

# Foreign National's Perspectives on Japanese Mobile Society

A Survey Report Prepared  
by  
**Prof. Ibrahim Kushchu**<sup>\*</sup>  
for  
The NTT DoCoMo's  
Mobile Society Research Institute

*This report presents data and its analysis as a result of a survey conducted by Prof. Kushchu in cooperation with the survey team from MSRI (mobile Society Research Institute) of DoCoMo as part of service agreement between Professor Kushchu and DoCoMo. This report is intended to provide a research input for further understanding of particular topics in Japanese mobile society and in no way intends to provide any implications for mobile businesses of DoCoMo. The researcher does not assume any liabilities whatsoever as a result of any form of the use this research.*

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<sup>\*</sup> Professor Kushchu is with the Mobile Government Consortium Ltd., UK  
[www.mgovernment.org](http://www.mgovernment.org) and can be contacted via email: [ik@mgovernment.org](mailto:ik@mgovernment.org)

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## **Executive Summary**

The advances in mobile technologies and its use in Japan are leading the world. The diffusion of such technologies in Japanese society is said to exhibit peculiar characteristics in the way mobile phones are used for communication and/or in the way they influence certain individual or collective behaviors. The Japanese society then is under a significant, unavoidable and evolving influence of what is gained by leading the world in mobility.

This research aims to provide new insights to this well accepted and fairly known issue from the viewpoints of foreign nationals (FNs) living in Japan. Based on a recent survey, it presents opinions of FNs on various issues including but not limited to the way mobile phones are used for communication, their roles in the Japanese society, and specific ways and circumstances in which mobile phones are used. It also reports FNs opinions on the use of mobile phones in public and on the personalization of mobile phones. In this way, the research will provide observations of FNs on socio-psychological impacts of mobile phone use.

More specifically, the report contains observations of FNs under those situations where mobile phones are being used in spare time, while waiting in public or private spaces. It is also concerned with reactions to those behaviors where others are also being influenced as a result of mobile phone use such using mobile phone while driving, cycling or having social interactions.

The research then ties those examples and cases into a number of key findings on FNs impressions on Japanese Mobile Society. Some of these findings include that mobile phones are essential and influential part of both individual and social life, and that this is different than what FNs already know or experienced before coming to Japan. In general the Japanese society is well mannered in using the mobile phones in public and there are good indications of regulations (i.e. posters) promoting such good manners. FNs often evaluate particular cases and situations relating to mobile phone use as having positive impacts but with warnings for the negative including likelihood of social isolation and negative effect on communication and creative skills.

## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

The leading power of Japanese mobile telecommunications industry, the diffusion of mobile technologies and services in the Japanese society are indisputably important phenomenon. Much has been said on the special aspects of Japanese mobile Society by many Japanese and non-Japanese researchers. However, according to our knowledge, not so much is heard directly from the experiences of foreign nationals living in Japan on the issue.

How does foreign nationals living in Japan evaluate the use of mobile phones by the public and by their Japanese friends and colleagues? Is this different than what they already know from their respective countries? What is their opinion and impressions regarding various aspects of mobile phone use including manners; behavioral changes and expressions; and the implications for the society?

This research therefore aims to fill in an important gap by focusing attention on the perceptions of foreign nationals living in Japan about the mobile phone usage in Japan and other behavioral and socio-psychological issues related to the mobile society.

## **1.1. Objectives**

In the last few years much is written and said about the Japanese mobile industry and the mobile society by both Japanese and non-Japanese researchers, journalists and businessmen. It is however important to understand from first hand experiences of non-Japanese who are actually living in the Japanese society. Therefore this study accomplishes an important task in identifying various perspectives on some of the known issues of mobile society in Japan. The primary goal of this study is then to obtain or seek for opinions of foreign nationals living in Japan on various points relevant to mobile society in Japan. In this way, it aims to provide further insights into some of the key issues of mobile phone usage and its impact on the society from the perspectives of non-Japanese living in Japan. It specifically aims to uncover issues related to, for example, influence on the communication and manners both for individuals and the public; and the implications that may be relevant to the society or to the business.

## **1.2. Methodology**

The foreign nationals living in Japan are often concentrated in big cities such as Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka. Others, though in small groups are distributed in various parts of Japan from Kyushu to Hokkaido. In order to reach a sample of those, two effective means are being used; a web based survey and semi-structured interviews using computer-based video / chat methods or face-to-face interactions. The questionnaire aimed to gather demographics and key data through multiple choice, ratings or open-ended questions. The interviews aimed to deepen some of the key discoveries made via the questionnaire and provided opportunities to talk to some of the respondents for explaining their ideas further.

The data gathered is analyzed using basic descriptive statistics such frequency and cross tabs. The data is often plotted as graph for visualizations. Although the analysis of data using above means is relatively more comprehensive, the report contains a set of important discoveries and interpretation of data.

## **1.3. The Questionnaire**

The appendix to this report contains the full questionnaire as it appeared on the web. It had various sections; questions asking about demographics, questions relating to the mobile phone use as a communication tool; questions relating to the behavioral aspects of the

mobile phone usage and finally a set of questions related to general aspects of mobile society. Each of these is more or less grouped into sections in the questionnaire.

## **1.4. Sampling**

Our initial aim for the selection of sample was to choose a proportional representative of respondents both according to country of origin and also distribution of the location in Japan. Naturally each country is represented in Japan by a different number of natives of that country. We initially aimed at having rigorously designed sample and intended to select those nationals of countries in proportion to their representation. We also aimed a priority list of countries according to not only each countries representation in Japan but also according to the interestingness of advances in mobility in that country and its relation to mobility in Japan. However, achieving this proved to be difficult. Among others, attempts for a rigorous way of reaching an unorganized group of foreign nationals seemed almost impossible.

Achieving this could have been an ideal but at the same time would bring in a bias to the sample. What we have realized however our survey could be equally successful if we were to reach as random foreign nationals as possible, provided that they lived in Japan at least 3 months. The current data analysis is based on such a sample.

## **1.5. Limitations**

There are various limitations in the study, most of which proved to be difficult. Some of these limitations relate to difficulties in achieving a one or more methodological goals such as the sampling issue described above. The others are related to the scope of the study and therefore the nature of the analysis. The scope of this particular report is limited to analyzing and interpreting data collected from foreign nationals only. Mob-Ken conducted a survey with a very similar questionnaire among Japanese nationals also. A comparative analysis between the results of the two may bring further insights into the issue at hand. We will revisit this issue at the end of the report while we talk about further study.

## **1.6. Report overview**

This report has 5 main parts including this introduction chapter.

In the next chapter, we will present the data and the demographics of the participants to the survey with a brief discussion on limitations on the data.

Chapter 3 is devoted to analysis of structured questions on mobile phone and influence on communication; its role and diffusion in the society.

Chapter 4 contains analysis of open ended questions where personalization of mobile phones, socio-psychological implications of individual and public use of mobile phones including manners, expressions and acceptance of certain behaviors in Japanese mobile society.

Finally, the report concludes with a discussion of key issues and summary of the report in chapter 5.

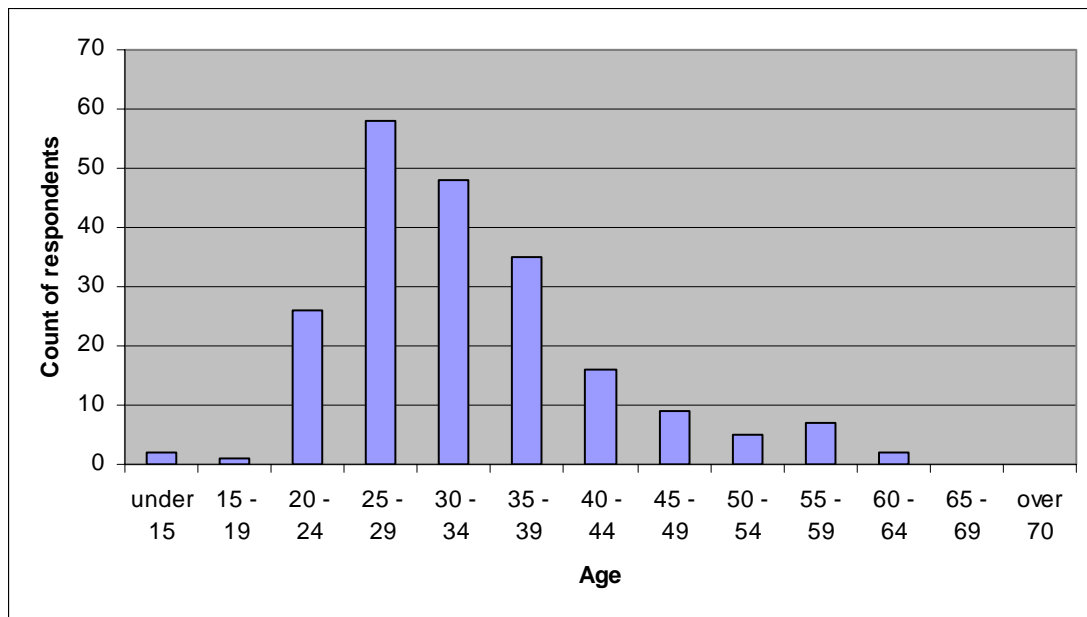
## Chapter 2. Data and Demographics

This part includes descriptive information about the survey participants.

There must be close to 2 million foreign nationals living in Japan. At the beginning of 2004, the number of registered foreign nationals in Japan was a record level of 1.92 million (Source: retrieved 5<sup>th</sup> January 2006; <http://www.moj.go.jp/ENGLISH/IB/IB2005/ib02.html>) For this research we aimed at reaching around 200 completed surveys and plus 10 to 15 interviews. From among those who filled in the questionnaire, a total of 209 were sampled as reliable and valid responses the online survey.

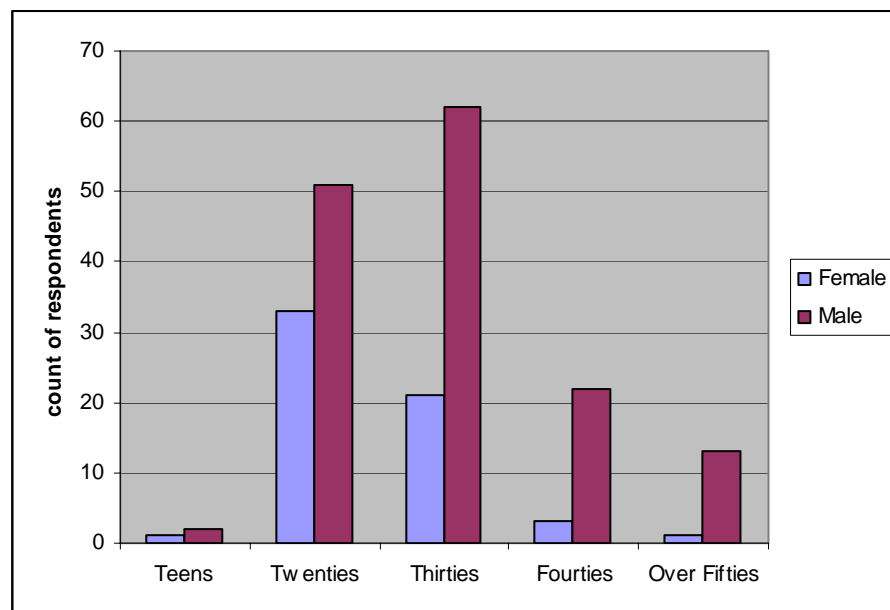
This sample contained 150 male (72%) and 59 female (28%) participants. Figure 1 below contains a chart of respondent's ages. Whilst all age groups from under 15 to 60-64 are represented within the sample, most participants are in the age range 20-39 - a total of 167 respondents or 80% of the total, with the age range 25-29 being

the most common (58 respondents, 28%). Naturally, it was really hard to reach teenagers both because they are expected to reside in Japan in low numbers and also because of difficulty of reaching those who currently reside in Japan in a rather protective environment.



**Figure 1: Age of Foreign National Respondents**

Figure 2 below shows a breakdown of respondents' gender by age group. This chart shows that responses from female participants are further limited within the sample, being under-represented in the Forties and Over Fifties age groups, with a total of just 4 respondents aged 40 and over. Female participants also tend to be younger than Male participants.



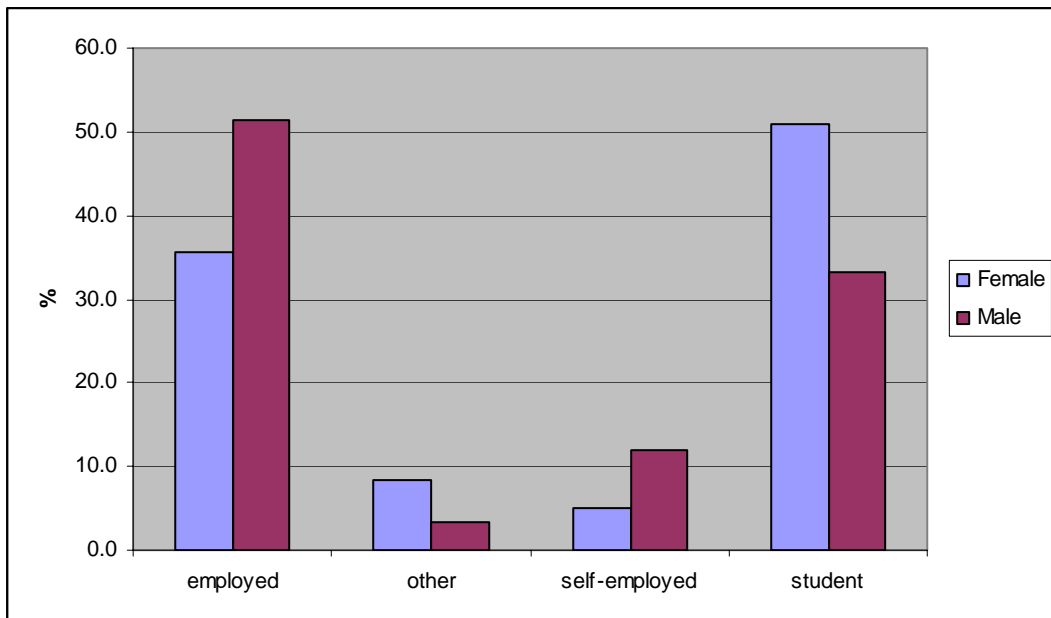
**Figure 2: Sex of respondents by age group**

Figure 3 below contains information about respondent's occupation. A total of 80 respondents (38%) are students, and 98 (47%) were employed. Many of the Student respondents originate from Asian countries; whereas respondents from Europe and North America tend more frequently to be employed.



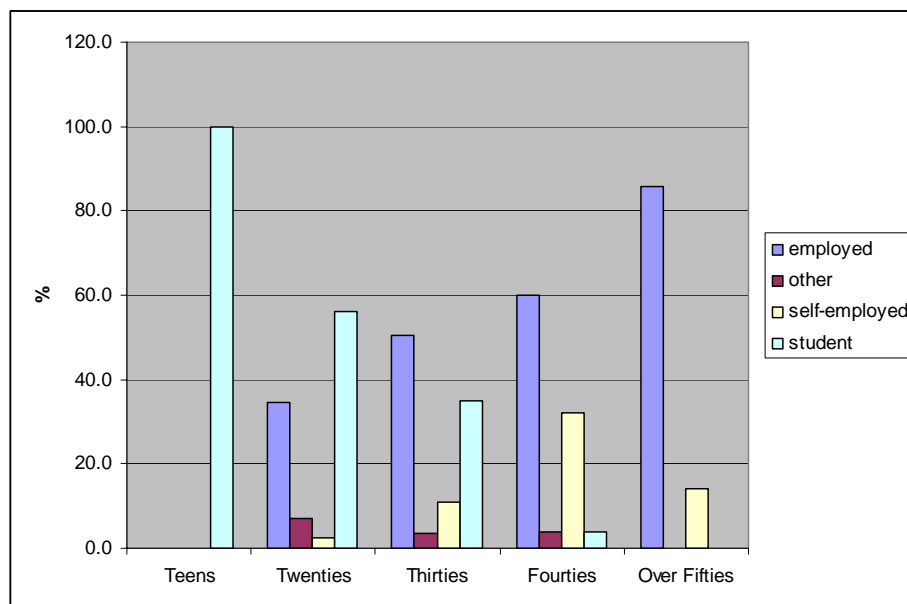
**Figure 3: Occupation of Foreign National Respondents**

Figure 4 below shows information about respondents' occupation by gender. It can be seen that female respondents are more likely to be Students, and male respondents are more likely to be employed.



