

## Wajima Collaboration Project Research Report

### Group C

#### Introduction

*Wajima nuri*, *urushi* lacquerware of a distinct style, is a highly recognized and exceptional craftwork that one can enjoy and own. Centuries of production and experience have turned *Wajima nuri* into a hallmark of excellence, beauty, and one of the most durable natural lacquers known to man. Although the original techniques of *Wajima nuri* persist and its craftsmen have created one of the most complex forms of strong and elegant lacquerware, *Wajima nuri* is facing the challenges resulting from the transformation of people's lifestyle and the development of new, effortless, and cheaper materials. Young families living in the big cities are deeply occupied by the concerns of the everyday life, and are increasingly separated from natural and traditional commodities. Therefore, it has become necessary to redefine the meaning and value of *Wajima nuri* products, reemphasize its environmentally friendly and unique characteristics, and develop a strategy to transmit its significance to the contemporary people through an innovative approach.

Group C of the *Wajima nuri* Cooperative Project has aimed to determine new potential users of these products with the greater goal of expanding the market and deepening people's understanding of *Wajima nuri*. It seeks to promulgate *Wajima nuri* as more than a product of Japanese traditional culture, but also as an everyday life good in contemporary society. Following several discussions and brainstorming sessions, we identified several groups of people with a high likelihood of buying *Wajima nuri* products. Eventually, Group C refined this

target group as: mothers within the age range of 31 to 50 years old, who have children living in the same household as the main potential customers. In this process, the Blue Ocean Strategy inspired us to emphasize the importance of targeting a new market that is still relatively untouched in the current situation; indeed, our group's main target customer is presumed to be a sub-target market with a low-purchase rate in the existing marketing strategy. We thus analyzed and confirmed the inaccuracy of this assumption through survey research. Furthermore, this customer selection is based on our argument that mothers usually choose high-quality products for their children, want to educate their children (about food culture and traditional crafts), tend to have a stable income, are the ones who make decisions for purchasing products in their families, as well as inherit and pass down the products to their children.

To achieve these goals—increase the use and understanding of *Wajima nuri* among mothers—Group C designed and conducted internet surveys concerning the marketing process, in which Kansei words were employed to introduce the importance of *Wajima nuri* products to mothers. Moreover, based on the survey results we provided suggestions for promoting *Wajima nuri* products on media channels. The final solutions proposed by this group provide new perspectives that combine narrative and catchphrases with educational and emotional values to persuade new target markets to become more familiar with *Wajima nuri*. The significance of this research will expand the exposure and highlight the cultural value of *Wajima nuri* to a wider customer-



Figure 1. Profile of the respondents

base in the long run.

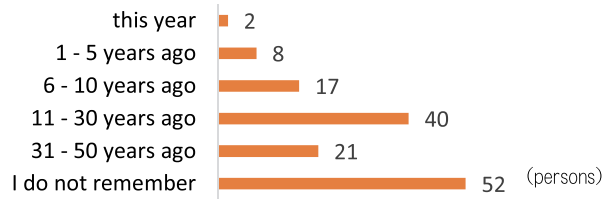
The following section discusses the results of the survey of the target market. The details of this survey research confirm the opportunity for expanding the *Wajima nuri* market to this new demographic. The survey results also compile various important points related to product sales, customer profiles, and ongoing trends that will affect

the marketing strategy.

