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Rap Music, Department Image and Student Intention; A Study in Japan

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Abstract. In the education context, the majority of studies on student intentions (school selection, retention and dropout) focused on the internal affecting factors (e.g., sex, family background, school performance and satisfaction). Those on the external determinants (e.g., school image) seem to be too thin, although these factors can be more easily and effectively regulated by education institutions. School image, however, does not stay unchanged but revolves over time. Nevertheless, the instability of school image has not been examined by previous research. Based on these understandings, this study aims to examine the change of a school department's images with the input of rap music as an image change agent. In addition, it investigates the correlation between department images and student intentions. Using the quantitative data collected from 96 students in three low-grade classes (1-3) in a junior technology college in the Tohoku region of Japan, this study found that the impacts that a piece of rap music can produce is marginally limited, and the images of the department are decaying. In addition, the study figured out that department images are significant to the formation of students' intentions to go to the advanced course and to recommend the department, but don't have any significant effect on students' intention to finish their five-year study. Some implications for the management of education activities to retain and recruit students are proposed based on these outcomes.

Keyword: *Affective image, Cognitive image, Intention, Kosen, Mixed design*

1. Introduction

The growth rate of world population is slowing down, especially in the developed countries. The consequences are numerous, including children and workforce shortage, production and consumption shrinkage, and economic slowdown. The lack of children, in particular, will lead to the lack of students for education institutions. Together with the current issue of

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student dropout, this will darken the future of the education sector in the developed countries.

Student intention to enter a particular school and/or department can be affected many factors. Some factors related to the students' sociodemographic and personal characteristics (i.e., internal), for example, sex, residency, family background and self-efficiency. The others are controlled by the external or environmental forces, for example, school characteristics and financial aid (Kallio, 1995). The internal-external categorization of the influential factors is also applied to those affect student intention to retain in or dropout from schools. However, the majority of studies on student intentions (selection, retention and dropout) focused on the internal factors. Those on the external determinants seem to be too thin, although these factors can be more easily and effectively regulated by education institutions. Among the external factors, school characteristics affect both student decisions to enter and to retain or withdraw (Landrum et al., 1999). This element is a group of attributes that are attached to a school (Cernicova et al., 2015). In other words, school image is the aggregation of the knowledge, beliefs and feelings that the students and the related audience hold about a school.

Student evaluation of school attributes (i.e., school's perceived image) does not only affect their decisions to enter and to retain or withdraw but also serves as the antecedent of their satisfaction, perceived value, expectation, attachment, loyalty, and word-of-mouth, among others (Wilkins et al., 2013). However, image is not a static concept. In other words, it can be reformed and changed with the input of information sources (Gartner, 1994). Nevertheless, the instability of school image has not been examined by previous research. Moreover, the images of a school department have not been assessed although they may be different from those of the other departments and of the school in general.

In the existing literature on the perceived images, researchers have investigated several image change agents, for example, movies and websites. Music in general and rap music in particular have not been employed in any studies. Regarding the effects of rap music, Johnson, Jackson, and Gatto (1995) found that the exposure to violent rap videos tends to increase the acceptance of violence use. In addition, Rudman and Lee (2002)'s study recorded that the evaluation of black and white men's personality characteristics could be changed with the input of rap music. These pieces of evidence have suggested that rap music can be used as a change agent of both perceptions and behaviors.

Based on the above discussion, this study aims to examine the change of a school department's images with the input of rap music as an image change agent. In addition, it investigates the correlation between department images

and student intentions. The outcomes provide some implications for the management of education activities to retain and recruit students, with an emphasis on the current ones.
Generally, the formation of the image of an entity is an on-going process which requires the input of many information sources. According to Gartner (1994), the sources can be grouped into three broad categories of organic, autonomous and induced information. In the case of schools, organic information includes the information gathered by actual experiences of the students and those told by their family members and friends. Autonomous information comes from public sources such as news, reports and television programs about the schools. Induced information, otherwise, is endorsed by the schools and the involved parties, including websites, printed materials, open-campus events, education exhibitions, recruiters and intermediators, and teachers and counsellors, among others (Pampaloni, 2010).