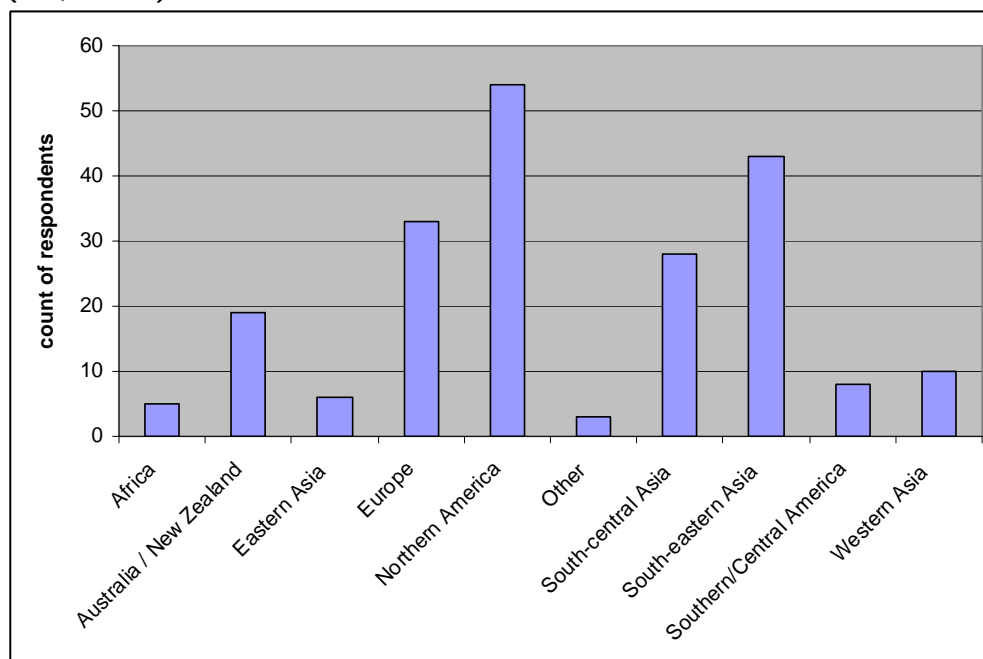
**Figure 4: Occupation shown by Gender**

Figure 5 below shows a breakdown of occupation by age group. Perhaps unsurprisingly, younger participants are more likely to be Students, with the proportion of employees increasing with age.



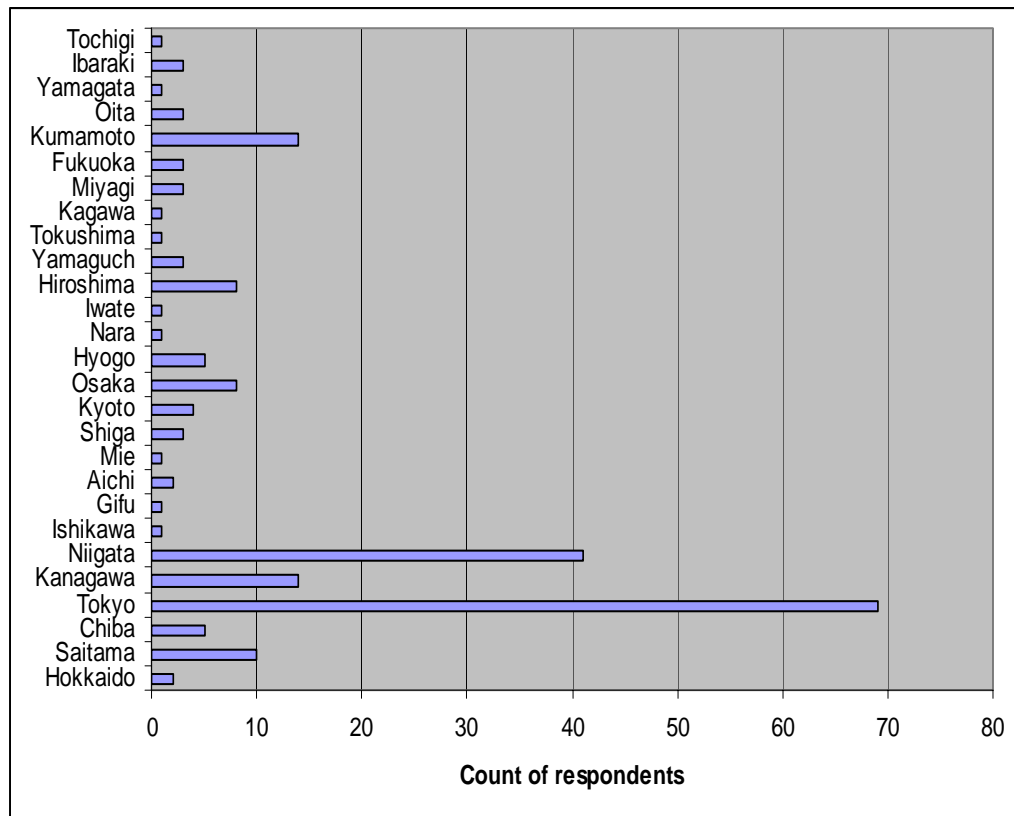
**Figure 5: Occupation of Foreign National respondents by Age**

A breakdown of respondents by country of origin is included in Appendix A. Figure 6 below includes a chart showing participants place of origin by region. For the purposes of this study, definitions of the relationship between countries and regions are taken from the GeoHive website (<http://www.geohive.com/> [Accessed 25/1/2006]). Most respondents originate in North America (54 persons, a total of 26%), South-eastern Asia (43, 21%), Europe (33, 16%) and South-central Asia (28, 13%).



**Figure 6: Region of origin for Foreign National Respondents**

The following figure 10 shows the region of Japan where the respondents were located. In the Foreign National sample this indicates their primary location within the country at the time when the survey was taken. The Foreign National sample is focused around a few key locations around the country, with a concentration of respondents in Tokyo and Niigata. This partially follows a natural distribution but also an ease of reach to a community of international students in Niigata prefecture.

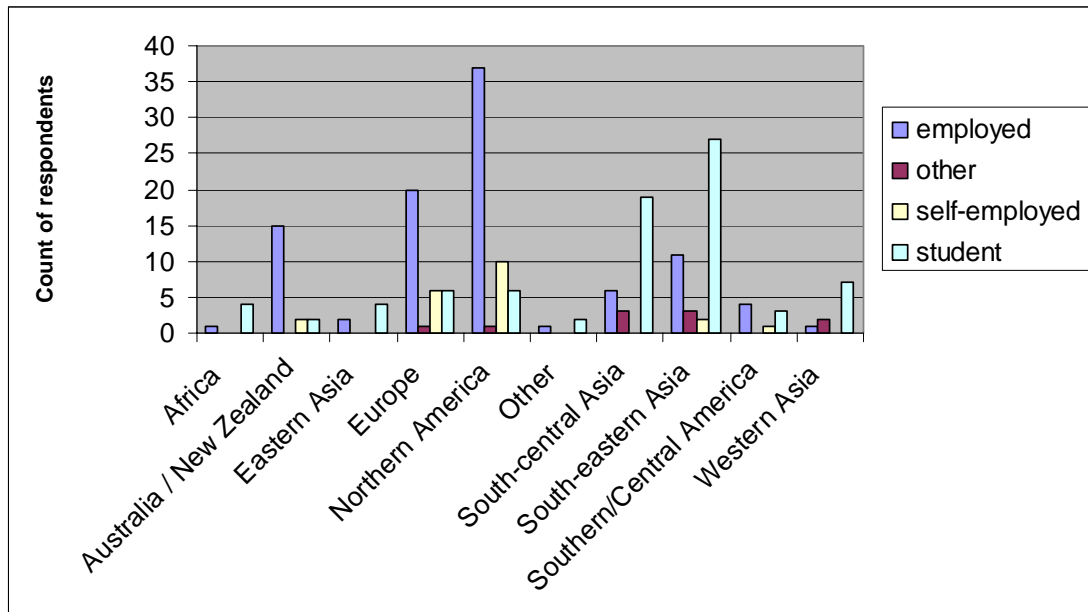


**Figure 7: Location where Foreign Nationals reside in Japan**

## 2.1. Limitations regarding the Data

We have already described limitations on the data collected from Foreign National respondents in two main areas – firstly, there are disproportionately more male than female respondents in the Foreign National sample. Secondly, respondents from age groups between 20 and 40 are over represented in the data from Foreign Nationals, with fewer teenagers and older people represented. This perhaps natural both in terms of the distribution of foreigners' age in Japan and also ease of reach to those who are scarce.

Another feature of the data collected from the Foreign National participants is shown below in figure 8 – occupation shown by region of origin. It can be seen that respondents from Australia / New Zealand, Europe and North America are more likely to be employed, whereas respondents from Asia are more likely to be resident in Japan as students.



**Figure 8: Occupation of Foreign National respondents, shown by region of origin**

To be specific, respondents from Australia / New Zealand, Europe and North America provide 72 out of a total of 98 of the employed respondents (73%). In contrast, respondents from South-central, South-eastern and Eastern Asia account for 50 out of a total of 80 student respondents (63%).

Although much of analysis in the report may not be location or country of origin dependent, these features of the data are borne in mind when making any culturally specific interpretations from the Foreign National responses.

## **Chapter 3. Data Analysis and Interpretation**

In this section we present information from the main sections of the survey – firstly, information about the use of mobile phone and their behavioral properties in Japan and secondly, open-text responses to a series of photos illustrating different facets of mobile phone usage in Japan.

We will start with reporting result of a question probing the level of ownership among foreign nationals. Figure 12 below shows information about the proportion of respondents who own a mobile phone for their own use. Mobile phone ownership is high amongst Foreign Nationals at 84%. The second column of data in Figure 8 shows the proportion of Foreign National respondents who owned a mobile phone in their countries of origin, before they came to Japan. Interestingly, this figure is substantially lower at only 64%. This may support the comments made by many respondents about the importance of the mobile phone for everyday life in Japan, as described below.

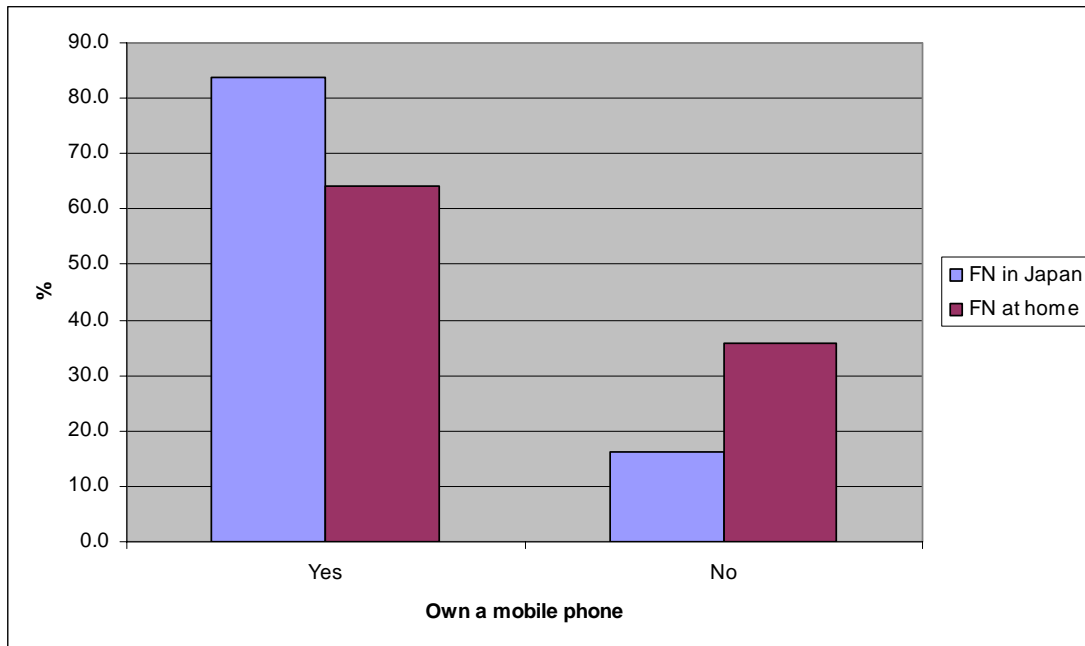


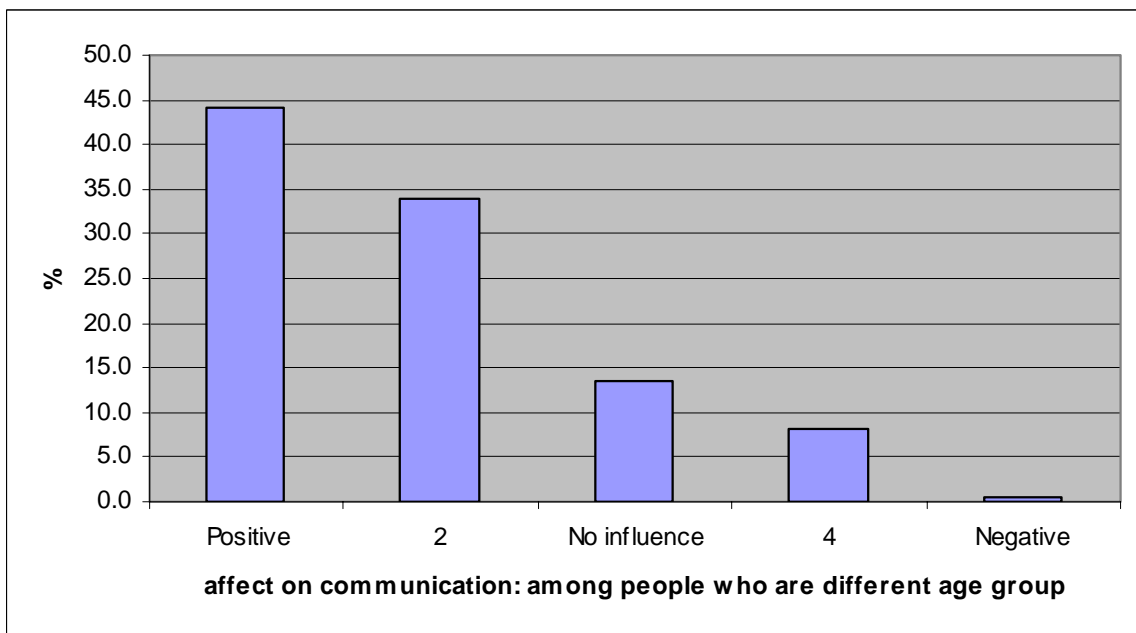
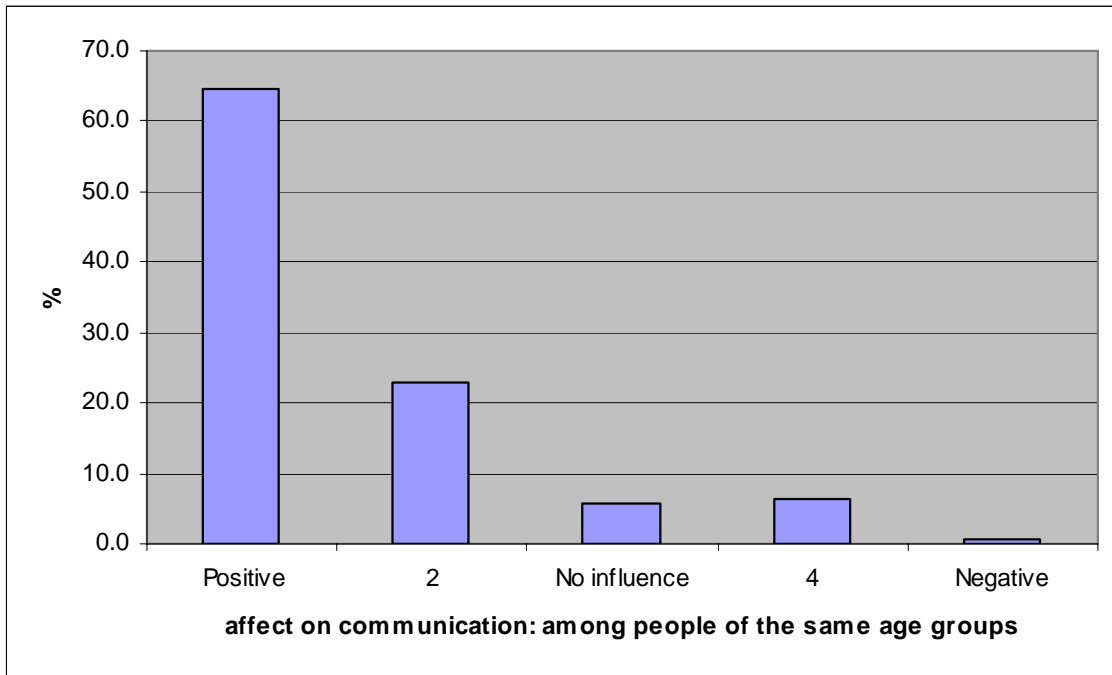
Figure 9: Proportion of respondents who own a mobile phone