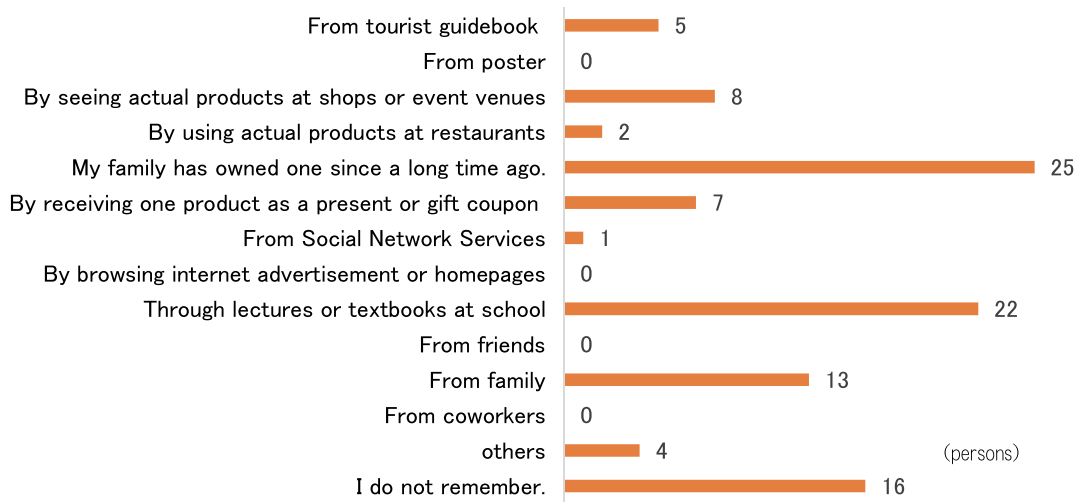
### Questionnaire Survey

- Outline of the survey and respondents

At the end of November 2017, we conducted an internet survey to gain an overview of the trends among our target customers in Japan: mothers (31–50 years old) with children that live in the



**Figure 2. When did you learn about *Wajima nuri* for the first time?**  
(Single answer. Total: 140 respondents)



**Figure 3. How did you learn about *Wajima nuri* for the first time?**  
(Single answer. Total: 140 respondents)

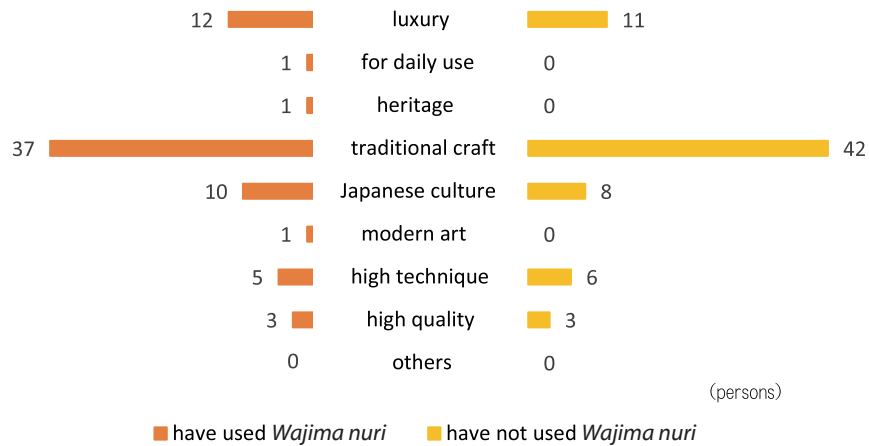
same household. We developed a questionnaire consisting of 19 questions and collected answers from 70 respondents who have used *Wajima nuri* and 70 respondents who have not used *Wajima nuri*. All 140 respondents were selected using an internet research company who ensured that respondents were already aware of *Wajima nuri* and had one or more children (aged 18 or younger) living in the same household. Moreover, respondents were selected equally in terms of age range, residence and experience of using *Wajima nuri* (see the Graph of Residence and Age in Figure 1, below).

- Results and analysis

In this section, we explain the results of the online questionnaire survey and analyze our target customers’ perceptions of *Wajima nuri*, expectations regarding the educational effect of *Wajima nuri*, and purchase intentions.

