

Market Intelligence Digest

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The Department of Trade and Industry - Export Marketing Bureau (DTI-EMB) is mandated to oversee the development, promotion and monitoring of Philippine exports. The DTI-EMB provides the exporters the enabling environment to make them globally competitive.

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COVID-19 and How Japanese Consumers are Responding

A focus on Japanese consumers and the impact of COVID-19 on their attitudes and behaviors.



Photo by Kate Trifo of Pexels

Mintel's Perspective

The dramatic surge in COVID-19 cases and a possible lockdown in Tokyo have amplified fears of the virus and its impact on the elderly.

However, Japanese consumers are trying to stay strong during these challenging times by embracing cultural values of jishuku (self-restraint) and omoiyari (empathy).

Consumers are likely to remain cautious in 2020, but will gradually regain their positive mindsets as they prepare for the Olympic Games in 2021.

Market Intelligence Digest

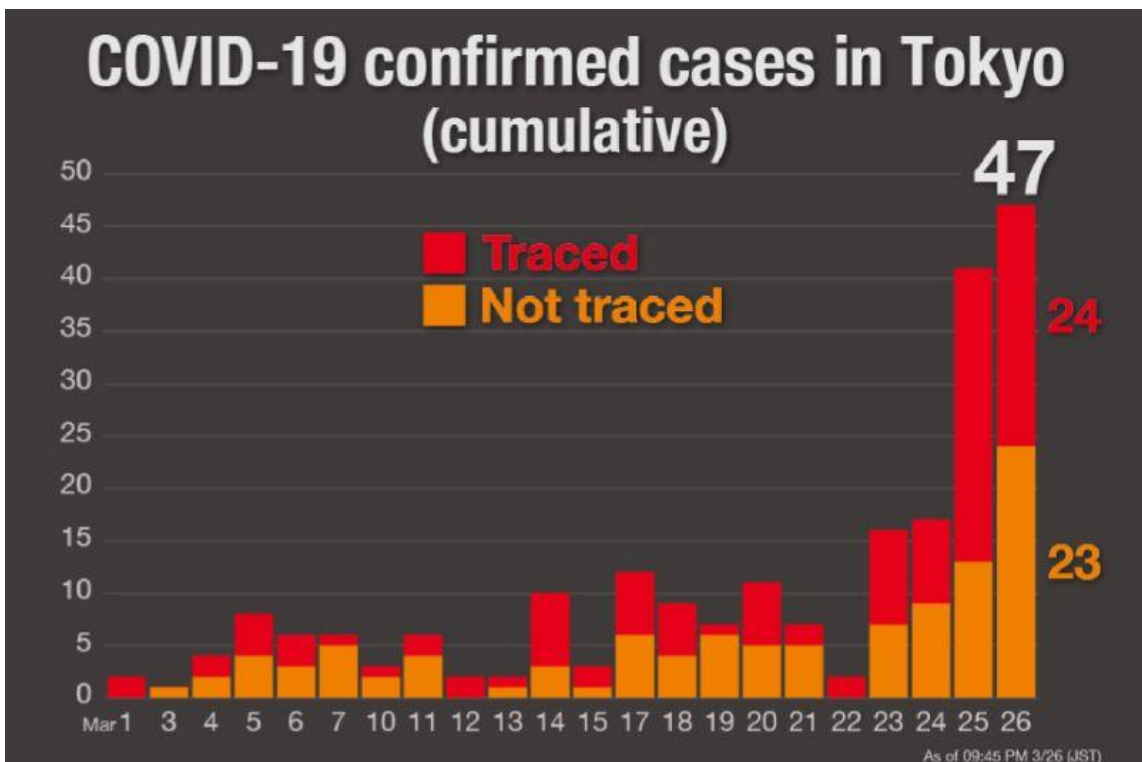
Volume 2 Issue No. 20 | May 2020

Japanese consumers' fear of uncertainty

Mintel's survey conducted in March 2020 showed that nearly 60% of Japanese consumers are worried about the risk of being exposed to the novel coronavirus.