### 3.1. Usage and Various Roles of Mobile Phone

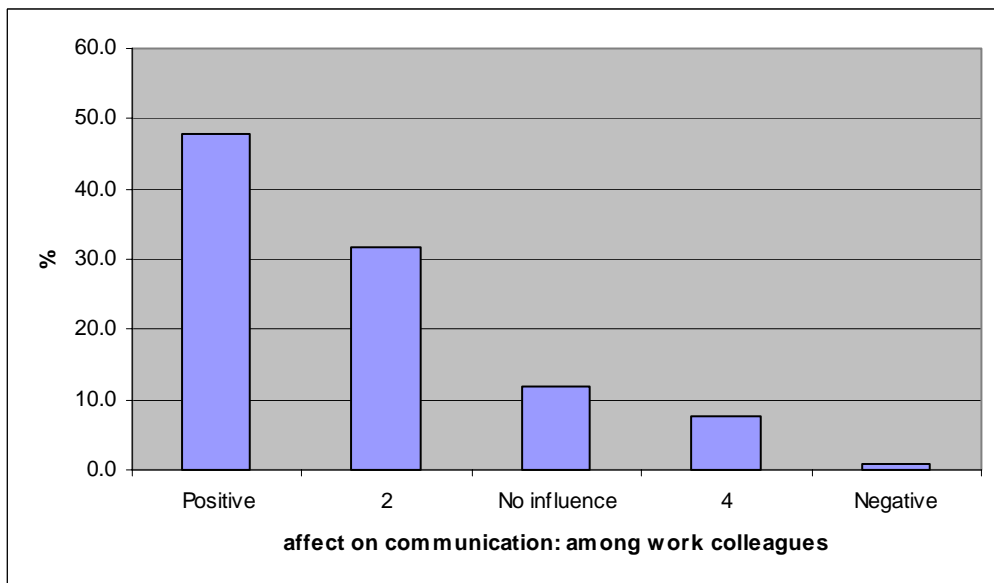
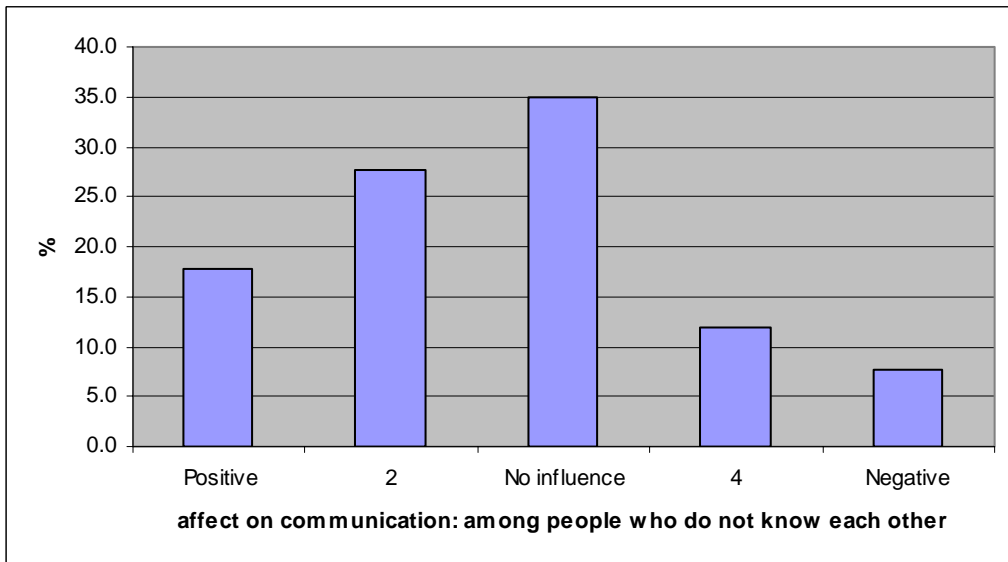
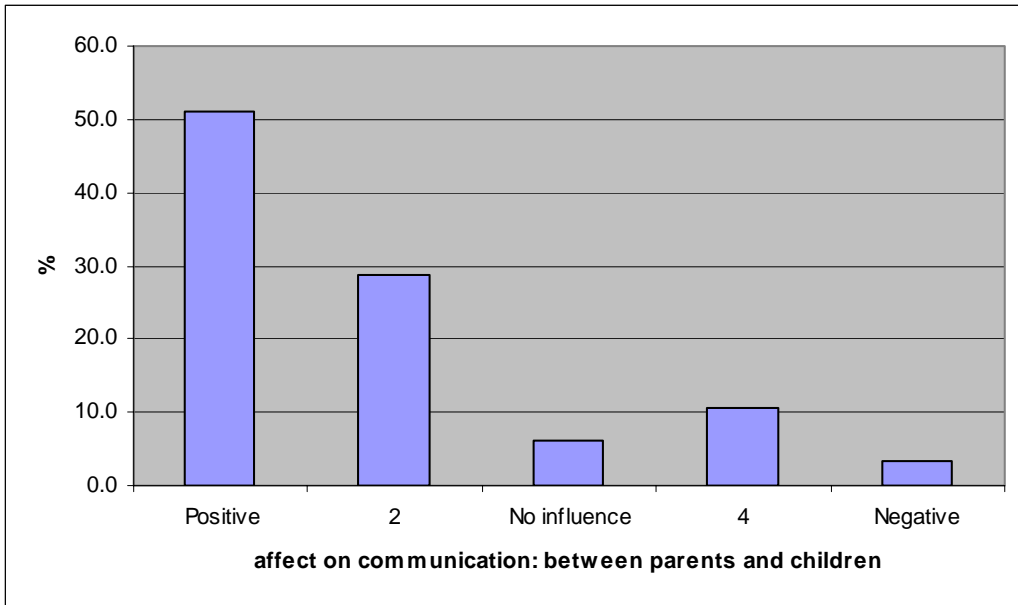
A series of questions explore degree of opinions about the usage and role of the mobile phone in Japan. In this section, we will look at the result of responses to those questions. The reader will observe that most of the data analysis shows an expected or normal outcome when plotted as a graph. We will then provide explanations for relatively unexpected and unclear situations, as most of the graphs are self-explanatory.

**QUESTION: \*\* Please rate the effect of mobile phones on communication in a given context below. Do you think the use of mobile phones has a negative or positive effect on communications ....**

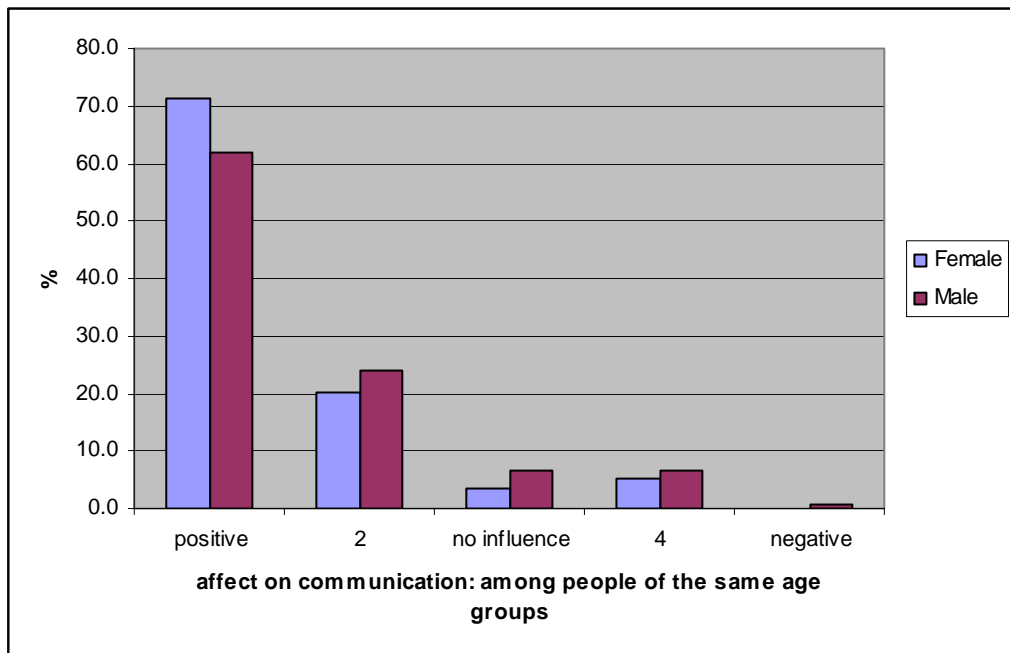
The first series of charts explore the perception of the affect of mobile phones on communication amongst various different groups in society. Respondents were generally positive about the mobile phone's impact on communications in general. Only communication amongst people who do not know each other was generally felt to be unaffected in a positive way by the mobile phone. This can be observed in the following five figures.



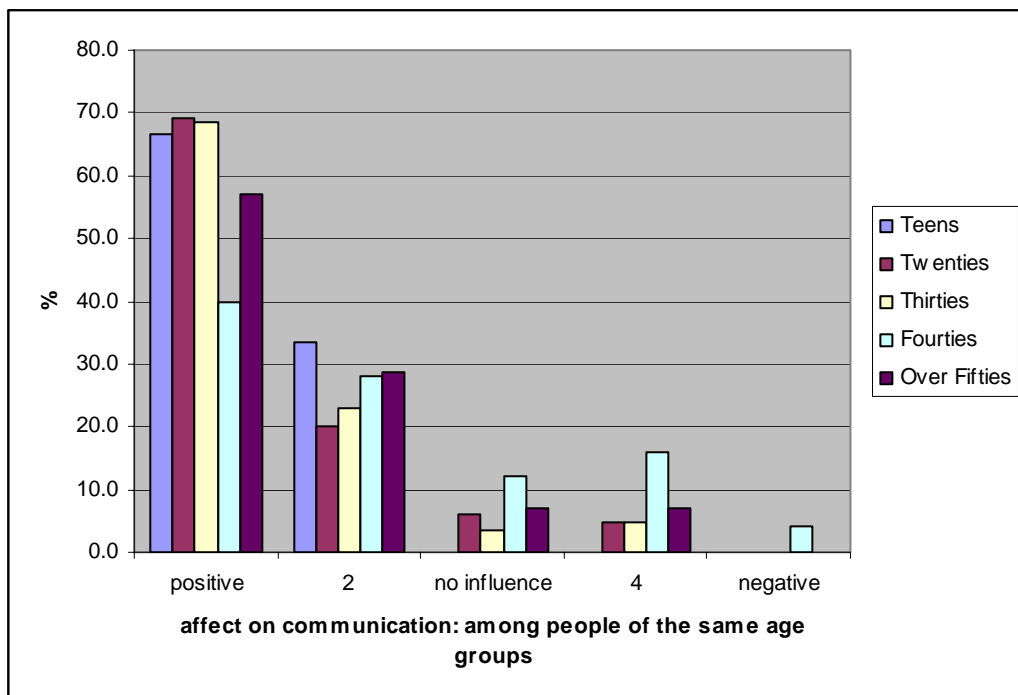
Although the respondents were positive about influence of mobile phones on communication regardless of the age group – i.e. same age group or a different age group – the affect on the different age group communication is naturally rated less. This is also similar to between parents and children as shown in the figure below. However, similar to same age group a strong influence is indicated among the communications of work colleagues.



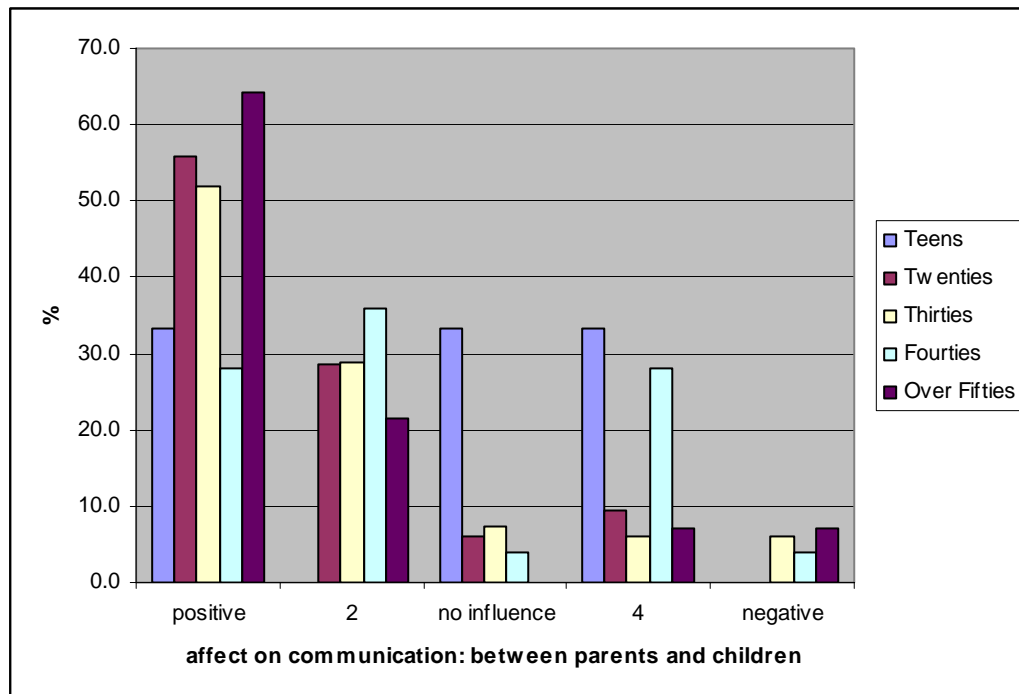
Attitudes were similar between the genders, as showed in the chart below. Female respondents tended to be slightly more positive than male respondents in most cases.



Attitudes were also broadly consistent across the age groups, with a slight tendency for younger people to be more positive about the affect on communication than older people in most cases.

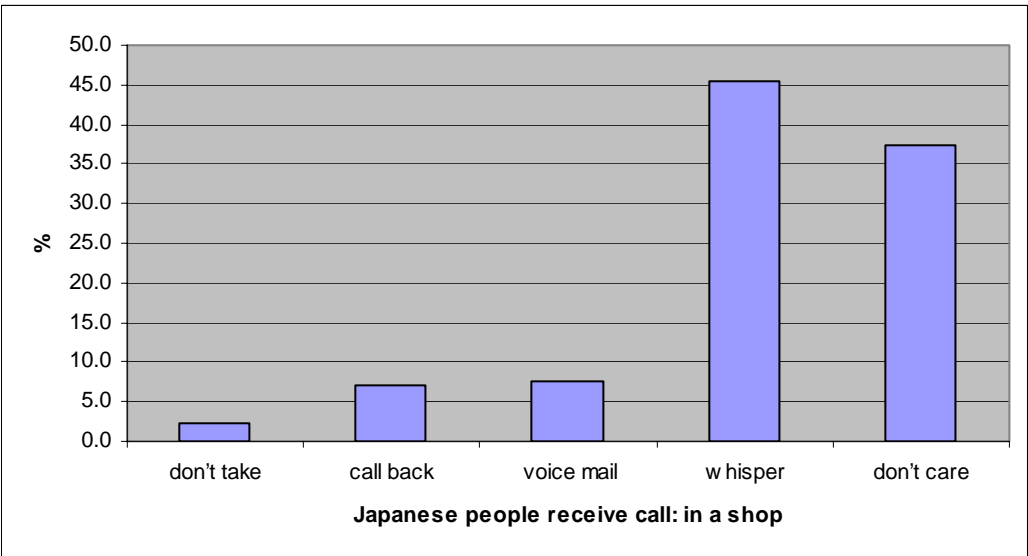
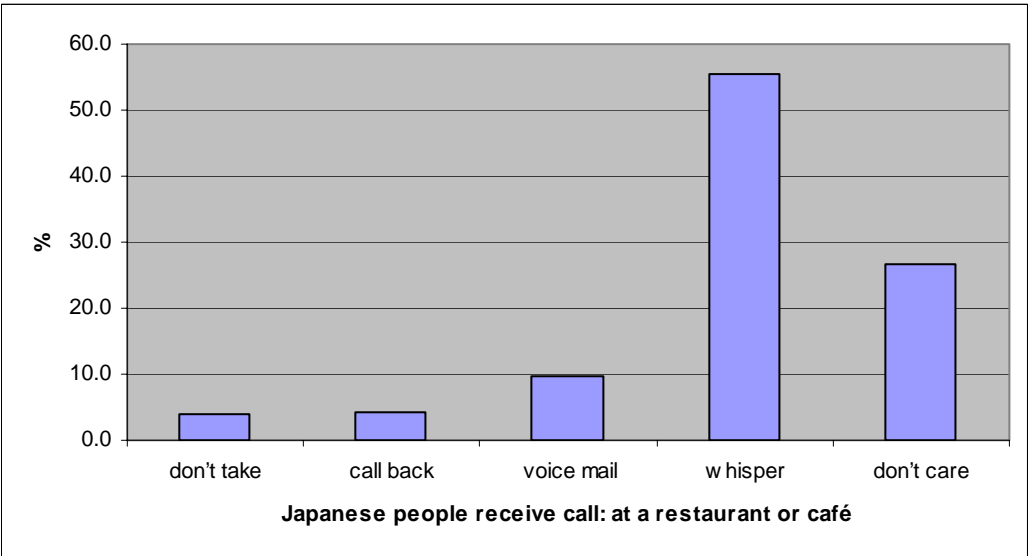
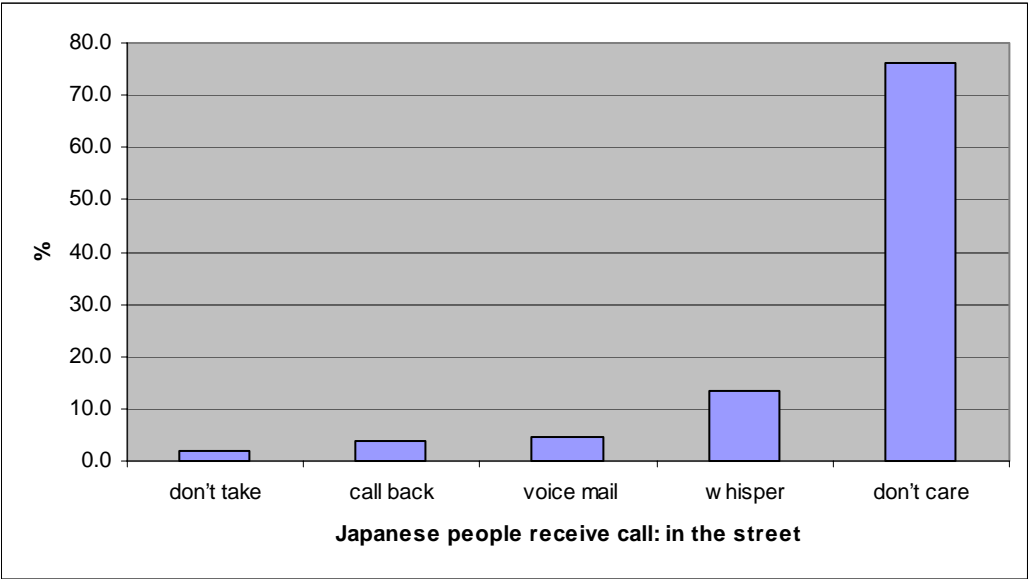