1) Perceptions of *Wajima nuri*

Figures 2 and 3 depict the trends of when and how the respondents learned about *Wajima nuri* for the first time. In Figure 2, the largest number of the answers shows that 52 respondents answered, “I do not remember.” In Figure 3, the largest number of the answers shows that 35 respondents answered they learned about *Wajima nuri* “through TV or radio programs,” 25 respondents answered “my family has owned one since a long time ago,” and 22 respondents answered “through lectures or textbooks at school.” These results show that *Wajima nuri*, the name or the object, is not something encountered at limited time or place; rather, it is commonly and repeatedly seen or heard in daily life through mass media (such as TV or radio), at schools, or in the home. Moreover, they do not learn about it on special occasions or through experiences at shops, restaurants, or events, but gradually recognize it as general information and



**Figure 4. What kind of impression do you have on *Wajima nuri*?**

(Single answer. Total: 70 respondents who have used *Wajima nuri* and 70 respondents who have not used *Wajima nuri*)

daily experiences throughout their lives.

Figure 4 shows the impressions that the respondents have of *Wajima nuri*. As the largest number of the answers, 79 respondents (37 who have used *Wajima nuri* and 42 who have not) answered “traditional craft,” while “luxury” received the second largest number of 23 (12 who have used *Wajima nuri* and 11 who have not). As such, the majority of respondents view *Wajima nuri* as a traditional craft intended for luxury rather than daily use. There is no significant difference in

answers between those who have used *Wajima nuri* and those who have not.

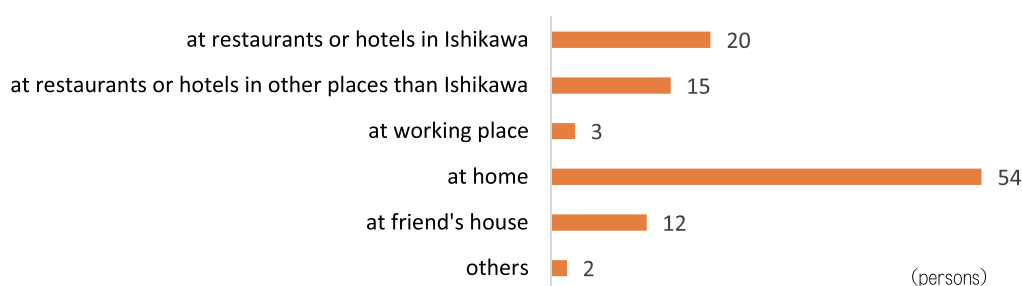
We also collected free answers from the respondents to identify effective Kansei words for *Wajima nuri* (see Table 1). Despite our expectations, there was no significant difference between the answers of those who have used *Wajima nuri* and those who have not, although answers of the former showed greater variety. There is a marked trend in all of the answers, as most of the words chosen are related to tradition, luxury, or beauty.

**Table 1. What kind of adjective comes to your mind to describe *Wajima nuri*?**

(Free answer. Total: 70 respondents who have used *Wajima nuri* and 70 respondents who have not used *Wajima nuri*)

Number of answers (persons)	have used <i>Wajima nuri</i>	have not used <i>Wajima nuri</i>
1	つるつる (smooth and glossy), 格式高い (high-class), 和の美しさ (Japanese beauty), ふかい (deep or profound), 優れた技術の (excellent technique), 伝統の美 (traditional beauty), 伝統がある (traditional), 木製の器 (wooden ware), 高級 (luxury), 芸術 (art), 品がある (classy), 高級な実用品 (luxury utility goods), 老舗 (veteran, long-standing), 凜とした (dignified), エレガントな (elegant), きちんとした (neat and tidy), 荘厳 (solemn), 忍耐 (perseverance), 高貴な (noble), 優雅な (cruisy),	伝統 (tradition), 格式ある (formal), 職人技 (artisanship), 渋い (simple and tasteful), つるつる (smooth and glossy), 美しい (beautiful and elegant), 落ち着いた高級感のあるもの (something calm and luxury), 優美な (exquisite), 上品 (refined), 大人っぽい (adult-like), 高価、美しい、上品な、美術品 (expensive, beautiful, refined and art object), 伝統品 (traditional product), 奥ゆかしい (modest), きらびやかな (gorgeous), 煌びやか (resplendent), 落ち着きのある (calm), 大人な雰囲気 (adult-like atmosphere), 伝統の技 (traditional technique),

