be measured through scientific and chemical tests using measuring instruments, and examples include the function of driving and power performance. The secondary quality is the quality that is measured through sensory evaluations based on the human senses, and examples include styling, comfortableness, and livability. The tertiary quality is the quality that is measured through image surveys, and examples include naming, brand appeal, and company names [24].

*Table 2. Quality Elements of Product (e.g., Automobile).*

Quality Elements		Morphological elements	Measurement Method	<i>Kansei</i> Quality/Evaluation
Product quality (Marketable Quality)	Primary quality	Functions, Power performance (acceleration, fuel consumption)	Physical/chemical measurement	Broad sense
	Secondary quality	Styling, Ride comfort, Interior comfort	Sensory analysis	
	Tertiary quality	Naming, Brand, Name of Company	Image survey	Narrow sense

Source: Amasaka, K. and Nagasawa, S. (2000), *Basics and Applications of Sensory Evaluation*, Japanese Standards Association, Tokyo, p.39, Table.

In a narrow sense, *kansei* quality refers to the secondary and tertiary qualities that are subjectively measured through sensory evaluations and (psychological) image surveys and is set against the primary quality. In particular, the characteristics of the secondary quality have something in common with those of customer experience, particularly SENSE and FEEL, which cannot be understood unless experienced because sensory evaluations to measure the secondary quality require evaluators to look at the styling of automobiles with their own eyes and experience them by driving them. The tertiary quality shares the same characteristics as FEEL in the sense that it means strengthening emotional bonds and as THINK in the sense that it means encouraging creative thinking. In a broad sense, *kansei* quality refers to general product quality (market quality) which encompasses even primary quality. This coincides with the fact that the total customer experience of products is their value as a whole [25].

**6. Relationships between the Information Processing of the Senses and Customer Experience**

This section examines the relationships between the information processing of the senses and customer experience. As described earlier, customer experience is classified into five strategic experiential modules with SENSE referring to experiences based on the five senses of customers, FEEL to those based on the emotions of the customers, THINK to those based on the recognition and interpretations of the customers, ACT to those based on the actions of the customers, and RELATE to those based on social relationships, including

among the customers themselves. These can also be considered as the results of each activity in the information processing of the senses and can be summarized as shown in Figure 2.

In a study of emotional design, Donald A. Norman, the founder of cognitive psychology, argues that if seen from the viewpoint of brain functions, the characteristics of human beings can be divided into three processing levels, and the emotions of human beings consist of the “visceral level,” a level of automatic and innate emotions; the “behavioral level,” which includes emotions that control daily actions; and the “reflective level,” at which one considers things carefully in the brain so that one thinks consciously [26]. If based on these processing levels, visceral and behavioral perceptions combine to stimulate the perception of customers and create sensory customer experience also known as SENSE. Later, visceral, behavioral, and reflective recognition combines to lead customers to recognition, creating cognitive customer experience also known as THINK. And visceral, behavioral, and reflective emotions combine to generate the emotions of the customers, creating emotional customer experience also known as FEEL. As a result, customers are encouraged to act through “expressions.”

“Expressions” in the information processing of *kansei* are related to ACT and RELATE, two of the strategic experiential modules. This indicates that customers act (change their behavior for themselves) through the information processing of expressions and they create behavioral customer experience also known as ACT because they act or change their behavioral style. In addition, since there are a number of customers who are provided with the same products and services, they are likely to go through similar processes and

take similar actions, which leads to their sense of a connection among themselves. This sense of connection creates relational customer experience also known as RELATE, causing customers to take similar actions as if they were socially connected.

As described above, it is understood that customer experience is created through the information processing of *kansei*. The authors also attempt in case studies to verify the validity of these information flows in concrete terms [27].

## 7. Relationships between Functional Benefits and Customer Experience

Up to now, the authors have taken up examples of the customer experience provided by many businesses and products as listed below.