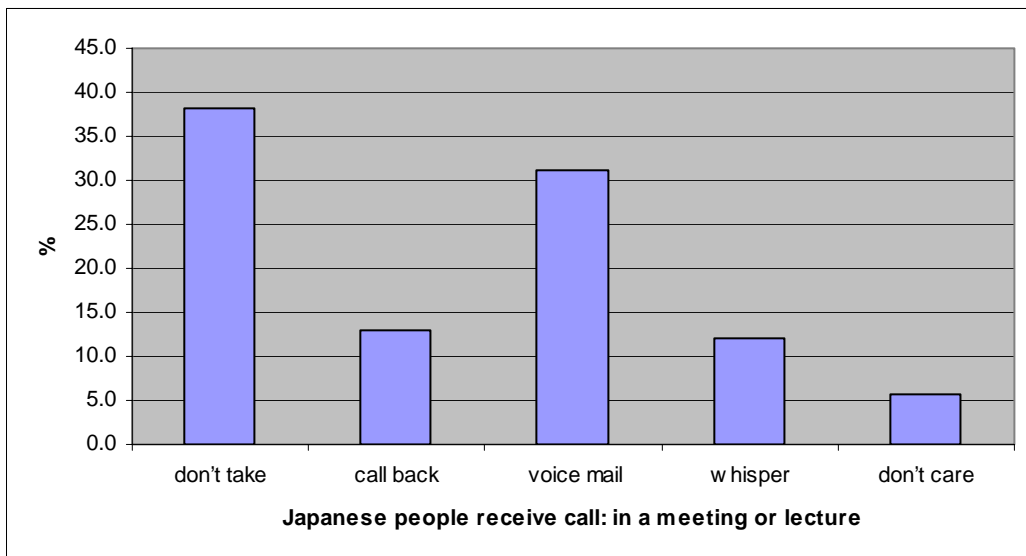
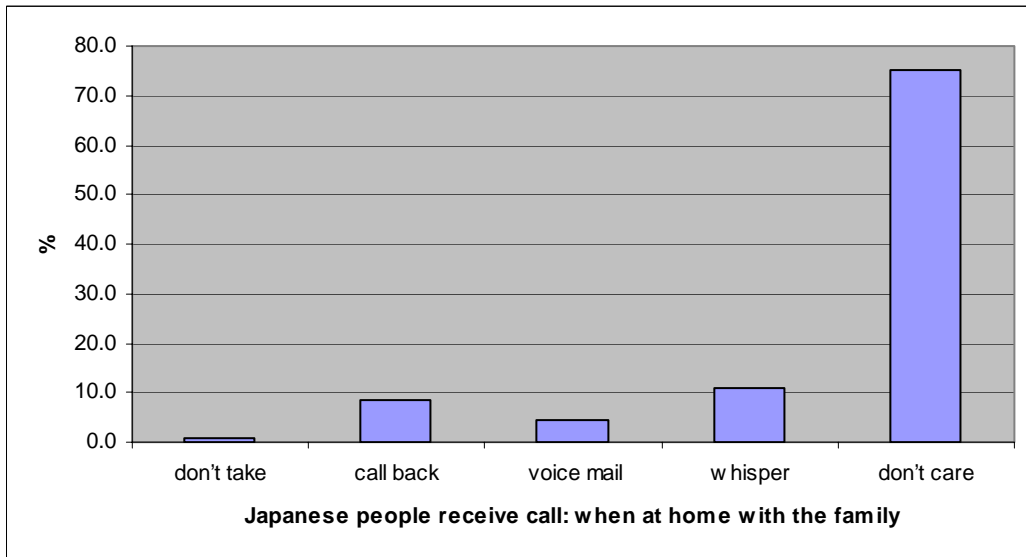
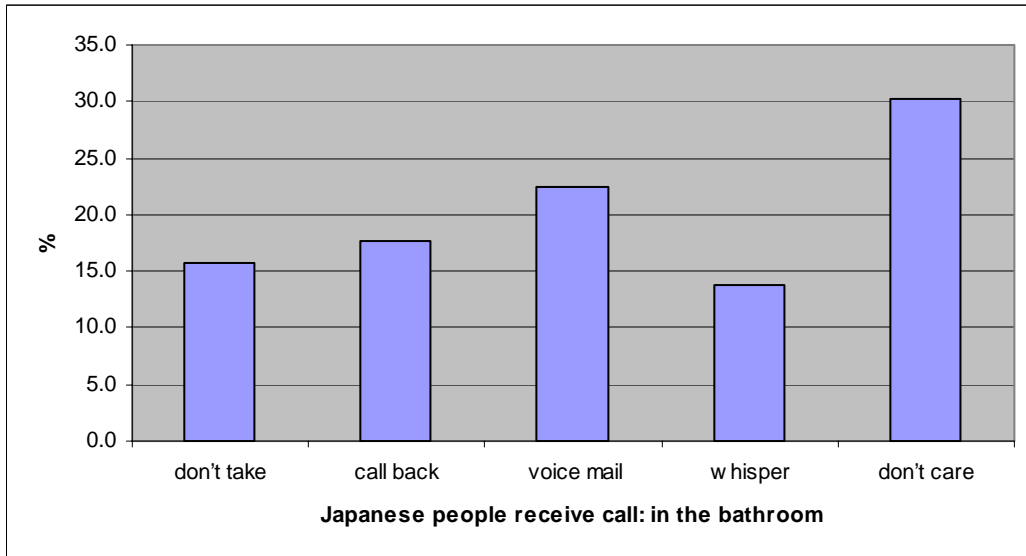
When it comes to communication between parents and children, teenagers and those in their forties are the most likely age groups to believe that mobile phones have a negative impact on communications.

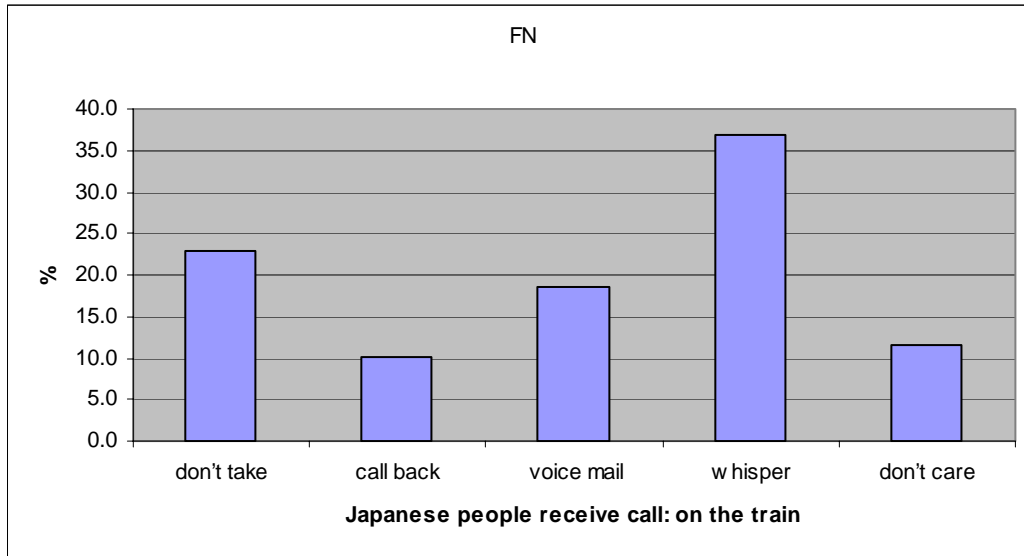


**QUESTION: \*\* In the following circumstances, how do you think Japanese people behave when they receive a call on their mobile phone?**

The following charts show how respondents believe that Japanese people would behave when they receive a mobile phone call in various different settings. This question addresses the perception about how Japanese people might modify their phone-related behavior in different situations as with respect to manners or polite behavior. For example, the data shows that when receiving a call whilst in the street, most Japanese people would be most likely to just take the call; not believing the situation requires special consideration. By comparison most of the other situations would lead to a change in behavior, with 'answer the call but talking in a whisper' being a common perception of behavior whilst in a café or shop, whilst using voicemail or calling the person back being more common behavior on a train or in a meeting / lecture.

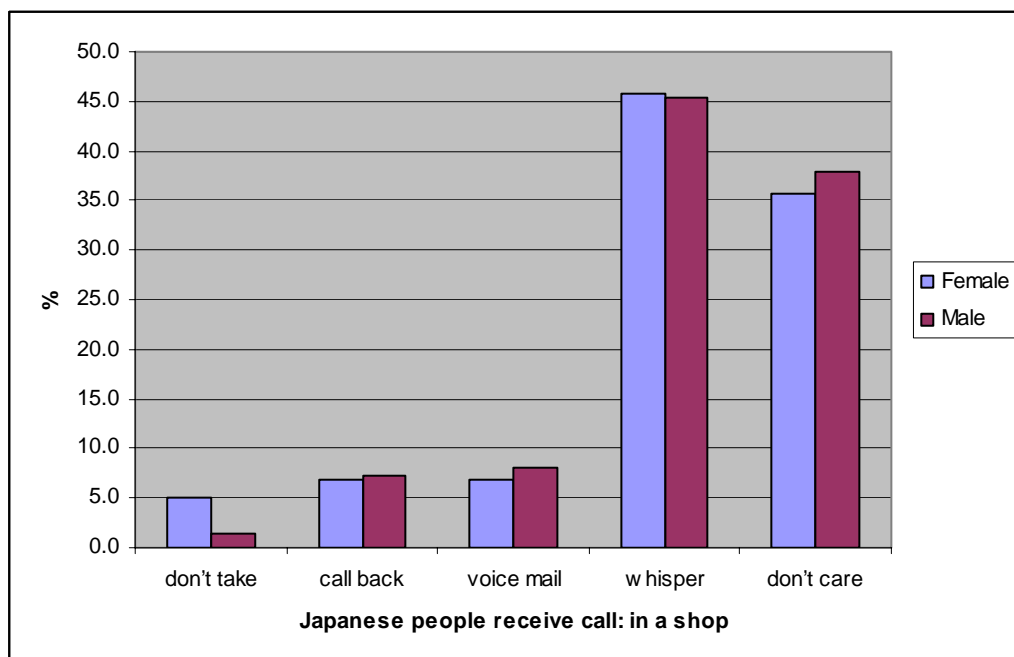


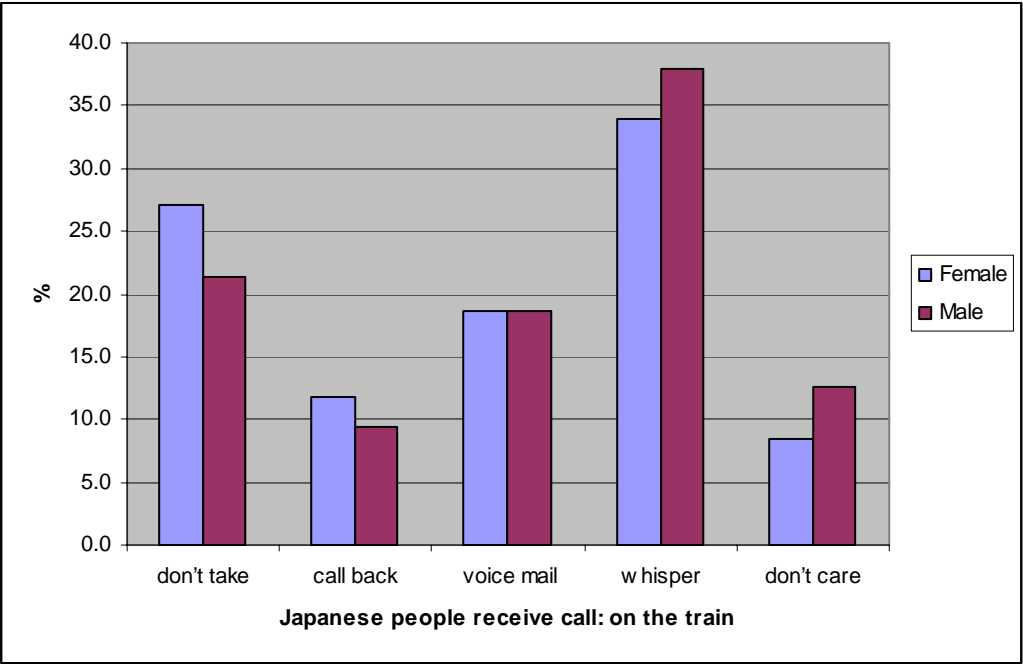




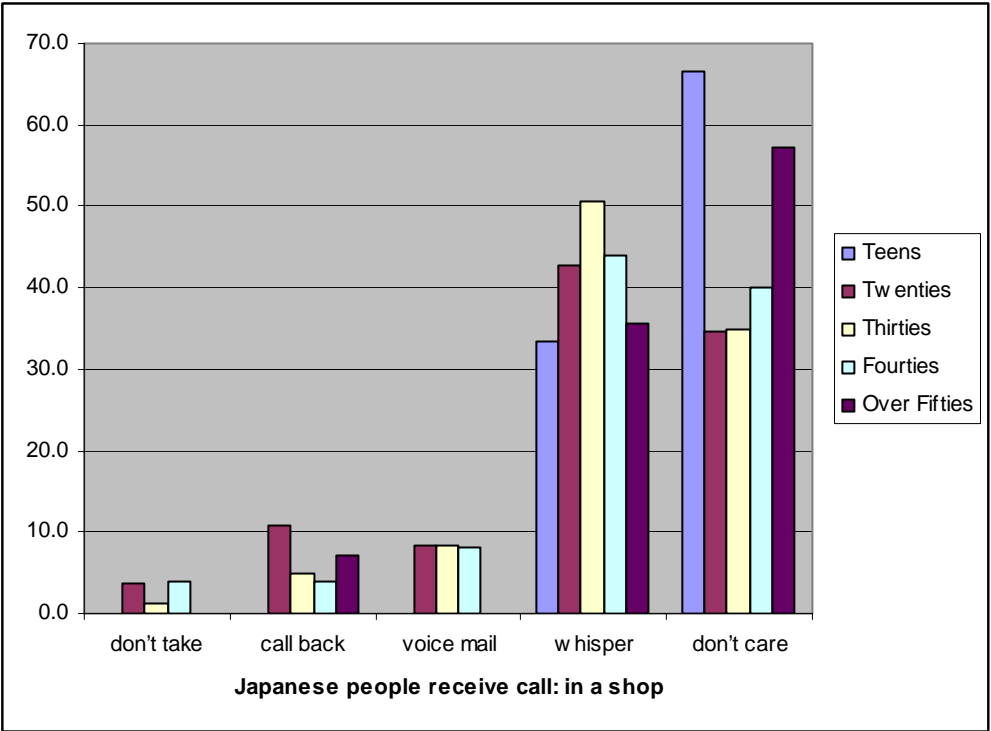
As it is observed from above graphs presence at the public places such as shops and trains gave an impression that Japanese mobile phone users either use voice mail or whisper while home or street seem to have less influence on the behavior change. The similarities among the responses in the case of bathroom may be attributed to the privacy of the situation where many foreign national may not know much.

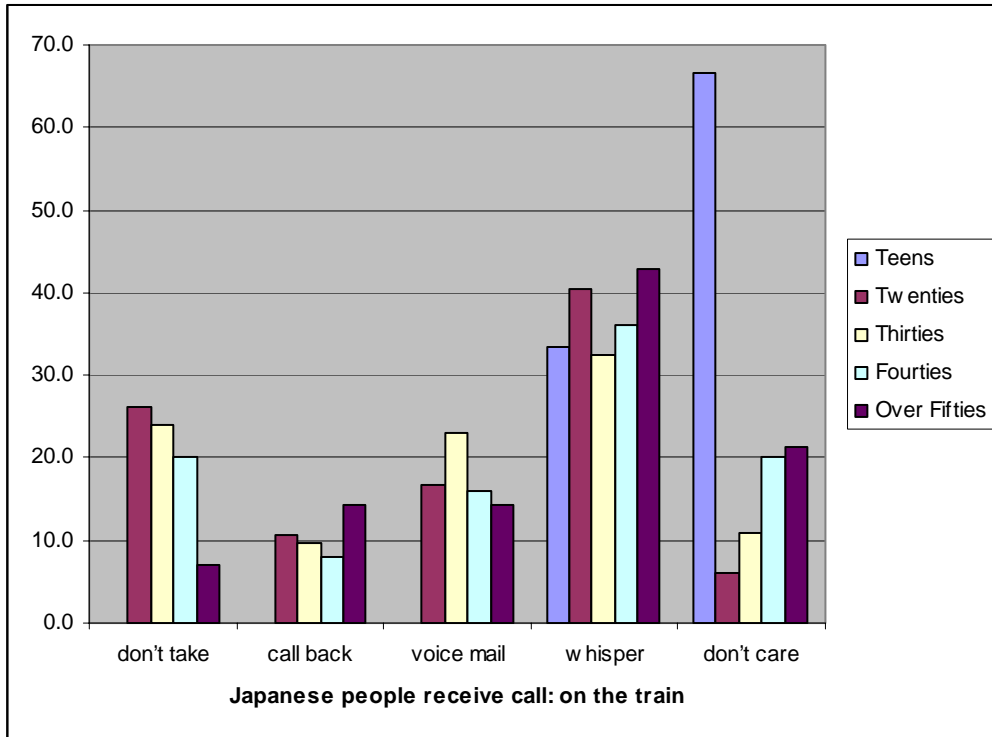
Perceptions about behavior are quite consistent between the genders, as the following charts show. Female respondents are slightly more likely to expect more considerate behavior than male respondents in some circumstances





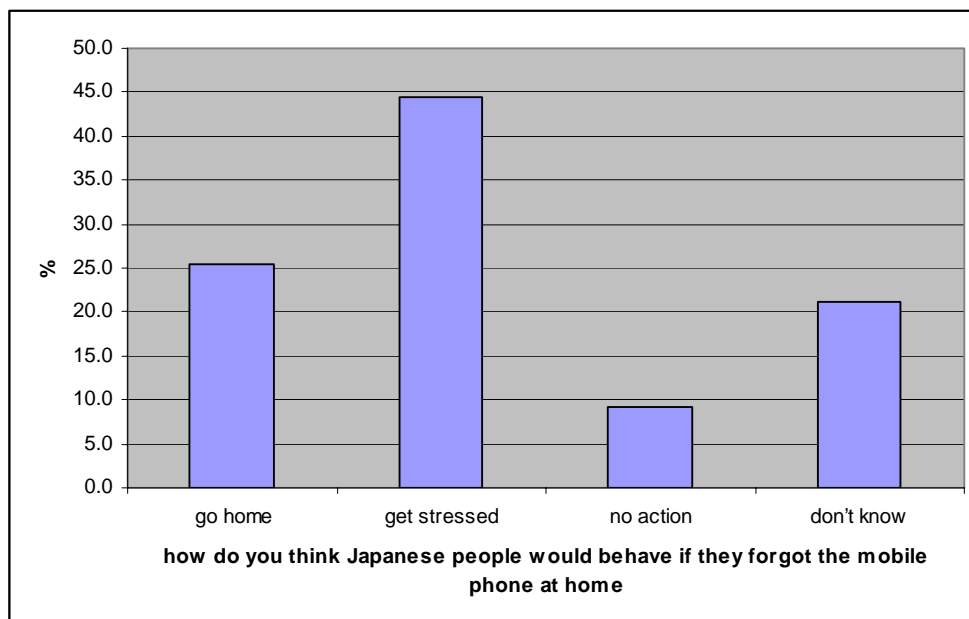
By comparison, there is a difference in perceived responses based on the age of the respondent. Teenagers and the Over Fifties were both more likely than average to believe that Japanese people would just answer the phone as normal when receiving a call on the train, and in a shop as shown below. It should be bourn in mind that the sample sizes for these age groups were particularly small.