	大事に使わないとすぐに傷んでしまうもの (something which gets easily damaged if not carefully used), しっとり (moist or mellow), つやつやきれい (glossy and neat), 伝統的な (traditional), 日本らしい (Japanese), 和 (Japanese-style), 素敵 (splendid), 侘び寂び (Wabi-Sabi), シックな (chic), ゆうが (cruisy), 艶 (coquettish), 高級料亭 (luxury restaurant), まろやか (mild), 黒と赤 (black and red), 高そうな (looks expensive), ツヤツヤ (glossy), 歴史的な漆器 (historical lacquerware), 漆塗りで光沢がある (lacquered and shiny), しっくり、手の込んだ、高級な (fit nicely, elaborate and luxury), 黒光り (black luster), きれいな食器 (neat tableware), 和の全て (all of the Japanese-style), 高級伝統工芸品 (luxury traditional craft works), 古風な伝統を受け継ぐ美しい工芸品 (beautiful craft works which inherit old tradition),	日本伝統 (Japanese tradition), 鮮やかな (vivid), 雅な (cruisy), お椀 (bowl), うつわ (container), 普段使いにはもったいないような美しい塗り物の食器 (beautiful lacquered tableware which cannot be used daily), 日本的な (Japanese), カッコいい (cool), 格式高い (high-class), 朱色 (vermillion), 深い色 (deep color), 色彩 (tint), 職人の技術の粋を集めた (collection of artisan's well-cultivated tastes)
2	すばらしい (wonderful), 伝統 (tradition), 高級品 (luxury goods)	特になし (nothing in particular), 気品がある・気品のある (graceful), ツヤ・つや (gloss), 素晴らしい・すばらしい (wonderful), 艶やか・艶やかな (charming and coquettish),
4	きれい・キレイ (neat)	伝統的・伝統的な・伝統の (traditional)
6		高級な・高級 (luxury)
7		綺麗・きれい・キレイ (neat),
12		美しい (beautiful)
16	美しい・うつくしい (beautiful)	



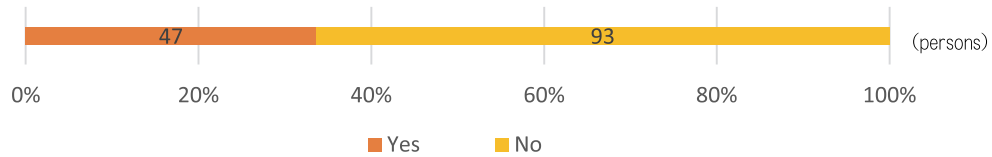
**Figure 5. Where have you used *Wajima nuri*?**  
(Multiple answer. Total: 70 respondents who have used *Wajima nuri*)

However, Figure 5 shows that the majority of those who have used *Wajima nuri* have more experience in using it at home than in restaurants or hotels.

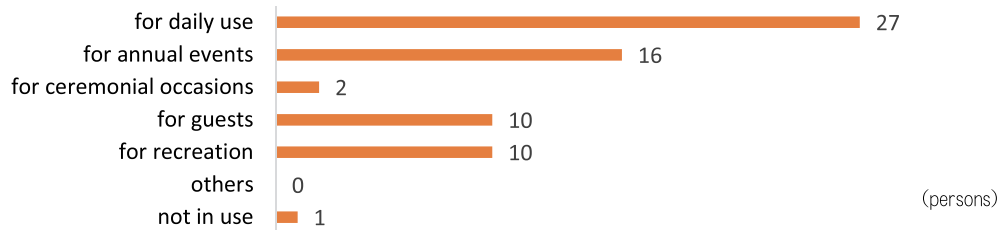
Moreover, the majority of those who currently own *Wajima nuri* (see Figure 6) tend to use it daily

rather than on special occasions, as Figure 7 shows.