Previous studies on place image have proved that the abovementioned sources of information can change the evaluation of place attributes. Konečnik et al. (2006), for example, compared the perceptions of German tourists who had and hadn't visited Slovenia. Interestingly, those who had the actual experiences evaluated Slovenia's image more positively as compared to those who did not. In another study in Australia with Australian residents, Ritchie et al. (2007) found some similar findings when they surveyed those who watched and didn't watch television programs about the capital city of Canberra. The outcomes revealed that the televised events had a positive impact. Specifically, those who watched them had better perceptions of Canberra in terms of natural setting, educational facilities, and sporting facilities, among others. Considering the evidence gathered from the place image literature, it is possible to assume that school image may also be changed with the correct input of information sources.

In Japan, the younger generations have been struggling to find their identities and social inclusions for decades (Suwa et al., 2013). Under this context, rap music is used as a social means to express Japanese youth's observations and opinions (Mattar, 2008). In a study with approximately 270 students in Tokyo, Brown (2012) reported that rap is ranked sixth in students' music preference chart (preceded by pop, rock, classical, jazz and soul). Brown (2012)'s further analysis revealed that listening to rap music significantly correlates to the "extraversion" trait of the listeners. This trait, in particular, reflects the social self-esteem, social boldness, sociality and liveliness of the respondents.

2. Methodology

Study context and subjects

The context of this study is Japan, the first developed country seriously affected by the depopulation issue. In Japan, the number of young people in general and of students in particular will decrease as the median age increases from 47 to 53 over the 2015 -2050 period.

Japanese education system is divided into elementary education (6 years), secondary education (3 years) and higher education. In addition to vocational and junior colleges (2 years), universities (4+ years) and graduate schools, higher education in Japan has a unique subsystem of colleges of technology. These colleges (Kosen in Japanese) are the hybrids of high school, junior college (the first two years in universities) and advanced course (the last two years in universities). However, the length of study (5-7 years), and the availability of other options may hold up student intentions to enter Kosens, to finish their 5-year study and to go to the 2-year advanced courses.

Currently there are 55 colleges (57 campuses) in the Kosen system; only three of them have a business department. Consequently, the images of the business departments cannot be similar to those of the engineering departments.

This study was implemented in a Kosen in the Tohoku region. This college has five departments and approximately 1,000 students. Its business communication department has approximately 200 students of five school years. This Kosen is the forerunner of the second Kosen block (there are five Kosen blocks altogether), whose aims are to modernize and globalize the Kosen system. The business communication department is in the center of all of this Kosen's efforts. Based on this reason, all the students of this department were targeted as the subjects of this study.

Instrument development

This study measures the change of the images of the department of business communication with the input of a piece of rap music. In addition, the study examines the correlation between department images and student intentions. Two research questions (RQ) are developed based on these objectives.

RQ1. Do the images of the department change after the introduction to the rap music?
RQ2. Do department images affect student intentions?
The students of the department of business communication were divided into two groups of high-grade (4th and 5th years) and low-grade (1st to 3rd years). The high-grade students were employed in the qualitative survey to generate the contents for the instrument. These students have been studying in the department for a longer period of time; thus they can help produce

more attributes based on their experiences. The low-grade students, otherwise, were targeted for the quantitative survey which examines the changes of the department image and the correlation between department images and student intentions. Since this study investigated the intentions of retention (to finish the five-year study), selection (to go to the advanced course) and recommendation (to introduce the department), the low-grade students form a relevant population.

Initially, a total of 64 students in their 4th- and 5th-year were asked to disclose the attributes of the department of business communication as an additional class activity. The students were requested to write down up to five words or phrases that can describe their impressions (cognitive attributes) and feelings (affective attributes) (Echtner et al., 2003). In total, they contributed 33 cognitive attributes and 14 affective attributes. After the similar items were combined and/or adjusted, only 18 cognitive attributes and 5 affective attributes were retained for the instrument. These items were measured on an eleven-point scale, ranging from extremely negative to extremely positive with the cognitive items, and from "I don't feel it at all" to "I feel it very much" with the affective items. In addition, the intention items were evaluated on a five-point scale of "not at all" and "very much." The instrument was developed and written in Japanese. The selection of the measures and their English translation were implemented by the researcher.

Image change agent

The stimulus of the experiment is a 150-second piece of rap music created by a graduate of the business communication department. This piece of music was selected for two reasons. First, the rap lyrics reflect the opinions and observations of the student and his classmates about the department, the Kosen and the studying in the Kosen. Thus, the piece is in line with world rap music in general and with Japanese rap music in particular. Second, the role of students as the creators of school image change agent has not been evaluated. Students, as the center of all the teaching and learning processes at schools, may potentially possess more contributions besides the conventional role of school image perceivers.