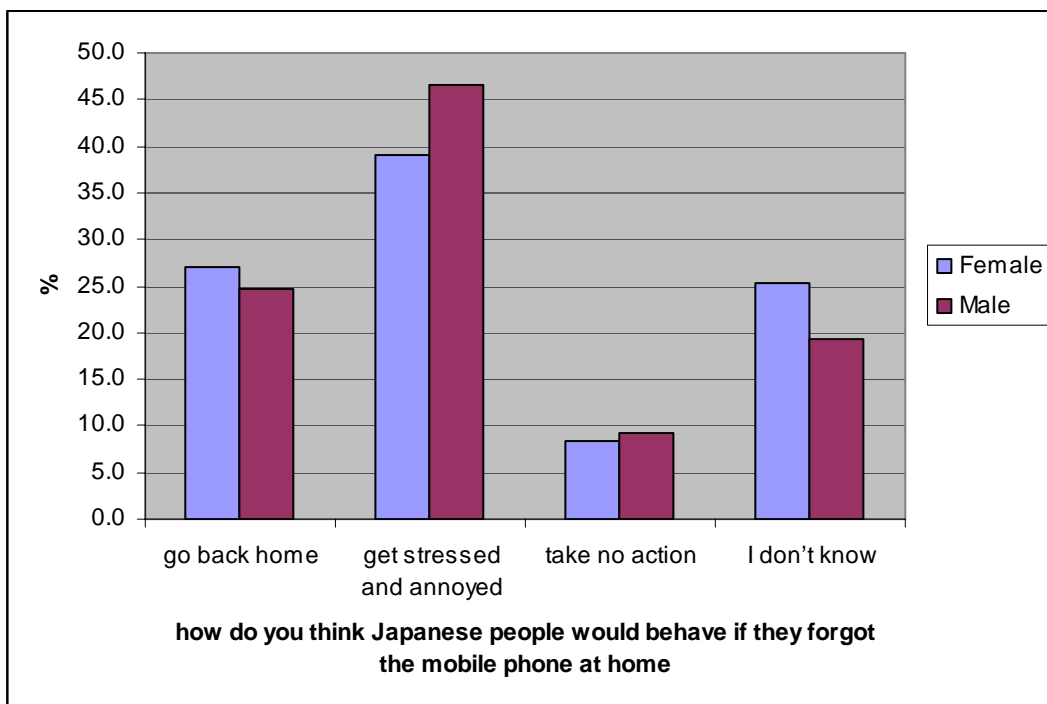
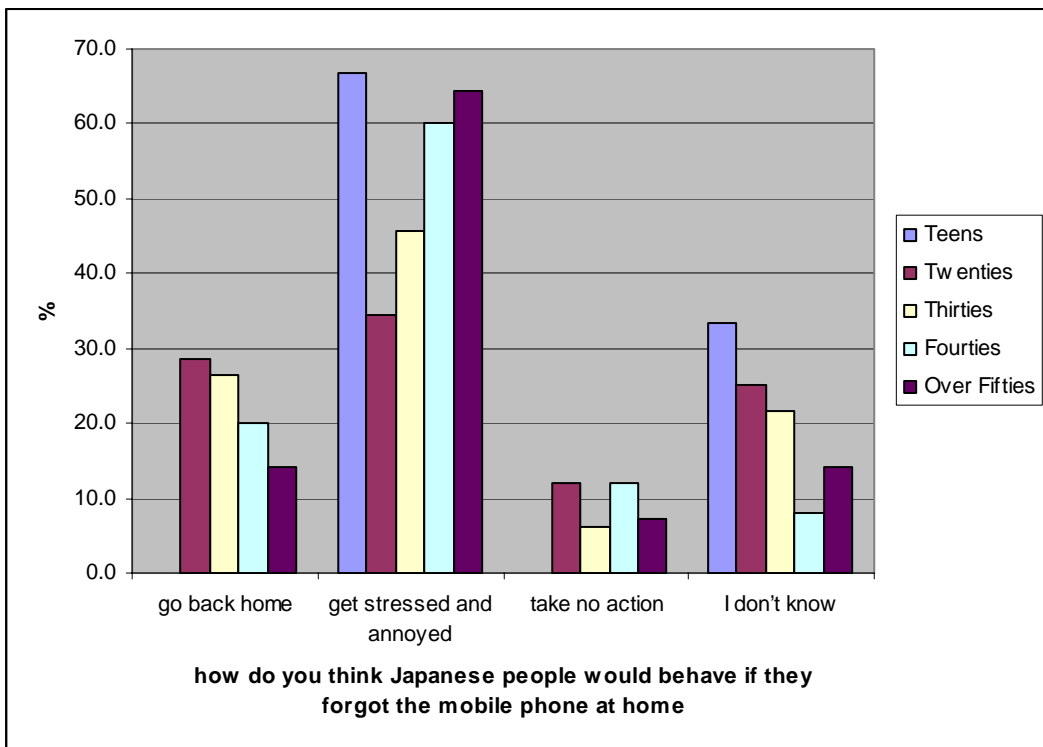




**QUESTION: \*\* In your opinion, how would Japanese people react if they left their mobile phone at home?**

The following charts show the perceived response of Japanese people when they leave their mobile phones at home, with responses broken down by gender and by age group.

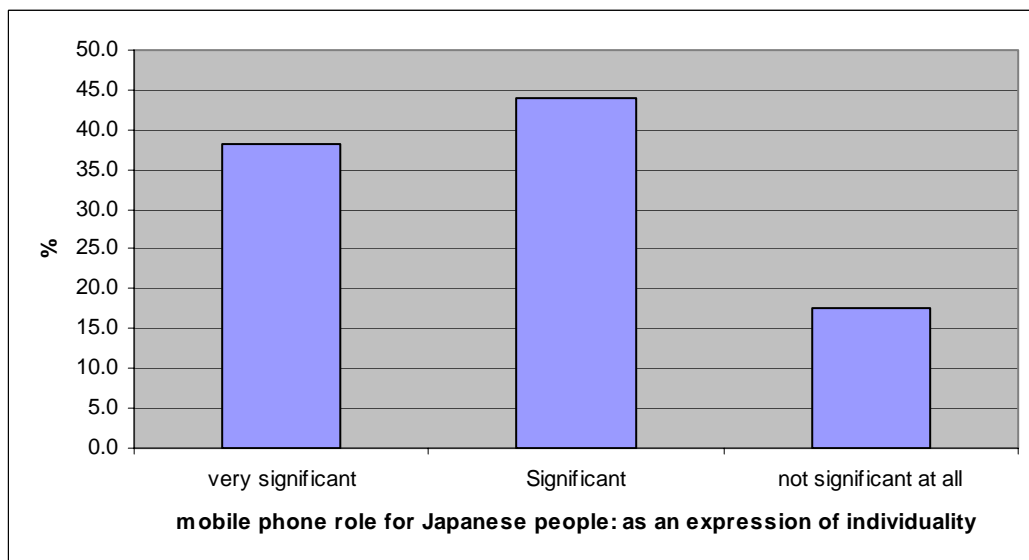
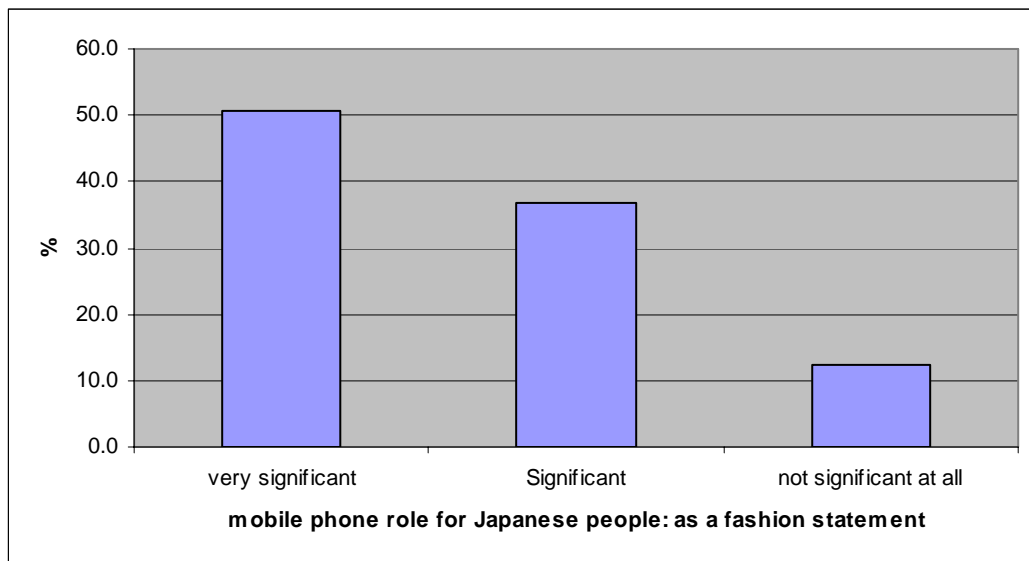


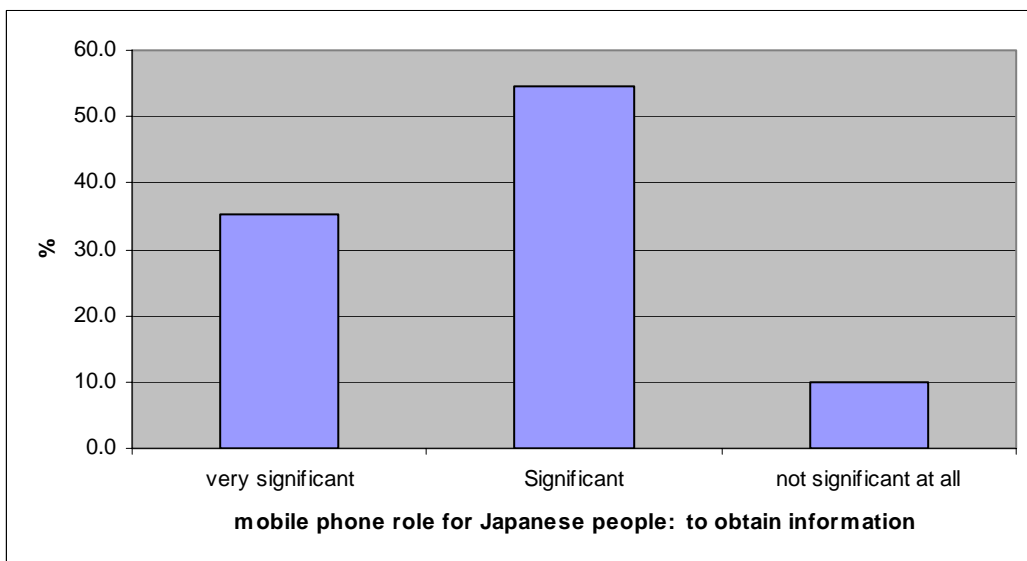
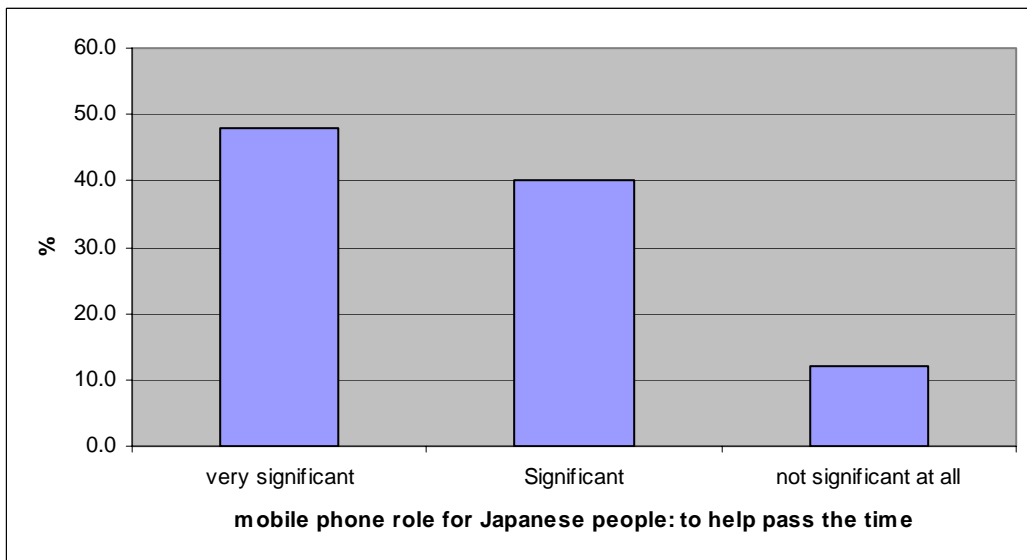
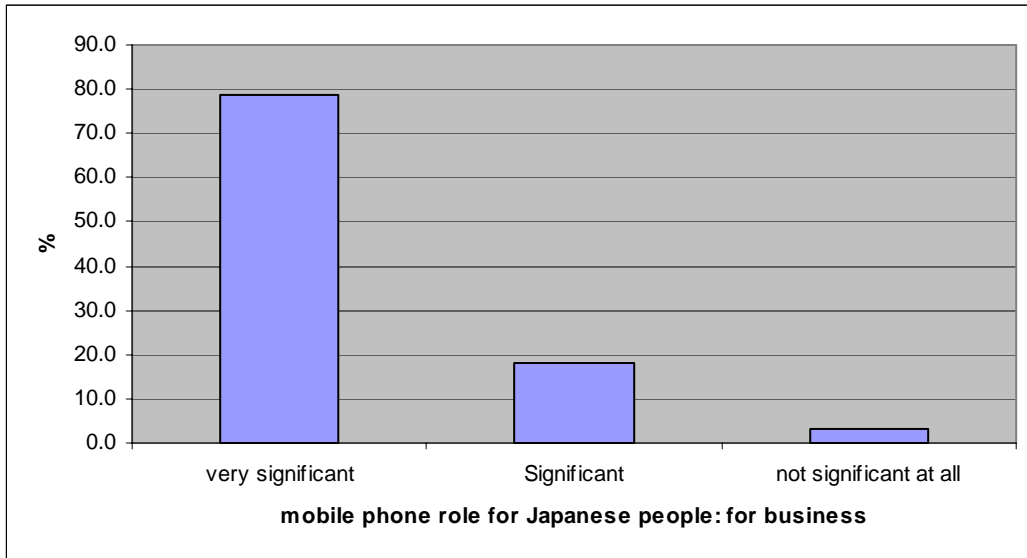