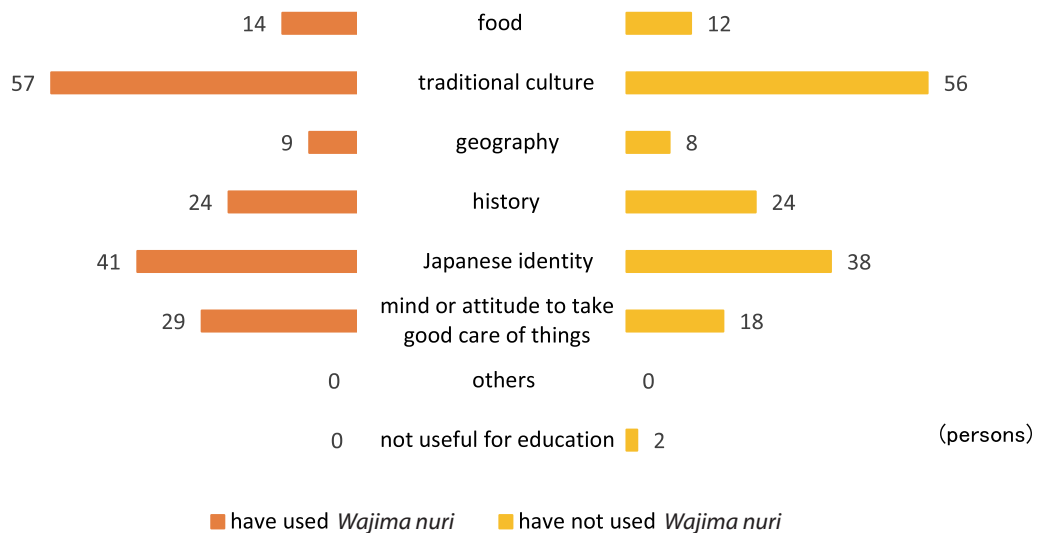
By analyzing these results, we can discern the overall image of *Wajima nuri* among the target customers. They tend to recognize *Wajima nuri* as a luxury and expensive traditional craft, although it is a familiar and common thing that they see



**Figure 6. Do you currently own *Wajima nuri* now?**  
(Single answer. Total: 140 respondents)



**Figure 7. When do you use your *Wajima nuri*?**  
(Multiple answers. Total: 47 respondents who own *Wajima nuri*)



**Figure 8. What kind of education do you think *Wajima nuri* is useful for?**

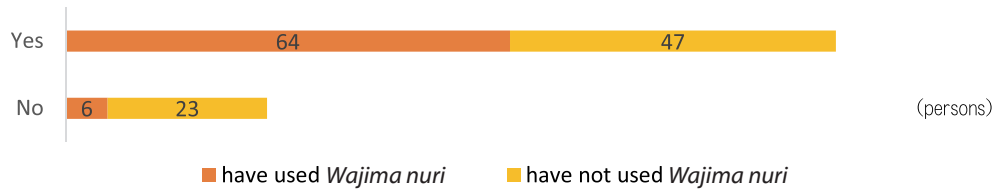
(Multiple answer. Total: 70 respondents who have used *Wajima nuri* and 70 respondents who have not used *Wajima nuri*)

or hear about often in their lives. Moreover, they tend to have more chance to use it at home than in restaurant or hotels; and once they own one, they tend to use it daily rather than reserving it for special occasions.