On 25 March, authorities in Tokyo reported a record spike in the number of coronavirus infections. They also announced that they couldn't trace the route of infection for at least 10 of the new cases, hinting at a greater risk of hidden growth in infections.

The sudden spike prompted Tokyo's Governor, Yuriko Koike, to ask residents to stay indoors over the weekend. This sudden announcement led consumers to panic-buy groceries and other supplies.



Tokyo reported a record spike in the number of coronavirus infections

Source: NHK; Mintel's Global COVID-19 Tracker

Market Intelligence Digest

Volume 2 Issue No. 20 | May 2020

Japan has gone into jishuku mode

Influenced by the coronavirus outbreak, Japan has entered a period of 自粛 (jishuku), which means 'self-restraint'. Various events have been cancelled or postponed, matching the country's somber mood.

On 24 March, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced that the Tokyo Olympic Games will be pushed back one year to the summer of 2021.



Source: Tokyo Midtown

Famous for its 200-meter-long avenue of cherry trees, Tokyo Midtown has also decided to cancel its annual Midtown Blossom 2020 event, which is usually held mid to late March to early April.

Greater attention to good hygienic habits

In Japan, 63% of consumers are wearing face masks in public to protect themselves and others from getting infected. Due to the scarcity of face masks, retailers such as Don Quijote held a 'buy one at 298 JPY and get the second one at 9,999 JPY' campaign to tackle the issue of reselling.

Brands and retailers in Japan are also emphasizing the importance of hand hygiene to flatten the curve and prevent the number of cases from growing. Supermarkets have placed hand sanitizers at their entrances, and beauty brands have introduced 'no touch' policies at their beauty counters.

The concept of omoiyari (empathy) could help promote a positive attitude towards cleanliness habits and encourage people, especially young consumers, to develop good hygiene practices.

Market Intelligence Digest

Volume 2 Issue No. 20 | May 2020

What Japanese consumers are avoiding

CROWDED PLACES

63%

of Japanese consumers are trying to avoid crowded places

EATING OUT

34%

of Japanese consumers have avoided restaurants and going out to eat

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

30%

of Japanese consumers are trying to avoid public transport

Base: Japan: 500 internet users aged 18-55

Source: Dynata/Mintel; Mintel's Global COVID-19 Tracker

However, the younger generation needs to be more cautious

Compared to the 67% of consumers aged 55+, only 36% of those aged 18-24 are trying to avoid crowded places. This indicates that the younger generation needs to be more cautious.

While younger consumers are more likely to experience milder symptoms, according to multiple reports, they may play a large role in spreading the virus without knowing it.

Despite the Tokyo Metropolitan Government's efforts to shut down parks famous for their cherry blossom trees, a crowd of people ignored the warnings and flocked to the famous hanami spots on Friday, 27 March, the day before the stay-at-home weekend.

The Hong Kong mall in Harbour City worked with seven global brands to create mask looks

Market Intelligence Digest

Volume 2 Issue No. 20 | May 2020

Keeping clean for the sake of others

HANDWASH

62%

of Japanese consumers are washing their hands more often

SANITIZERS

33%

of Japanese consumers are using hand sanitizer more often

DISINFECTANTS

32%

of Japanese consumers have increased their use of disinfectants or other household cleansing products

Base: Japan: 500 internet users aged 18-55

Source: Dynata/Mintel; Mintel's Global COVID-19 Tracker

Plenty of opportunities for sanitizer

The use of sanitizers is relatively low compared to the use of hand soaps.

There are many reasons for this. Consumers are unable to find them because of the shortage, and some are concerned that hand sanitizers, with its alcohol content, could dry out the skin.

Due to this, fashion brands such as Gelato Pique have decided to use their body care production facilities to create their own hand gels formulated with alcohol, also including chamomile extract and hyaluronic acid to protect and restore the skin barrier.

Follow this movement to tackle the crisis and help people fight against COVID-19.