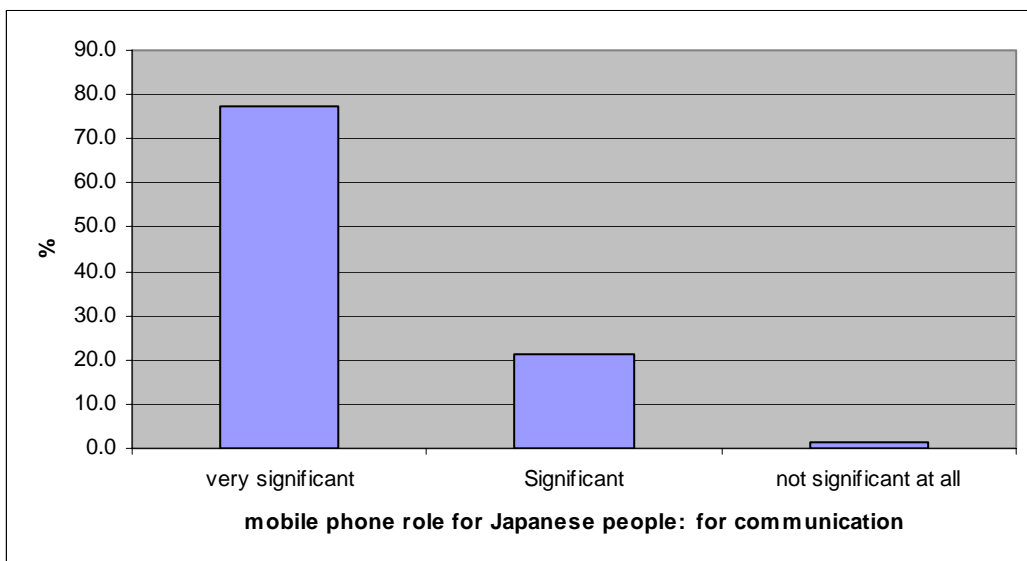
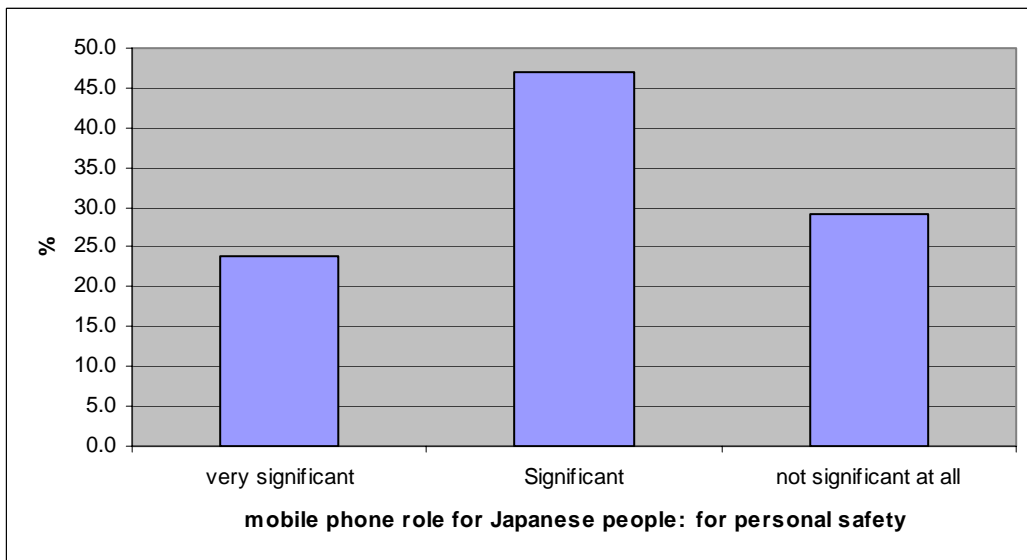
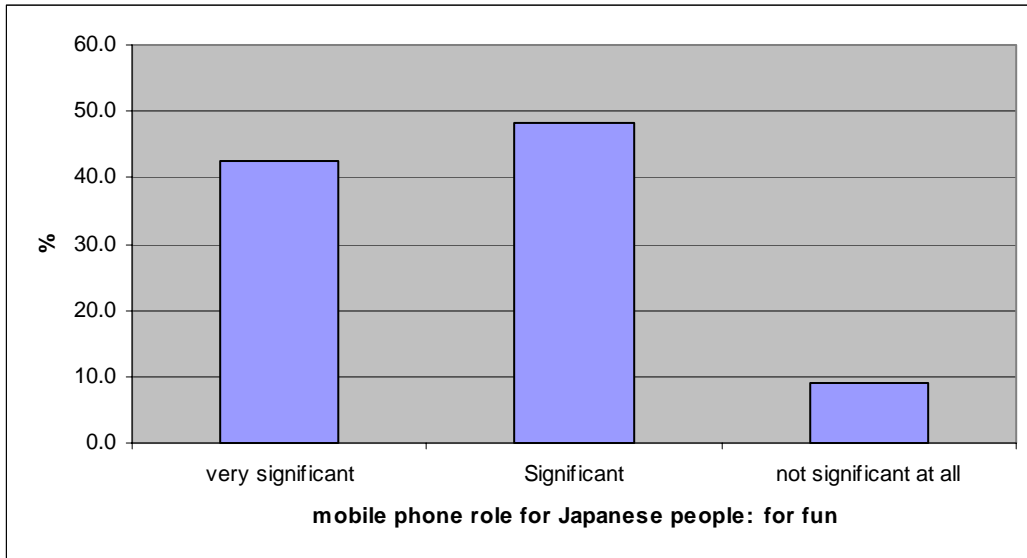
There does not seem to be significant differences in terms of gender on the perceived behavior of Japanese people when they forget their mobile phones at home.

**QUESTION: \*\* Please rate the importance of various roles of mobile phones for Japanese people in the following contexts.**

The following charts show how survey respondents rated the importance of various roles of the mobile phone for Japanese people. Among the various roles suggested, "for communication" and "for Business" are seen as the most important roles. Fashion and to Express Individuality are also seen as being very important for Japanese People.



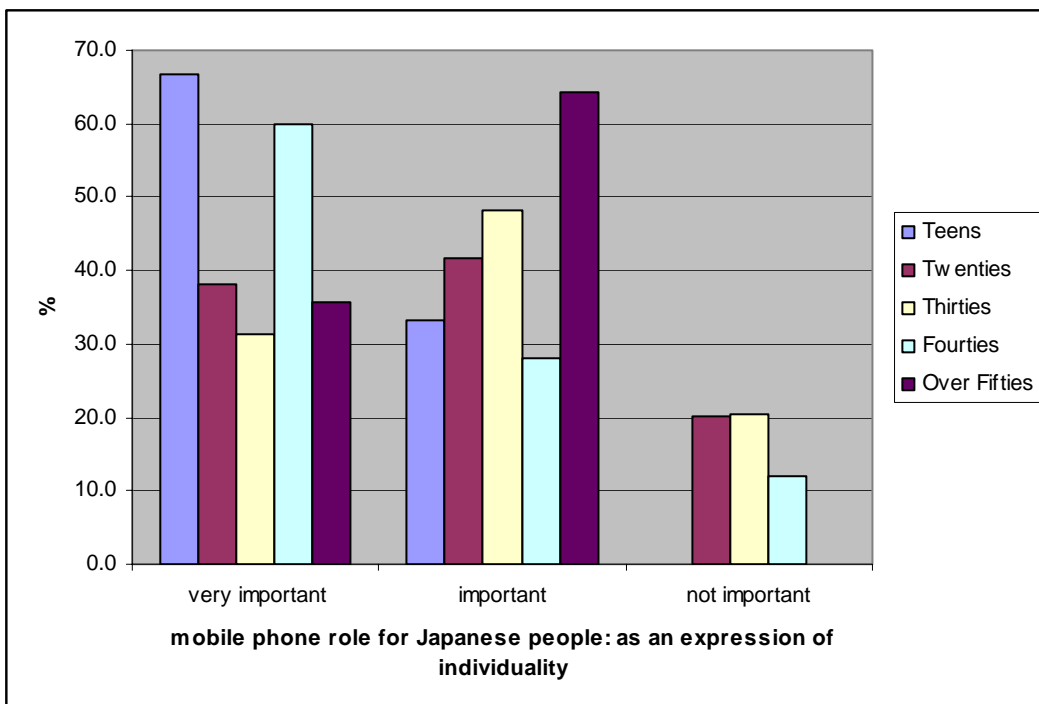
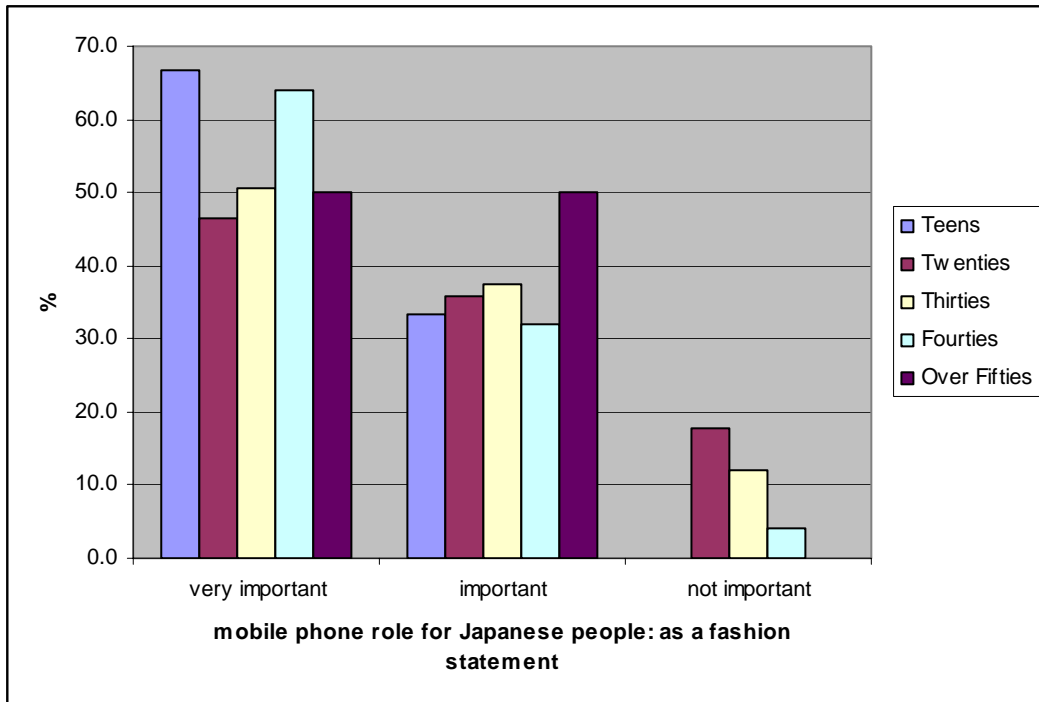


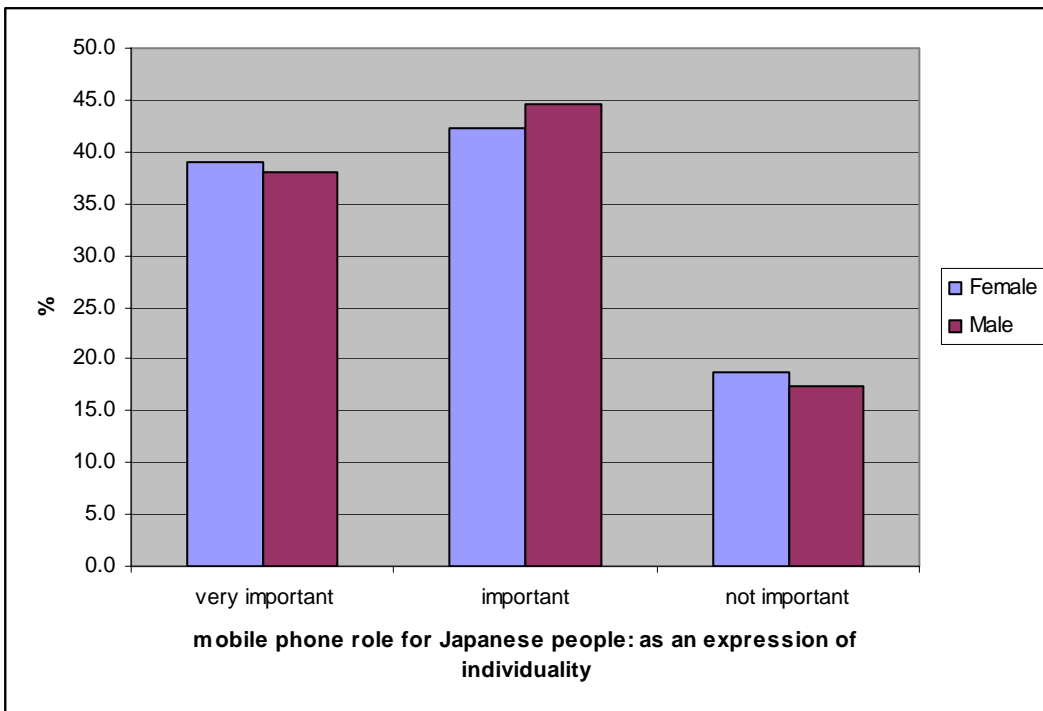
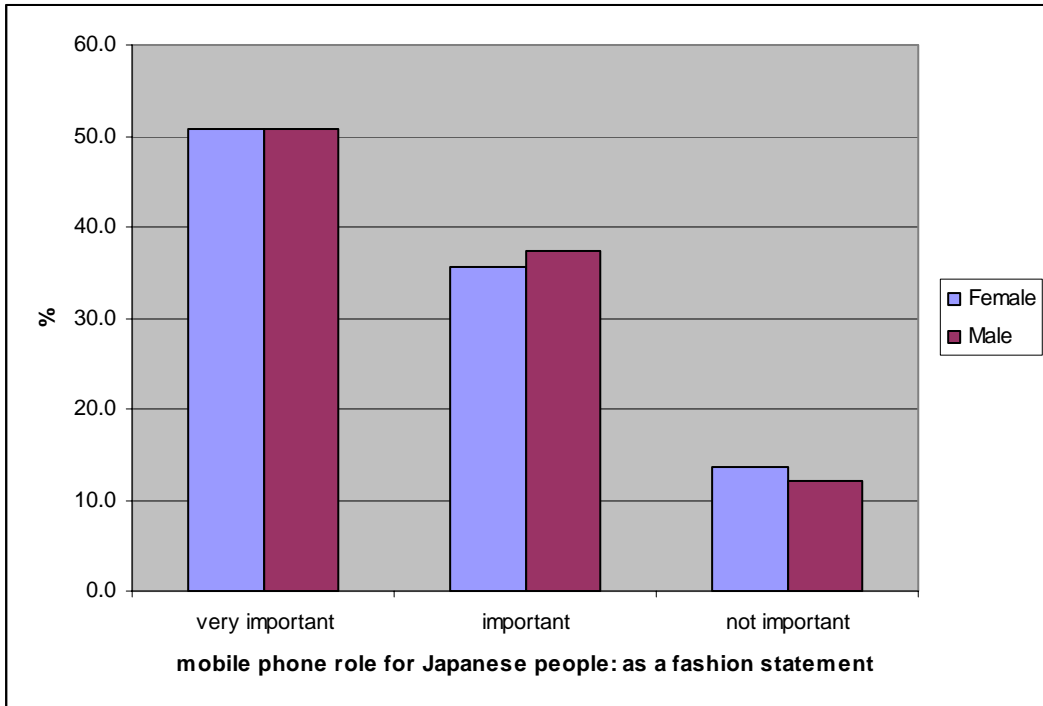


It is really interesting to note that most of respondents believe that the role of mobile phone as a tool for communication and business use are

the two most significant roles. This significant role is followed by the role mobile phone as being a fashion statement.

Picking out two of the roles, the phone as a fashion statement, and as an expression of individuality, it can be seen from the following charts that opinions from the participants are fairly consistent across gender and across the different age groups.