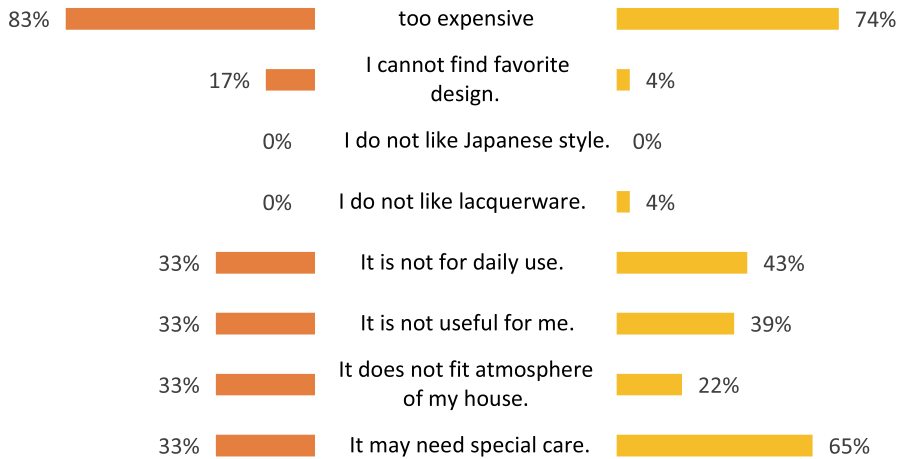
2) *Wajima nuri* for education

If they use *Wajima nuri* at home on a daily basis, what causes them to do so? We presumed that one of the causes is the educational effect of *Wajima nuri* when mothers use it with their children. Figure

8 shows the kinds of education respondents expect from *Wajima nuri*. The answer which got the largest number was “traditional culture,” and it was the common answer by both those who have and have not used *Wajima nuri*. However, in a different trend between these two groups, “mind or attitude to take good care of things” was chosen more often by those who have used *Wajima nuri*. This suggests that those who have experience using *Wajima nuri* know it is a long-lasting product and expect their



**Figure 9. Do you want to buy *Wajima nuri* if you have the chance?**  
 (Single answer. Total: 70 respondents who have used *Wajima nuri* and 70 respondents who have not used *Wajima nuri*)



**Figure 10. Why do you not want to buy *Wajima nuri*?**  
 (Multiple answer. Total: 29 respondents who do not want to buy *Wajima nuri*)

children can learn to take good care of things and not waste resources.

### 3) Purchase intension

Even if our target customers know the value of *Wajima nuri*, are they motivated to purchase one? Figure 9 shows that 111 respondents (64 of those who have used *Wajima nuri* and 47 of those who have not) answered they will buy *Wajima nuri* if they have chance. This confirms that they have the potential to be a valuable future customer-base for the product.

However, there are still some problems that may prevent them from buying one. Figure 10 shows the reasons 29 respondents gave for not wanting to buy *Wajima nuri*. The expensiveness of *Wajima nuri* is the biggest reason. In terms of the difference between those who have used *Wajima nuri* and those who have not, the result shows that the latter tends to feel that the products need special care more than

the former do. This suggests that it is necessary to inform potential customers that *Wajima nuri* lasts long even without special care, especially those who have not used the product before.

The Kansei word to attract the target customers  
 Of the words we collected from the 140 respondents (Table 1), we chose the word “*shikkuri*” (しっくり) as the Kansei word to promote *Wajima nuri*. This word means the condition wherein you feel that things fit nicely to your body or mind, or in which something is stable and harmonious. As such, this word can express specific characteristics of *Wajima nuri*: it fits nicely to both your hands and lip, as well as your and your children’s daily lives, and will long remain with you physically and mentally.

Moreover, some of the words collected from the respondents related to the technique of artisans, while others tended to only express appearances of *Wajima nuri*. To show the high value of the products, it is necessary to tell stories of its

manufacture by human hands and nature.

Therefore, we created following Kansei phrase to attract the target customers;

あなたに寄り添う、もの語り

*Anata ni yorisou, mono-gatari*

くらしに、じっくり、輪島塗り

*Kurashi ni, shikkuri, Wajima nuri*

(Stories, being with you. Fit nicely to your life, Wajima nuri.)

Here, “stories” refers to both the manufacturing process, which the product traveled along up until now, and the life which it leads with the user from now on. We expect this phrase will resonate with the target customer.

### Solutions

In this section, we propose solutions based on the



Figure 11. Market Persona (based on survey results)

survey and workshops results, provide an analysis to confirm our hypotheses, as well as answer our research questions and purposes. A workshop was conducted to construct the target customer’s persona based on survey results, and designing a value proposition canvas helped gather valuable insights for our solutions.