(1) INAX’s tankless toilet “SATIS,” Nissan Motor’s sports utility vehicle “X-TRAIL,” canvas bags manufactured by Ichizawa Hanpu (currently Ichizawa Shinzaburo Hanpu), a Kyoto-based company, and J1 football team Albirex Niigata [28]

(2) Suetomi’s traditional Kyoto confectionery, the long-established Shoeido incense, and the luxury brand Hermès scarves and bags [29]

(3) Sharp’s liquid-crystal TV set “AQUOS,” Wacoal’s high-grade lingerie “WACOAL DIA,” Kokuyo’s eraser “Kadokeshi,” and Bandai’s entertainment audio system “LITTLE JAMMER” [30]

(4) Long-established Toraya’s sweet jelly made of adzuki beans and TORAYA CAFÉ [31]

(5) SOMÈS SADDLE’s horse gear and bags, Kuriyamabeika’s 10,000 JPY rice cracker “Komecho Yuki,” Inden-ya Uehara Yushichi’s traditional handicrafts “inden,” Hanamaruki’s high-grade original miso “Ojo,” Yamanaka Lacquerware Cooperative Association’s modern Japanese household utensils “NUSSHA,” Kaihara’s high-grade denim, and Hakuho-do’s cosmetic brushes [32].

(6) Long-established Chiso Kyoto-yuzen printed silk [33]

(7) Real estate of so-called shared house [34]

(8) Local companies of Asahi Shuzo and Snow Peak in Niigata Prefecture, and Zenith and Hublot in Switzerland [35].

Based on the results of analyses of these examples, this section examines the relationships between the conventional functional benefits and new customer experience as well as the roles that customer experience plays in products and services.

In analyzing the relationships between functional benefits and customer experience, it would be effective to consider from the viewpoint of customer value creation as to what the products provide and accomplish for the customers.

If analyzed from the viewpoint of functional benefits, for example, INAX’s tankless toilet “SATIS” offers greater convenience such as higher functionality and usability as customer value. Similarly, a wider range of choices that cater to customer preferences through diverse product lineups with options and enhanced product images through unified designs are also considered customer value. However, if this product is marketed simply by emphasizing that it can be installed in a narrow place where it would have been impossible to install a normal toilet since it is space-saving due to the elimination of a tank, it would be a hit only because of its functional benefits.

A comparison of customer value created by functional benefits and that created by customer experience as described above indicates that the two complement each other while partly overlapping. The functional benefits of SATIS provide customer value by improving the functional aspects of the toilet and increasing its convenience while its customer experience provides customer value by appealing to the senses of customers and thereby improving the psychological aspects of the toilet, a form of customer value that cannot be offered through functional benefits. Worded differently, functional benefits provide value that gives physical and bodily satisfaction, and customer experience provides value that gives psychological and sensory satisfaction.

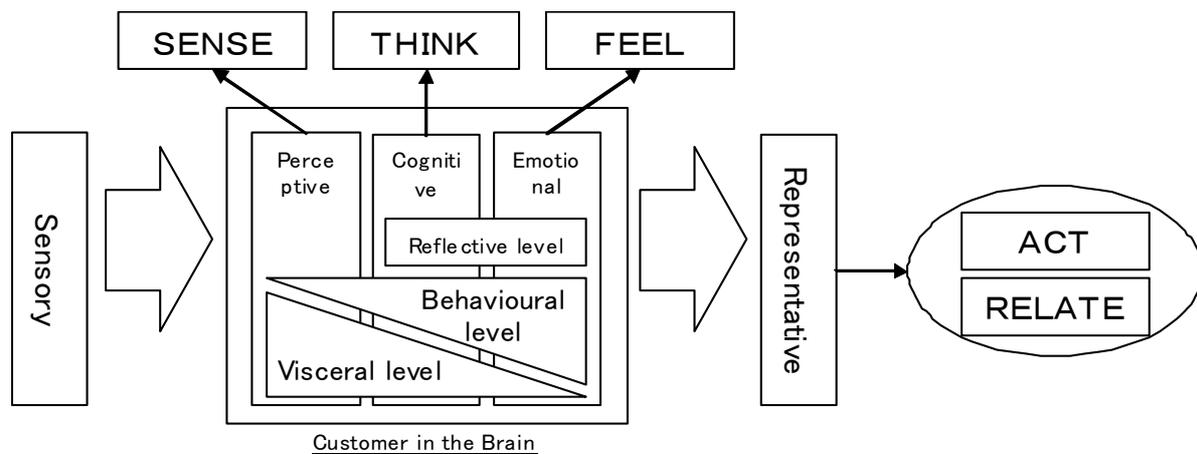


Figure 2. The relation between the information process of Kansei and Schmitt’s customer experience.