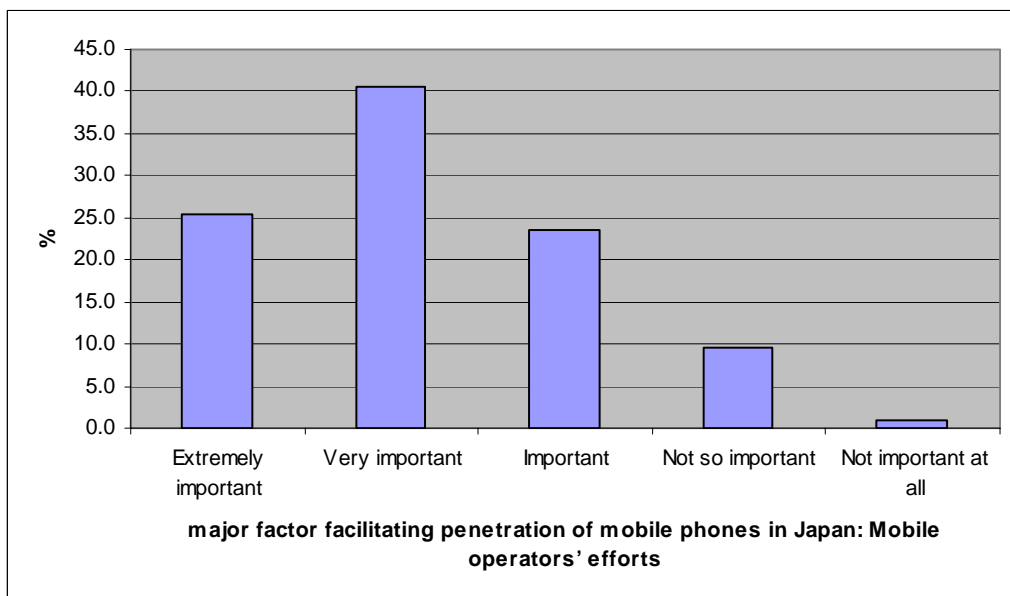
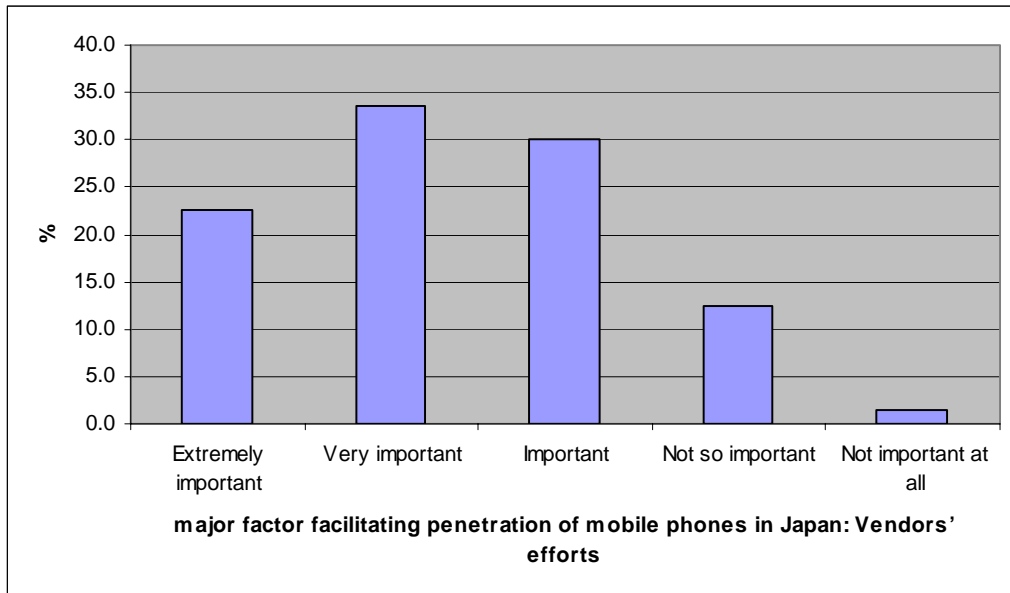


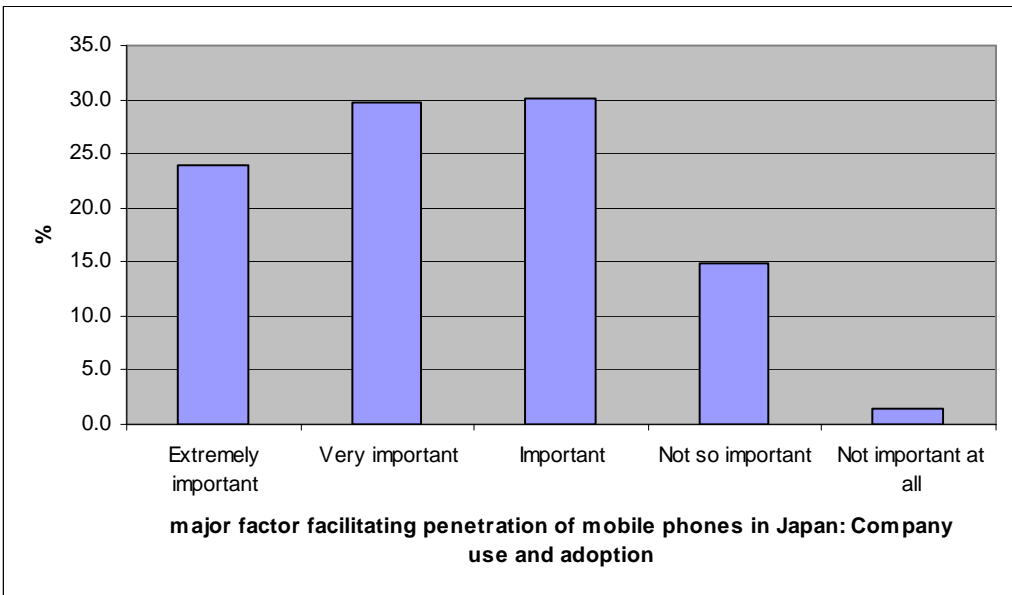
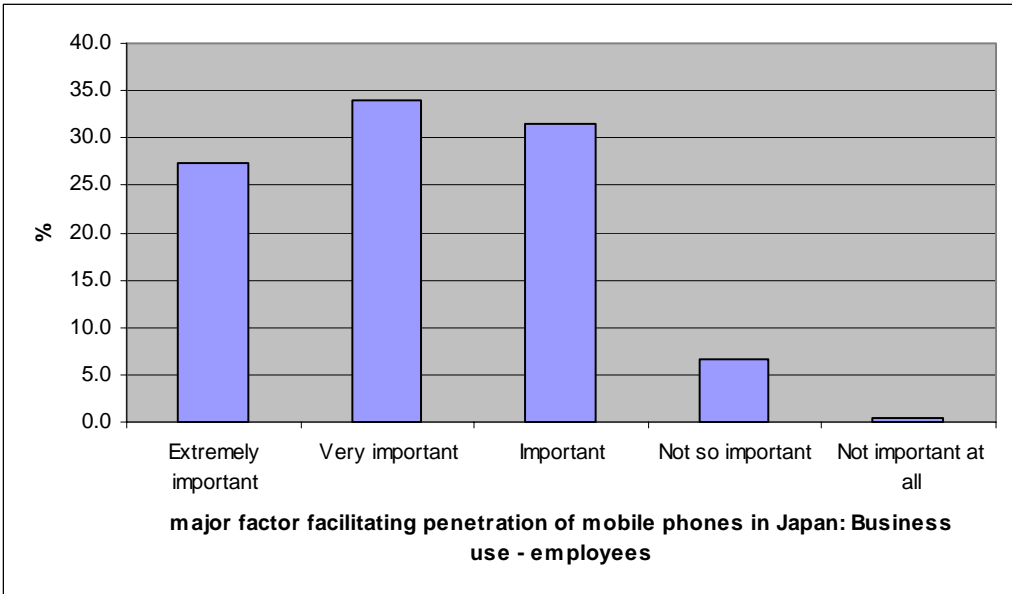
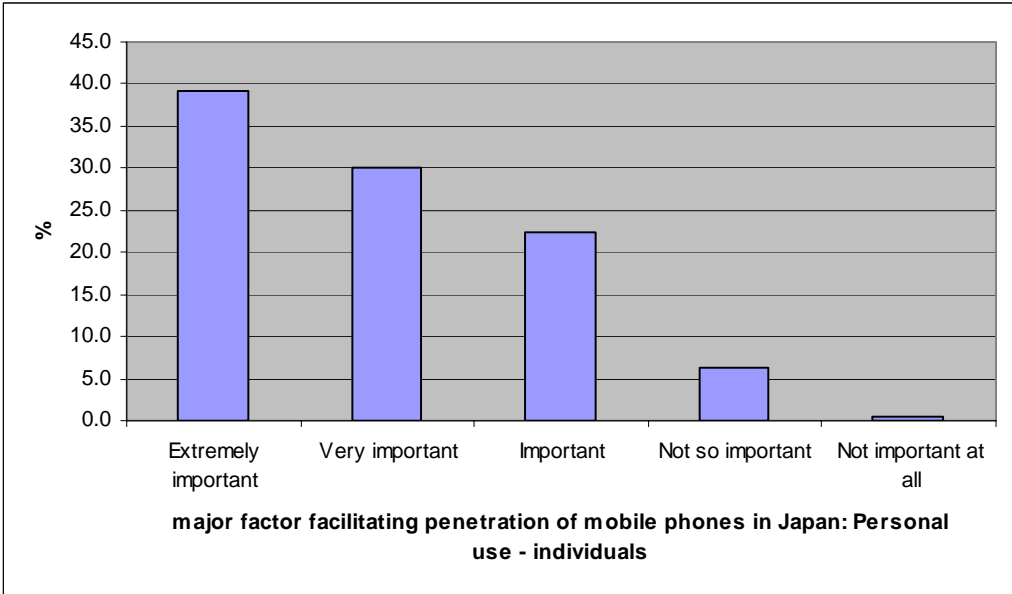
**QUESTION: \*\* Please rate the major factors facilitating the spread, popularity and use of mobile phones in Japan?**

The following charts show participants impressions about the major factors facilitating the spread, popularity and use of mobile phones in Japan. Individual usage, both for personal reasons and for business

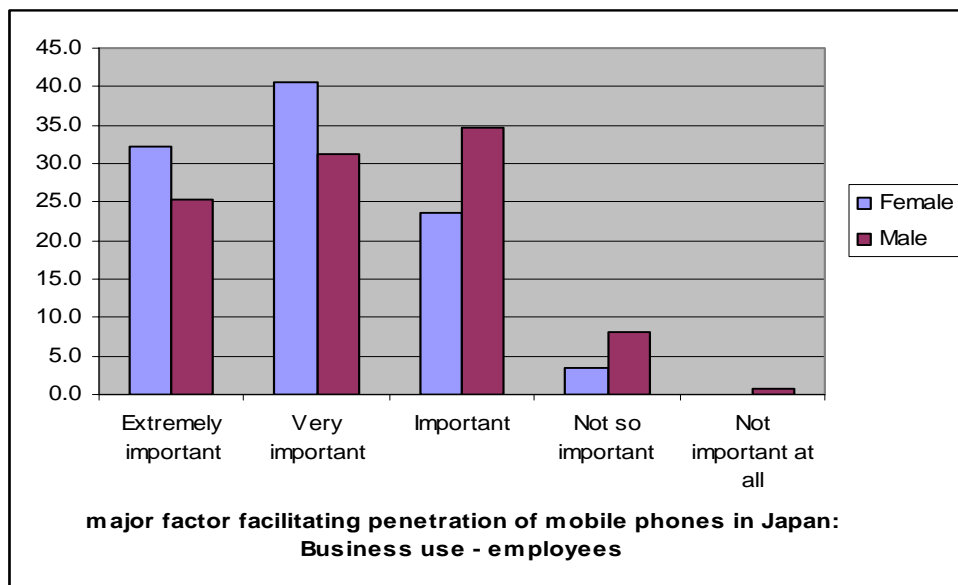
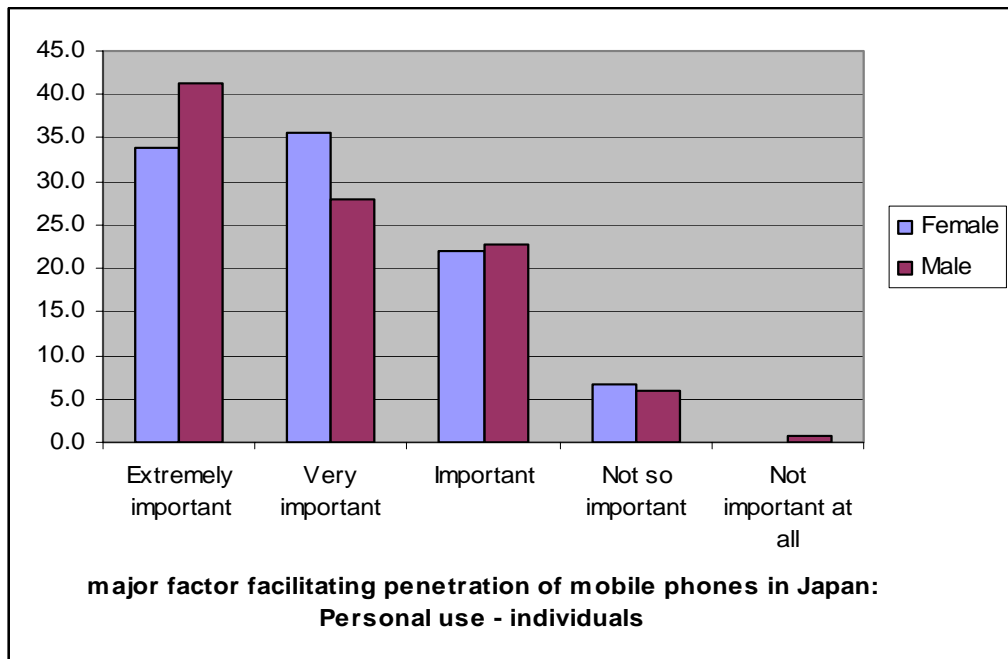
reasons, tends to be regarded as the most important reason for growth and popularity.

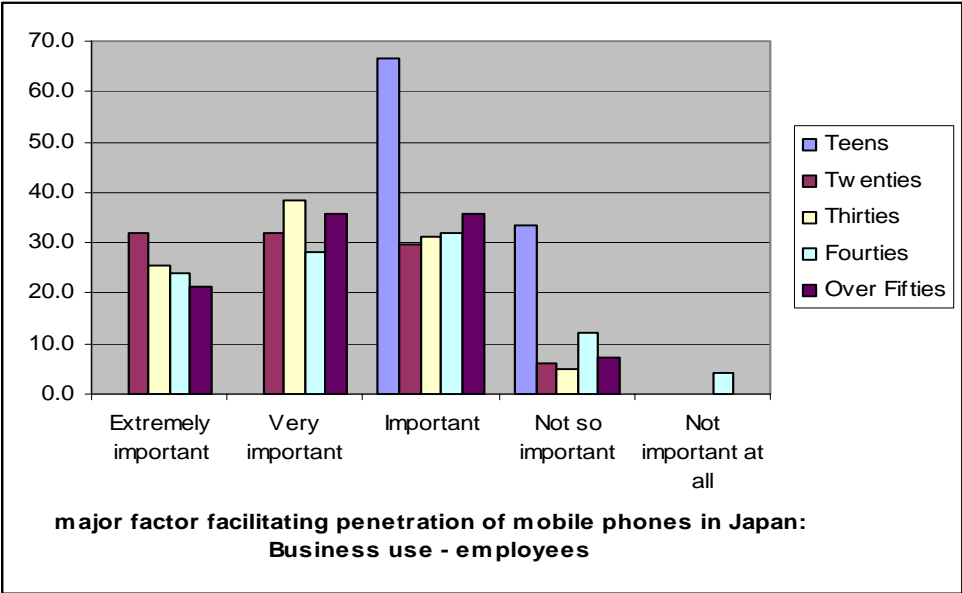
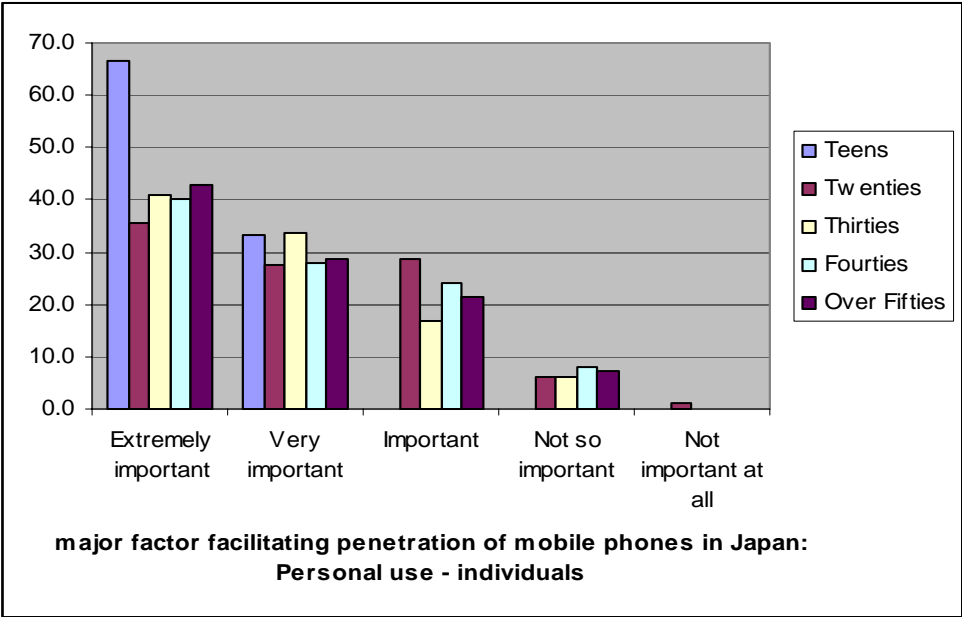
We believe this question must have been very difficult to answer by the respondents, as it requires some knowledge of the mobile communications sector in Japan.





The following charts show information for two of the factors most often regarded as important – personal use and individual business use – broken down by gender and by age groups. As can be seen, responses by age and gender are broadly consistent throughout the sample.





## Chapter 4. Influence of Mobile Phones

The analysis in the chapter will often be related to the open ended questions in the questionnaire. Questions in this part of the survey took two forms, firstly participants were asked questions about their direct experience and usage of mobile phones in Japan, and secondly participants were asked for their responses to photos illustrating different aspects of mobile phone usage in Japan. Lets start with direct experiences.

**QUESTION: \*\* Have you ever experienced/observed a situation involving mobile phone usage in Japan that was noticeably different to what you are familiar with in your own country?**

Participants were asked whether they had experienced or observed a situation involving mobile phone usage in Japan that was noticeably different to what they were familiar with in their own country. A surprisingly high proportion, nearly 40% - a total of 83 participants had not experienced any noticeably different situations of mobile phone usage.

Figure 10 below shows a breakdown of responses by region of origin. It is interesting to compare the responses between respondents from Europe and North America, noting that substantially more respondents from North America experienced or observed differences in usage than respondents from Europe.