As seen in Figure 11, the process of building a customer’s persona is necessary for understanding the profile of the market’s majority, and to decide the most suitable marketing step. Based on the survey results, we obtained the data on the places where the target customers are most likely to shop, their thoughts and objections in their decision-making process in buying products, as well as how to offer solutions to solve customer grievances using the method of value proposition canvas (as explained in Figure 12).

As mentioned in the introduction to this research, in constructing solutions utilizing the marketing approach, the Blue Ocean Strategy inspired our group to pitch in the idea of penetrating a new market. We used this strategy to cooperate with Kirimoto-san’s request of avoiding new product design development. Thus, the strategy was implemented to introduce the importance of *Wajima nuri* to a new market demographic.

To acquire this goal, our group suggests two approaches:

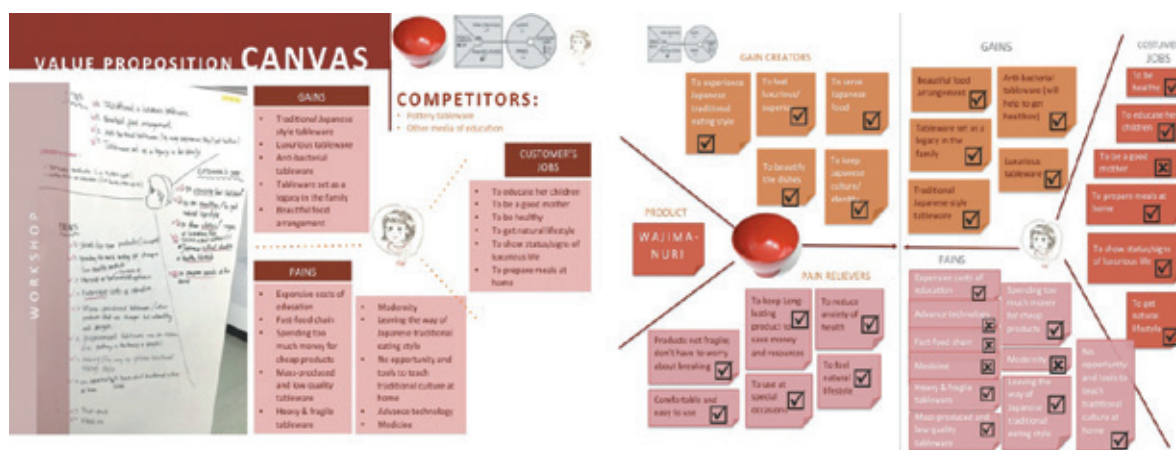


Figure 12. Workshop results





Figure 13. Suggestions: Place, Promotion, Solution

### 1. Place

We suggest opening shops at places often visited by the target market, such as big department stores (i.e. Takashimaya, Isetan, Daiwa, Seibu, Mitsukoshi, etc.) or shopping malls (e.g., AEON or Apita). Interactive brochures that appeal to the customers – the design of which brochure is elaborated upon further below – should be provided in these shops.

### 2. Promotion

Based on the survey results, the main sources of information for the target markets are TV and radio. Thus, we propose that audio-visual commercials be made for both medias. In this commercial, we suggest including the story of *Wajima nuri* – starting from the extraction of the sap from the Urushi tree, and including the production process, and the people involved. This dominant narrative is based on Kansei words acquired from the research results.

More specifically, this solution emphasizes the need for a marketing strategy through commercials to maximize exposure to the products, and using a persuasive catchphrase based on the survey results using the Kansei engineering methods.

The proposed solutions also confirm the necessity of targeting a new market – as verified by the survey results, which show the affirmative response and willingness to buy *Wajima nuri* from target market. As such, the solutions should also include these important points:

- Elements of Japanese traditional culture to introduce the *Wajima nuri* craftsmanship along with its cultural values to children. To achieve this, the commercial should include the story and origins of *Wajima nuri* and Urushi-sap, and be complemented by a catchphrase or Kansei words in the narrative. The interesting Kansei words will educate the target market regarding the appeal of *Wajima nuri* as a traditional Japanese craft.