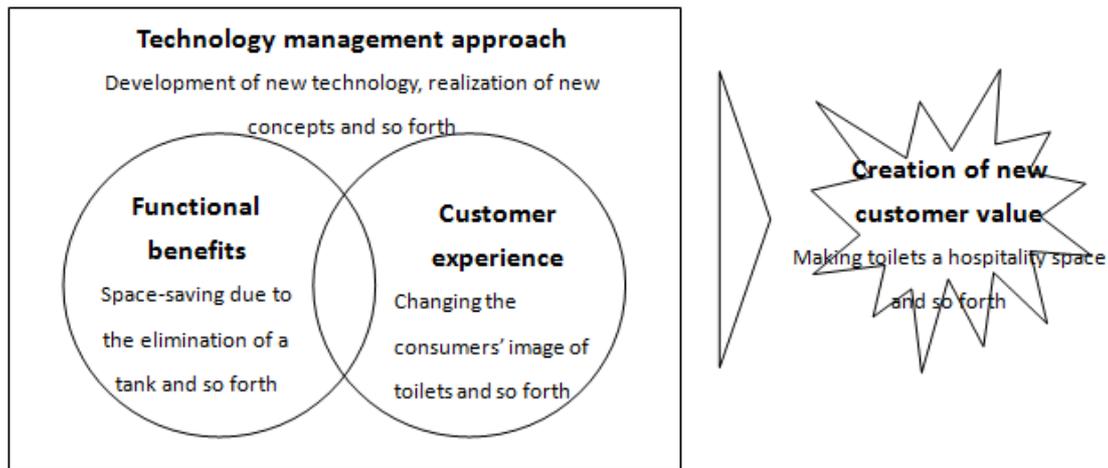


Figure 3. Conceptual Diagram of the Relationships between Functional Benefits and Customer experience.

Figure 3 shows a conceptual diagram of the relationships between functional benefits and customer experience, suggesting that each of the two has areas in which it is strong but that they coexist while complementing each other. The complementary relationships between the two are maintained by a technology management approach. In other words, the manufacturer provides functional benefits (such as saving space by eliminating the tank) as customer value by developing new technology (such as direct valve cleaning) through a technology management approach. By developing a new concept of toilets, the customer experience of SATIS (such as changing the customers' image of toilets) provides

value that appeals to the senses while affecting the psychology of the customers. And the functional benefits and the customer experience complement each other, thus creating a completely new form of customer value not found before (such as making toilets a hospitality space) [36] [37].

## 8. Summaries of the Examples

Table 3 summarizes the various examples the authors have taken up so far from the viewpoint of tangibles (such as products) and intangibles (customer experience).

Table 3. Tangibles (Such as Products) and Intangibles (Experiential Value) of the Examples Taken up so far.

Example	Tangibles (such as products)	Intangibles (customer experience) and new customer value
INAX's "SATIS" [1]	Tankless toilet	Changing the consumers' image of toilets and making toilets a hospitality space
Nissan Motor's "X-TRAIL" [1]	SUV (sports utility vehicle)	Offering outdoor sports gear and developing a feeling of fellowship among outdoor sports lovers
Kyoto-based Ichizawa Hanpu (currently Ichizawa Shinzaburo Hanpu) [1]	Canvas bags	Works created by craftsmen who pay particular attention to all their specifications
J1 football team Albirex Niigata [1]	Football team and games	Creating enthusiastic environment for sports and developing a love for one's home
Suetomi, a maker of Kyoto-style confectionery and a purveyor to the head of the Urasenke school of tea ceremony [2]	Beautifully designed, Kyoto-style confectionery with unique names	Promoting Japanese culture as well as providing educational opportunities such as learning about classical music
Shoyeido, a long-established incense maker with a history of 300 years [2]	Incense and incense sticks	Promoting Japanese culture, particularly incense-smelling
Hermès, the top-ranking manufacturer of luxury items [2]	Expensive scarves and bags	Promoting aristocratic culture, in particular equine culture
Sharp's "AQUOS" [3]	Flat-panel liquid-crystal TV set	Emphasizing hospitality using designs by Toshiyuki Kita, TV commercials featuring Sayuri Yoshinaga, and promotional videos by Daizaburo Harada
Wacoal's "WACOAL DIA" [3]	Expensive lingerie	Using designs by haut-couture designers, serving customers in anticipation of their needs, and treating them in special spaces
Kokuyo's "Kadokeshi" [3]	Eraser with many projecting edges	Calling up memories of elementary school days through its design
Bandai's "LITTLE JAMMER" [3]	Entertainment audio system	Calling up memories of student days, band experience, and jazz cafés through its design
Toraya, a long-established maker with a history of 500 years [4]	Sweet jelly made of <i>adzuki</i> beans and TORAYA CAFÉ	Maintaining its long history and tradition and bringing innovation by incorporating Western features in Japanese ones
SOMÈS SADDLE in Hokkaido [5]	Professional horse gear and the highest grade of branded bags	Manufacturing in the northernmost island of Japan starting from gear for horses
Kuriyamabeika in Niigata Prefecture [5]	10,000 JPY rice cracker "Komecho Yuki"	The premium rice cracker from Niigata, the land of rice cakes, which requires users to enjoy it through the brain and to which the manufacturer pays particular attention, became popular.