Data collection and analysis

The main data of the study were collected from the students in the low-grade classes in the mid of 2017. Specifically, in the second week of June 2017, the researcher asked the students in each class to fill in a questionnaire of a research on the department image. The survey was undertaken in the classrooms; each class occupies a separate classroom in a different floor of the same building. A week later, the researcher let the students listen to the piece of rap music and repeated the collection of the data after the rap music. The students were unknown about the second

survey beforehand. During the rap music, the researcher observed and took note of the students' reactions.

There are 123 students in the three low-grade classes. Some students were missing in either one of the surveys or did not provide the evaluations for some of the measures. The missing answers were eliminated from the database. This yielded a sample of 96 respondents for each survey (192 for both surveys), corresponding to a response rate of 78.05%.

The independent t-test analysis and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were implemented for each class to identify the change of the images before and after the rap music. In addition, multiple regression analysis was conducted to verify the correlation between department images and student intentions. As a result of several attempts of principle component analysis, both the cognitive image and the affective image were treated as a one-factor component. Cronbach's alphas were calculated for each component. Among the cognitive measures, C2 (boy-girl balance) had a corrected item-total correlation value below 0.30. This item was removed to improve the alpha of the cognitive component to 0.946. Moreover, among the affective measures, A2 (sad) and A5 (anxious) had negative corrected item-total correlation values. They were also removed to increase the alpha of the affective component to 0.915. After that, the mean value of the two components were estimated and used in the regression analysis on the combined data of the pre- and post-experiment surveys (n = 192).

3. Results and Discussion

The change of department images

The independent t-test analysis suggested that there were no changes of the department images when using the conventional significance value of 0.05. However, when relaxing the criteria to a marginal value of 0.10, it is observed that there potentially was a small positive change in the perception of the first grade student of C10 – globalization ($t = 1.695$, $p = 0.095$). In addition, there is a possibility that the third grade students negatively changed their evaluations of C4 – study difficulty ($t = 1.990$, $p = 0.051$), C8 – student quality ($t = 1.859$, $p = 0.068$) and C18 – atmosphere ($t = 1.876$, $p = 0.066$). The analysis of variance further added that there were some significant changes in the perceptions of the students in different grades (Table 1). Specifically, the first grade students were the most optimistic, while the third grade students were the most pessimistic perceivers.

Table 1. Comparison of student evaluation of department attributes

	Pre-music		
	1st grade [1]	**2nd grade [2]**	**3rd grade [3]**

	(n = 36)	(n = 31)	(n = 29)
Cognitive image			
C1. Curriculum	8.36 [2, 3, 5, 6]	6.68 [1, 4]	5.24 [1, 4]
C2. Boy-girl balance	5.31	5.61	5.14
C3. English class	8.83 [2, 3, 5, 6]	6.84 [1]	6.38 [1, 4]
C4. Study difficulty	8.00 [5, 6]	6.77	6.66
C5. Teaching staff	8.92 [3, 5, 6]	7.52 [3, 6]	4.83 [1, 2, 4, 5]
C6. Study abroad opportunity	8.33 [3, 6]	7.35	6.41 [1, 4]
C7. Department name	7.94 [3, 6]	7.10	5.28 [1, 4]
C8. Student quality	8.31 [3, 6]	7.35 [6]	6.07 [1, 4]
C9. Study purpose	8.03 [3, 5, 6]	6.65 [4]	5.93 [1, 4]
C10. Globalization	7.92	6.71 [4]	6.28 [4]
C11. Future prospect	7.81 [3, 6]	6.48 [4]	5.59 [1, 4]
C12. Study continuation	7.28	6.32	5.93
C13. Study method	7.03 [6]	6.23 [4]	5.69 [4]
C14. Prestige	8.06 [3, 6]	7.00 [6]	5.28 [1, 4]
C15. Study time	7.78 [5, 6]	6.42	6.14
C16. Homework	7.42 [6]	6.81	5.86
C17. Freedom	9.56 [3, 5, 6]	8.39	7.76 [1]
C18. Atmosphere	9.86 [3, 5, 6]	8.45	7.76 [1, 4]
Affective image			
A1. Interesting	9.42 [2, 3, 5, 6]	7.71 [1]	6.41 [1, 4]
A2. Sad	2.72 [3, 6]	3.84	5.24 [1, 4]
A3. Happy	8.75 [2, 3, 5, 6]	6.65 [1, 4]	5.86 [1, 4]
A4. Bright	9.06 [2, 3, 5, 6]	7.32 [1, 4]	6.41 [1, 4]
A5. Anxious	5.50	6.06	5.66

Table 1. Cont.

