

## Impressions and Feedback

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## Collaboration Project with University Based on *Wajima nuri* Market Survey: A New Perspective Incorporating Kansei Engineering

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### Background

As traditional industries continue to face a crisis brought about by diversification of consumer values, we have been concerned about how to enable consumers to understand the value of *urushi* ware (traditional Japanese lacquerware) appropriate to its price.

Urushi ware makers themselves appear to have lost sight of what to make and how to sell it. Furthermore, the urushi ware industry lacks the resources to investigate and analyze the situation. There is a need to develop products and sales channels from a new perspective that differs from the traditional one.

Particularly in the case of the city of Wajima, the local production brand image is strong compared with other areas, as there is an emphasis on manufacturing urushi ware based on time-consuming traditional manufacturing methods. However, since this results in a high price, sales have been struggling.

### Objective of the collaborative study

By collaborating with a research institution such as a university, it has become possible to conduct research that enables consumers to understand the value of *Wajima nuri* (urushi ware made in Wajima using traditional local methods), more specifically by applying kansei (“sensitivity”) engineering from a new perspective that differs from the traditional one. This kind of collaborative activity aims to achieve sales promotion through cultivating untapped potential customer segments and

enhancement of product development capabilities.

### Expectations

Students engaged with the project through the following activities:

- Field surveys to find out the actual current status of *Wajima nuri*
- Attending basic lectures on kansei engineering
- A kansei evaluation survey on *Wajima nuri*
- Investigation of the *Wajima nuri* market and *Wajima nuri* value using marketing techniques
- Estimation of potential customers by marketing techniques
- Investigation of specific proposals aimed at market activation

The students conducted the various surveys and research in this project in collaboration with *Wajima nuri* producers as part of their education. As a result, the producing area not only received the benefit of time and cost, but there was also an opportunity for students to gain a deeper understanding of *Wajima nuri* and for the producers to take a fresh look at their ordinary product manufacture, sales, and so on.

The market survey was extremely interesting. Whereas previous surveys conducted in Wajima have all focused on prospective or potential customers who already have an interest in urushi ware, the survey in this project also focused on potential customers who have little interest.

The content used in advertising for *Wajima nuri* up until now has mainly been about the history and process of *Wajima nuri*. In addition, there has been

little language to help consumers better understand the appeal of *Wajima nuri*. Sales have also relied until now on the *Wajima nuri* brand image. It has become difficult to capture the mind of the consumer with this alone.

The kansei evaluation engineering technique elicited content that answers fundamental questions, such as “Why do people buy *Wajima nuri*?” and “What is the superior value that people seek in *Wajima nuri*?”, which includes the viewpoint of potential customers. This is likely to be very useful for diffusion and promotion, product development, and sales channel development going forward.