Example	Tangibles (such as products)	Intangibles (customer experience) and new customer value
Inden-ya Uehara Yushichi in Yamanashi Prefecture [5]	Traditional handicrafts “Inden”	Offering decorative leather products going beyond space-time that will last a lifetime; developed in Koshu (former name for Yamanashi), Inden-ya has a history of over 400 years.
Hanamaruki in Nagano Prefecture [5]	High-grade, original <i>miso</i> “Ojo,” “Senjotei,” and “My Misogura”	Offering its unique premium <i>miso</i> products that Shinshu (former name for Nagano)’s skillful <i>miso</i> makers have restored.
Yamanaka Lacquerware Cooperative Association in Ishikawa Prefecture [5]	Modern Japanese household utensils “NUSSHA”	NUSSHA products are favourite items of Parisians! Hokuriku’s traditional handicrafts of “Yamanaka lacquerware” are marketed globally.
Kaihara in Hiroshima Prefecture [5]	Premium denim	Based in Hiroshima, the manufacturer shifted from <i>kasuri</i> (cloth with splashed patterns) to denim and now provides the fabric to distinguished manufacturers of branded jeans in Japan and abroad.
Hakuho-do in Hiroshima Prefecture [5]	High-quality Kumano cosmetic brushes	The manufacturer holds a 60% share of the worldwide cosmetic brush market! The spirit of the engineers that is put into cosmetic brushes in Hiroshima keeps women beautiful.
Chiso, a long-established maker with a history of 450 years [6]	<i>Kyoto-yuzen</i> kimono printed silk	The manufacturer has overcome five once-in-a-hundred-years crises through innovation..
Rental housing with community [7]	Rental housing with community Space	Offering synergy effect of hardware, software and operation creating community
Asahi Shuzo in Niigata Prefecture [8]	Expensive Japanese sake	Works created by craftsmen who pay particular attention to all their specifications and ingredients
Snow Peak in Niigata Prefecture [8]	Expensive outdoor goods	Works created by craftsmen who pay particular attention to all their specifications
Zenith in Le Locle, Switzerland [8]	Expensive watch	Works created by craftsmen who pay particular attention to all their specifications
Hublot in Nyon, Switzerland [8]	Expensive watch	Fusion of raw materials such as gold, plastics, rubber, denim

Source:

- (1) Nagasawa, Shin'ya ed. (2005) Value Creation through Customer Experience That Enables to Develop Hit Products: Manufacturing and Fabrication That Influence Kansei, Nikkagiren Shuppansha. (in Japanese).
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An analysis of the examples listed above from the viewpoint of customer experience creation indicates that all the products have a high level of SENSE, FEEL, THINK, ACT, and RELATE characteristics, and it can be said that each of them is a collection of customer experience and that at the same time it has been developed from a technology management approach. In addition, an analysis and study of each case as an example of customer experience creation shows that consistent explanations can be given based on Schmitt’s five strategic experiential modules. Therefore, these concepts of customer experience are extremely useful in developing unconventional products that appeal to the sensibility of customers by complementing the conventional functional benefits and are expected to help create new customer value.

In each example, the manufacturer’s product development capabilities constitute a source of the customers’ customer experience, creating the customer experience of products, including lifestyles and culture. Each example demonstrates that manufacturers can enhance the customers’ experience and maintain a competitive advantage by making the most of their

characteristics represented by technology (such as tankless toilets and Kyoto’s local traditional industries and craftsmanship) [38]

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