	Post-music				
	1st grade [4] (n = 36)	2nd grade [5] (n = 31)	3rd grade [6] (n = 29)	F	*p*
Cognitive image					
C1. Curriculum	8.47 [2, 3, 5, 6]	6.58 [1, 4]	5.17 [1, 4]	18.833	0.000
C2. Boy-girl balance	5.72	5.84	5.10	0.538	0.747
C3. English class	8.25 [3, 6]	6.90 [1]	5.72 [1, 4]	11.820	0.000
C4. Study difficulty	7.53 [6]	6.45 [1]	5.97 [1, 4]	5.881	0.000
C5. Teaching staff	8.19 [3, 6]	6.97 [1, 2, 6]	4.31 [1, 2, 4, 5]	23.992	0.000
C6. Study abroad opportunity	8.72 [3, 6]	7.42	5.72 [1, 4]	8.295	0.000
C7. Department name	8.11 [3, 6]	6.35	5.00 [1, 4]	8.496	0.000
C8. Student quality	8.14	6.74	5.21 [1, 2, 4]	11.111	0.000
C9. Study purpose	8.61 [2, 3, 5, 6]	6.35 [1, 4]	5.45 [1, 4]	14.232	0.000
C10. Globalization	8.67 [2, 3, 5, 6]	6.52 [4]	6.34 [4]	7.402	0.000
C11. Future prospect	8.28 [2, 3, 5, 6]	6.48 [4]	5.28 [1, 4]	10.638	0.000
C12. Study continuation	7.44	6.26	5.72	3.886	0.002
C13. Study method	7.67 [2, 3, 6]	6.32	5.55 [1, 4]	7.557	0.000
C14. Prestige	8.19 [3, 6]	6.97 [6]	4.93 [1, 2, 4, 5]	13.446	0.000
C15. Study time	7.47 [6]	5.90 [1]	5.48 [1, 4]	5.525	0.000
C16. Homework	6.94	6.23	5.66 [1]	3.631	0.004
C17. Freedom	9.14 [6]	7.61 [1]	7.28 [1, 4]	6.390	0.000
C18. Atmosphere	9.47 [3, 5, 6]	7.45 [1, 4]	6.76 [1, 4]	12.252	0.000

Affective image					
A1. Interesting	8.89 [3, 5]	7.48 [1]	6.10 [1, 4]	14.963	0.000
A2. Sad	2.92 [3, 6]	3.90	5.45 [1, 4]	10.858	0.000
A3. Happy	8.28 [2, 3, 5, 6]	6.68 [1, 4]	5.41 [1, 4]	15.981	0.000
A4. Bright	9.06 [2, 3, 5, 6]	6.48 [1, 4]	5.79 [1, 4]	18.246	0.000
A5. Anxious	5.08	5.06	6.07	1.088	0.369

Note. Superscripted numbers represent the subjects whose perceptions significantly differed from the subsample's evaluation.

The correlation between department images and student intentions

The results of regression analysis suggested that both the cognitive and the affective department images did not have any significant effects on students' intention to finish the five-year study (Table 2). Among the cognitive attributes, those might have a significant predictive power ($p< 0.10$) include C4 and C6 (negative) and C14 and C16 (positive). Moreover, department images had some weak impacts on students' intention to go to the advanced course. The predictive power potentially came from the cognitive component ($p< 0.10$), with the potential predictors are C5 and C14 (positive) and C15 (negative). Furthermore, both the cognitive and the affective department image components could explain 45.4% of the total variance of the students' intention to recommend the department. Again, the effect of the cognitive component was larger, with the most important potential contributors ($p< 0.10$) to be C1, C5 and C18 (positive) and C7 (negative). An additional regression analysis revealed that cognitive image could significantly regulate the formation of affective image in a positive manner (adjusted $R2 = 0.548$, $p = 0.000$).