Figure 14. Commercial Solution: The process of collecting Urushi-sap

- The durability of *Wajima nuri* as daily utensils should be emphasized. The commercial should show the interaction between parents and children in a meal-setting using *Wajima nuri*. This commercial should show the durability of *Wajima nuri* in daily usage, and how there is no need to worry about the special care for these products. This commercial should also persuade the target market and their children to take care of things, and emphasize the value of not having to replace this durable product with other competitors – such as plastic ware – that is cheap but harmful for the environment.



**Figure 15.** Commercial Solution: *Wajima nuri* can be used by children

- The promotional media should be interactive and user-friendly. As an example, the brochure design should use a pop-up technique to attract the attention of children. It should also be



**Figure 16.** Promotional brochure containing information of the product and a QR code to access Kirimoto's official website (additionally, an interactive pop-up brochure)

complemented by a QR code to lead the mothers to *Wajima nuri* Kirimoto's official website, where they can obtain further information of the desired products. The design solution for this brochure is illustrated in Figure 16.

- A further solution that can be added in the promotional media, is the use of the advanced technology such as Augmented Reality to provide mothers – and other potential costumers – with a 3 dimensional view of the product, as seen in Figure 17.



**Figure 17.** QR code is accessible using any gadget, such as a smartphone

The proposed design solutions are flexible and should adapt to the needs and demands of the costumers. Regardless, the advertisements used to promote the product should include the important aspects lifted from the costumers survey results, and detailed in the previous sections.

## Conclusion

*Wajima nuri* is well-known as a utility lacquerware of superior quality in Japan. Developed and established over hundreds years, the *Wajima nuri* “spirit” and beautiful production techniques have been conserved and transmitted over generations by Wajima lacquer artisans who have devoted themselves to creating lacquer products of beauty and sophistication. *Wajima nuri* has always maintained its position as a unique feature of Japanese cultural identity. In the context of

modernization, however, this handicraft product has been confronted with serious challenges. These include the urgent need to maintain and expand its market, as well as find a harmony between its identity as a traditional craft and its need to adapt in contemporary society. The Wajima Cooperative Project is a special undertaking by Kirimoto *Wajima nuri* and the Graduate Program of Cultural Resource Management of Kanazawa University, and seeking to solve these issues.

Within the framework of the Wajima Cooperative Project, we conducted an initial survey (including a brainstorming process) to select potential customers in order to develop a concrete understanding of *Wajima nuri*. Following the selection of this potential customer segment, we then developed solutions to attract and expand the market to them. We (Group C) focused on the “mothers” who have children living in the same house. In our opinion, this target group has the most potential as a customer-base because they have a strong attachment to activities involving culinary utensils—including lacquerware products. Based on the result of the survey, we realized that *Wajima nuri* has value beyond its function as culinary utensils among this potential customer-base. In addition to its strong points in terms of beauty, sophistication, and quality that distinguish *Wajima nuri* from other industrial and traditional products, the target customer of “mothers” consider *Wajima nuri* as one of the best ways of educating their children about Japanese traditional culture. Certainly, *Wajima nuri* artisans have done their work very well in terms of transmitting the traditional cultural values to customers through lacquer products.

However, there are still many obstacles in inducing customers to choose Wajima lacquerware. For instance, many respondents mentioned the high prices and perceived need for special care; and a large portion of potential customers appear to lack an understanding of *Wajima nuri*. Consequently, we developed solutions for promoting *Wajima nuri* products that using both digital (TV and radio

commercials, and QR codes, and AR) and print (interactive brochures) media.

As such, this research has illustrated the potential of an untapped demographic of potential customers of *Wajima nuri* using a multi-perspective approach. It has also made a number suggestions aimed at preserving the traditional cultural values of *Wajima nuri* while adapting it to the modern context.