This study aims to assess the power of rap music as an image change agent in an education context. On the one hand, the outcomes revealed that the impacts that a piece of rap music can produce are marginally limited. This do not support the observation found in the existing literature (Rudman & Lee, 2002). The reasons are numerous. First, the images of the department have been built and kept for a long stretch of time on a daily basis (several months with the first grade students and several years with the second- and third-grade students). Thus, a minute stimulant cannot induce a lot of changes. Second, only one stimulant was used in the experiment. Hence, its impacts may not be strong enough, although the students showed some immediate positive reactions when listening to the music (e.g., grinning, talking to one another and repeating after the lyrics).

Table 2. Correlation between department images and student intentions

	Intention to finish the five-year study	**Intention to go to the advanced course**	**Intention to recommend the department**
Cognitive image	β = -0.012 p = 0.910	β = 0.248 p = 0.015	β = 0.518 p = 0.000

Affective image	β = 0.118 p = 0.275	β = 0.151 p = 0.135	β = 0.198 p = 0.014
Summary	Adjusted R^2= 0.002 p = 0.321	Adjusted R^2= 0.131 p = 0.000	Adjusted R^2= 0.454 p = 0.000

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On the other hand, the findings suggest that the department's images are unfixed (Gartner, 1994). However, instead of being improved, they are decaying (Chen & Funk, 2014). Specifically, the higher grade the students are in, the less favorable the images of the department they evaluate. The most decayed attributes of the department include, for example, teaching staff, study purpose, student quality, curriculum, English class, study difficulty, study method, study time, study abroad opportunity, globalization, prestige and future prospect. In this case, the students have moved from the front stage (when they were applicants) to the backstage (after they entered the department). The deeper they ventured, the darker aspects they have seen and the less satisfied they are with the department.

Another objective of the study is to verify the importance of department images to student intentions. Its results are both similar to and different from those of previous research (Wilkins et al., 2013). In the similar manner, this study found that department images are significant to the formation of some of the student intentions (intention to go to the advanced course and intention to recommend the department). Between the two image components, the impact of the cognitive one is stronger than that of the affective one. This contrasts the observation of the research on destination image, where tourist intentions are affected the most by the affective component (Nghiêm-Phú, 2015). Consequently, the outcome suggests that students are more rational than emotional when thinking about their future plans.

In the different manner, the study did not see any significant effect that department images can have on students' intention to finish their five-year study. In other words, the external factors of department image are not very

important to this particular intention of the students. Instead, the reason behind the students' intention may originate from their internal characteristics, such as motivations and goals (Kallio, 1995). This observation is consistent with the popular cultural theory on Japan (Hofstede et al., 2010). Accordingly, Japanese people are always constraining themselves; they tend to compromise to keep the harmony within their group. Thus, there is a possibility that the students have been enduring (gaman in Japanese) the unfavorability of the department in order to accomplish their high school and junior college education in the same school for five years.

4. Conclusion

This study, with its mixed design, has initiated an examination of an education organization's image change. Unfortunately, the outcomes show that the department image is decaying. This suggests that the students are in a pathetic situation on the one hand, and that the department has failed to maintain its students' interest on the other. The change of the department images is the result of a cognition-based process, in which the students use their experiences to build up the more accurate perceptions of their department. Therefore, an emotion-based agent of rap music cannot easily produce many significant impacts.

However, the images of the department are important with the students' future intentions. Therefore, a comprehensive change of the department's curriculum, teaching contents and methods and teaching staff is recommendable. This effort may help significantly improve the education quality, thus improve the characteristics of the department. When the current students have good images of their department, the organic information that they give the potential students and their families becomes more positive (Gartner, 1994). The improvement may also encourage the current students to go to the advanced course to ensure its existence and development. The improvement, however, may not be meaningful to students' intention to retain in the school or department until they finish their fifth school year. Yet, that can make their school life more interesting and satisfied, which is meaningful to their well-being and future prospect. The strategies for other education organizations, nevertheless, cannot be proposed in this mini-scale study. To suggest a concrete and sustainable approach, more research on school image and school image change should be done. Particularly, the importance of school image as an external impacting factor of student perceptions and behaviors need to be further explored. In addition, the decay of school image, whether it is a prominent or a peculiar phenomenon, must be thoroughly investigated. Moreover, the role of students as the creators and/or facilitators of school image change should also be evaluated. The role of rap music in particular and music in

general as an image change agent should also be reexamined. Furthermore, the relationship between image change and student reactions (especially psychological and emotional reactions) may be further addressed.

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