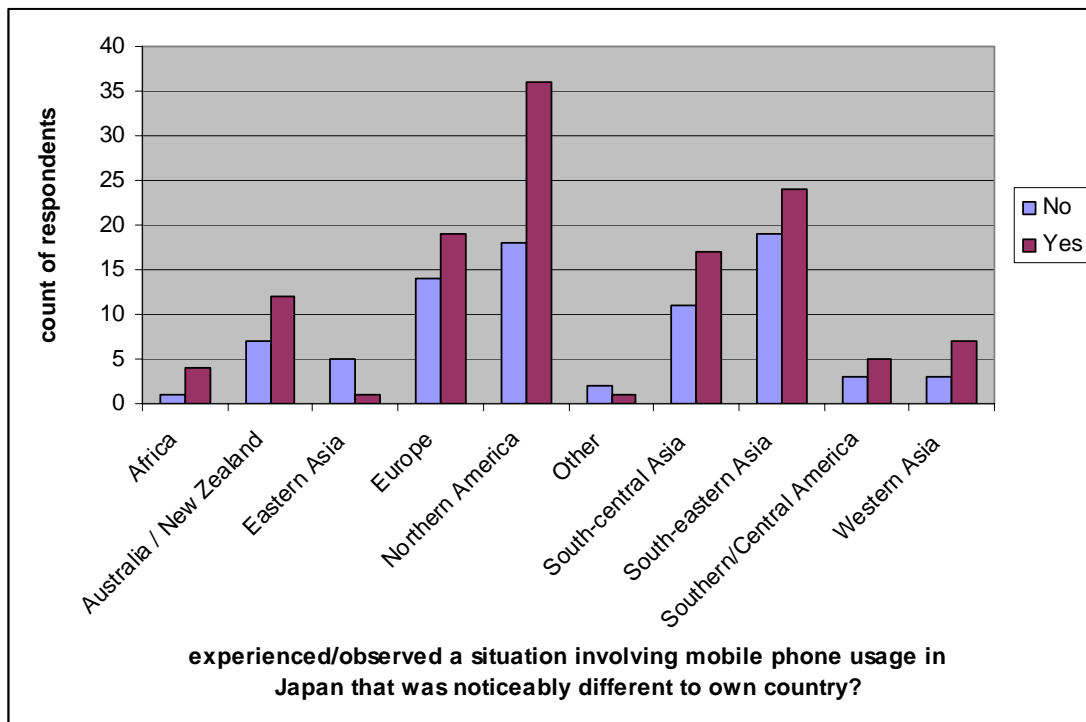


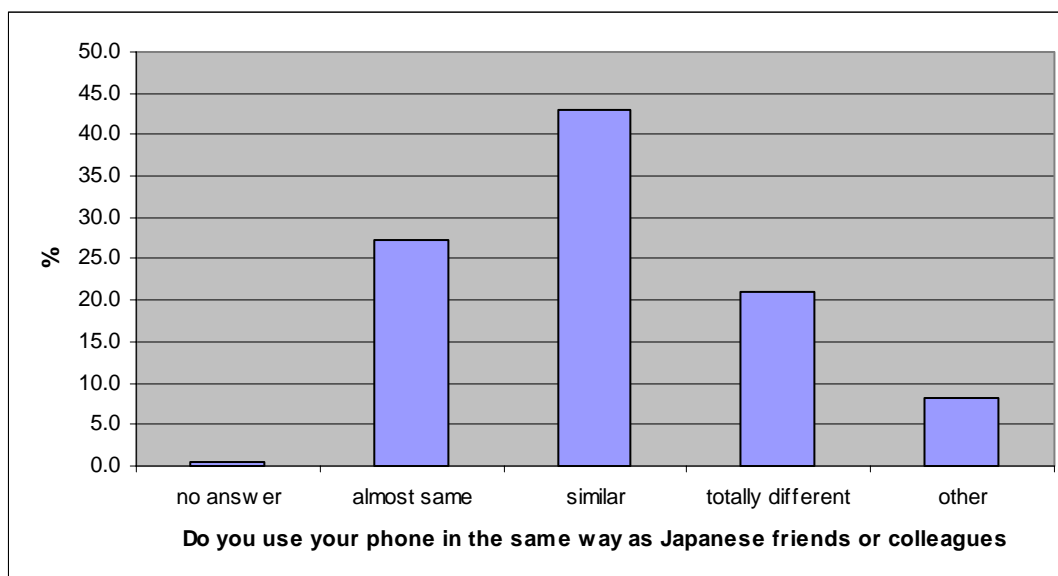
Figure 10: Foreign National's experiences by Region of Origin

**QUESTION: \*\*Have you ever experienced/observed a situation involving mobile phone usage in Japan that was noticeably different to what you are familiar with in your own country?**

Participants were then asked to briefly describe the situations they thought represented noticeably different behavior; and some representative comments are included in the section below.

**QUESTION: \*\*Do you use your mobile phone in the way your Japanese friends or colleagues use or is there a drastic difference?**

In the next question participants were asked whether they use their mobile phone in the same way as their Japanese friends and colleagues, or whether there was a drastic difference. Figure 11 shows that a total of 70% use their phones in a way that is similar or almost the same; and 21% use their phones in a way that is totally different.



**Figure 11: Foreign National's mobile phone usage**

The graph shows at least more than 20 percent of the respondents use their mobile phones in a different way than the Japanese do. We consider such a difference as significant and that it requires further explorations. The open-ended questions below do explain some these differences.

Now we turn into analysis of those open-ended questions that are based on pictures from various mobile phone usage scenarios.

#### **4.1. Behavioral Issues in the Japanese Mobile Society**

**SECTION IV: In the following questions I will present you an accompanying set of pictures. Please read each question and then take a look at the following sets photos of situations relevant to the question and fill in the text boxes with your thoughts and impressions - you are free to be very general or to refer to specific cases. These are open-ended questions and you should write how you feel about each of the picture set. If you don't have anything to say just type `n/a`**

The next section of the survey included a series of photos illustrating different phenomena associated with the use of mobile phone usage in Japan:

- The decoration of mobile phones with soft toys, straps, photo-stickers, etc
- The usage of mobile phones in spare time (e.g. while traveling etc)
- The use of posters and notices signaling correct usage of mobile phones in public places
- The usage of mobile phone while doing something else at the same time (e.g. walking, cycling etc)
- The usage of mobile phones by teenagers

Participants were asked to give their comments about each of these aspects. A number of key themes and observations emerged and are described in the following sections.

## 4.2. Customization or Decoration of Phones

In this section we describe participants' observations about the customization and decoration of mobile phones – in other words, participants' impressions about what this practice means to people who engage in it. This activity is seen as a uniquely Japanese phenomenon, there was no evidence that this practice is common in any of the participants' country of origin:

*“Japanese people tend to attach a great number of various accessories to their mobile phones, that never happens in my country”*

Specific ideas that emerged in this context include:

- 1) It's useful to have a phone that is personalized to you, making it easier to recognize amongst a group of your friends phones. Alternatively, a phone with straps on can be easier to retrieve from a handbag:

*“I like the strap as it helps me grab my mobile out of my purse”*

*“With phones being so small all of the decorated phones are easier to find and identify.”*

- 2) As a means of expressing your personality or individuality, or to demonstrate ones group affinities and interests

*“it is the self expression of their personality.”*

*“Merely a way to express one's personality”*

*"I think they are great. Allows people to show their individuality."*

*"Interesting way to assert one's creativity and identity"*

*"An extension of identity/personality - important in a society like Japan's where overt displays of individuality are discouraged."*

*"It does make the user unique so I am cool with that."*

*"This is a reflection of personal style it is not an issue (actually I have one strap with a beer can on it)."*

*"All mobiles in Japan have mascots attached to them. These items, usually character goods, add to the phone's individuality"*

- 3) As a holder for good luck charms or mementos. There is a sense in which the phone is seen as a receptacle for its owner's life – it has all their friends and families contact details in it, the messages and photos that constitute the owner's social life. Decorating the phone with personally meaningful objects enhances the phones role in this way.

*"These decorations are set to give the mobile phones, somehow, the owner's personality"*

*"Because people always carry it with themselves, it is place to put valuable (nice memory) to people things..."*

*"A simple feel-good accessory - like a baby blanket or stuffed animal"*

*"To commemorate a favourite caricature or loved one"*

*"Japanese people like small cute toys. They feel those decoration toys like living creature or their small friends."*

- 4) Customising the phone as a fashion statement, or as an item of personal jeweler

*"It is common for teenagers; they just want to be notice with their appearance"*

Respondents also noticed how the impulse to decorate and customize is not limited just to mobile phones, that this impulse is culturally widespread in Japan:

*"Japanese fill everything with manga and little objects so the mobile phones make no exception"*

#### **4.2.1. Attitudes towards Customized and Decorated Phones**

The section above described participants' observations about why people decorate and customize their phones, in this section we describe the range of responses that participants have towards this practice. A broad range of attitudes, from uncritically positive to strongly negative, are represented in the data as follows.

Many respondents were positive about this activity, appreciating the appearance the phone that were modified in this way, and believing that it is up to the individual to choose whether or not to engage in this activity:

*"I think mobile phones with these additional functions is lovely."*

*"It's cute and funky. Very very original. Only people of Japan can express themselves freely"*

A number of participants also describe decorating their own phones:

*"My first phone in Japan about 7 years ago was also heavily decorated with straps and toys"*

Some respondents were completely against the practice:

*"I think they look ridiculous and can't understand why people would want to carry around so many toys"*

*"Ugh..! Japanese have really bad taste!"*

*"I do not like it..."... "Silly" ... "Stupid and childish"*

And there were many respondents who had mixed feelings. Some thought it was OK for certain groups in society to indulge in this practice – young girls in particular, but it was not acceptable for other group:

*"I thought it was a female thing to decorate their mobile phones but I even find males with pretty interesting decorations on the phones"*

*"Weird for people over the age of 12 to like to have 'toys' hanging on their phones. They should be embarrassed."*

Some respondents thought a certain level of decoration was acceptable, but disapproved of too much customization, or were concerned about its affect on the usability of the device:

*"Too heavy/bulky! One or two dangly things or photos express individuality, a couple of dozen things indicates obsession!"*

*"Admittedly they are looked cute but these redundancies may hamper the functionality of the phones"*

### **4.3. Accounting for Different Patterns of Usage**

Survey respondents offered a number of insights to account for different patterns of usage for mobile phones in Japan compared to their own countries.

In particular, reduced phone costs and more flexible billing structures compared to respondents countries of origin were suggested as reasons for greater phone use, and for more diverse use of functionality beyond simple voice calls:

*"In Japan: incoming calls are free of charge, so phone number can be given to more people; no prepayment is needed; wider usage of mobile Internet; phone can be used as credit card; navigation system can be used for buildings search"*

*"I feel it important to mention that cell phone usage in Japan can be much more cheap than from where i come from"*

The expanded functionality of phone in Japan is also commented upon, particularly to account for a perceived preference for data over voice functionality.

*"They can use mobile phones like rechargeable electronic wallets here in Japan Mobile phones in Japan have higher capacity, e.g. serving on Internet, use as credit card, GPS etc."*

*"They use mobile phone in the trains to play game, to search internet all the time"*

*"People here in Japan use mobile phones for email and not so much for phone calls"*

*"They keep emailing by mobile phone in all spare time. In my country mobile phones don't have email function"*

#### **4.4. The Politics of Public Mobile Phone Use**

Comments concerned with appropriate public behavior with mobile phone permeated the survey, occurring in great frequency in all the relevant questions. For the most part participants commented about the politeness and consideration shown by Japanese people when using their phones in public places:

*"Japanese people have better phone manners than abroad e.g. speaking in a low volume in a public place"*

*"I was very impressed when I first came here that even though 95 % of Japanese seem to have a cell phone; people are very polite about taking phone calls in public."*

*"Most people will not speak on a phone in a public transport (subway, etc.), and will not speak loudly"*

*"In Japan people take a lot of care in talking at public places such as train, shops etc than my country."*

*"Simply, Japanese have better manners when using their phones."*

*"I think people of Japan are all well-mannered that although they receive important phone calls, in public places, they always consider other people that are present in the same public place."*

*"I think Japanese are sophisticated and polite in their use of mobile phones"*

Participants often remarked on the differences in behavior with their country of origin:

*"In Thailand, we can use mobile phone anywhere we want to. No strict rules applied like in Japan about mobile phone."*

*"Americans talk anywhere anytime in loud voices. It is very inconsiderate. Japanese are completely opposite in almost every situation."*

*"Japanese people use mobile phone less in public place compared to Mongolia. Example, they whisper in train and buses while talking on the phone."*

*"Japanese people seldom take the call when they are on the train or in the meeting while in Vietnam, this is not the case."*

Not all participants observed universally considerate behavior. There were a substantial number of comments that went against the trend, including reporting of specific examples of inconsiderate behavior:

*"I was seated on a plane before takeoff and a woman got a call on her mobile phone and she proceeded to keep talking while the flight attendant was trying to ask her to end the call."*

*"I think the situation is generally good, but too many people (especially those in the 12~30 age range) ignore mobile phone manners"*

*"In public places (train...resto..etc) there is still some who let their the mobile phone set with their annoying ring tones"*

Mobile phone usage whilst traveling, especially whilst driving or cycling attracted some strong comments; many participants were concerned about this behavior on safety grounds:

*"Hands-free sets should be mandatory for drivers. I have never seen such blatant irresponsibility--worse here than in any other country I have visited. "*

*"Sometimes it's scary to see people using their phone while riding on a bike or driving car- it's dangerous"*

Signage illustrating proper use of mobile phones was generally regarded as both necessary and appropriate:

*"I think it is very useful to remind people even they do not always follow the rules the signs help for proper use in Japan."*

*"That is a good way to remind every body everywhere how to use a mobile in a good manner. "*

*"It is ok with me and I don't feel oppressed with this kind of things."*

*"They appear as an effective reminder and create better public environment"*

*"This is very apt and the Japanese people abide by the rules and regulations"*

As Foreign Nationals, some participants felt that it would be helpful to experience the signs in a wider variety of languages, or in a form that was more consistent and recognizable:

*"They are not strong enough. They are also too varied in design to create a recognizable standard. It's a wonder whether anyone even notices them, since there are few similarities. If they were all circular, red, and clear, then I think people would consider them."*

*"Well, I can't read most of the signs. However, I think it is pretty obvious when it is inappropriate to use my phone"*

*"Maybe the message should be in English and Chinese, targeting those foreigners."*

Again, a number of participants comment on examples of rule-breaking:

*"People just ignore them. I see people on the trains using their cell phones near courtesy seats all the time."*

*"A lot of people ignore the signs in trains and hospitals, and it seems to me that it is the older people, not the kids, who are disobeying these requests"*

#### **4.5. Awareness of the Socio-Psychological Functions of Mobile Phones**

Participants commented on a wide range of subjects that might be termed the broader socio-psychological functions of the mobile phone; that is the role these items play in peoples live beyond the purely instrumental communicative and information-seeking function.

Participants tended to observe that the mobile phone plays a broader, more nuanced role for Japanese people than in their own countries:

*"Compared to my own country, mobile phones seem to play a larger part in people's lives and to a larger cross-section of society."*

Many participants related their observations about mobile phone use to perceptions of the characteristics of Japanese society:

*"Japanese people ... prefer to communicate each other from some distance. That's why mobile is a important tool for their society"*

*"Many Japanese people do not have much spare time and mobile is one of entertainment to release heavy workload and loneliness."*

*"As a foreigner, I don't feel that Japanese people interact with each other much, they look more isolated and more choose society of a "digital friend" to people"*

*"I see couples out on dates together on their cell phones instead of speaking to each other. Japanese people are losing the ability to communicate with those in the same room with them"*

*"Mobiles have drastically reduced Japanese's ability to socialize with other humans"*

*"When most of my friends said that they would rather email someone than talk to them directly or even with the phone it makes me wonder how good the mobile society is on actual social skills."*

*"I often hear that young people are just not that good at using their voice to express themselves"*

*"It is integral to keeping in touch in a society that encourages silence and minimal face to face expression of affection or true feelings"*

A number of comments described how urban Japanese people tend to lead very busy lives, and often commute longer on public transport than people in the respondents own countries – this is seen as a contributing factor for extensive mobile use.

*"The use of mobile phone in Japan is essential for a large population used to commuting a lot to go to work, using heavily public transportation."*

*"It is important to remark that traveling times by metro or train are longer or more frequent in Japan than what we are used to, so there are more occasions to use a mobile"*

*"Being from the U.S., generally speaking people aren't away from home or work so much, because more people drive"*

Participants also describe how the mobile phone is used by an individual to define their personal space, or to offset a sense of vulnerability or aloneness:

*"phone usage while on the move is extreme, used in the same way as a cigarette to fill in time, it also acts as a barrier to those around you, making it look as if you are busy and so not to be disturbed."*

*"It is a good way to keep in touch on the go but I think it sets up communication barriers with people around you."*

*"I did notice that many Japanese individuals used their phone almost as a shell to the outside world."*

Many of these comments appear to regard excessive mobile use as a barrier to communication, but the opposite opinion was also widely represented – the mobile phone enhancing communication in society:

*"I appreciate the sense of security that comes from being able to contact our loved ones easily."*

*"For teenagers, mobile phones are their toys which can improve their social contact."*

*"I think that to have a mobile phone for a teenager is a good way for communication with their parents (the most important issue) and friends"*

*"It helps them communicate more."*

*"It can help sociability but should be used with control"*

*"It's important for teenagers to have their own mobile phone in order to communicate with their parents/families"*

Participants also described the use of the mobile phone during social gatherings by groups of co-located people:

*"At a party in a restaurant, students in the same class did not talk to each other but instead used their mobile phones, staring into them"*

*"I really hate it when you see a group of people together and everyone is playing with their phones instead of talking to each other."*

*"Everyone wants to be seen using their phone as a statement of how important they are within their group"*

## Chapter 5. Discussion & Conclusions

This section includes a discussion that relates results back to original aims and objectives that we stated at the beginning of the report. The general impression we have got from non-Japanese respondents that they do confirm most of the issues related to a successful use on mobile phones in Japanese society. However, the study proved to be significant in gaining deeper knowledge socio-psychological impacts of mobile phones – positive and negative. This can range from those issue that are of concern to an individual as user/owner of a mobile phone and also to the members of the society as being made up by those but at the same time being influenced by the very actions of those individuals.

The findings of the survey may be summarised as follow:

- Whether at the individual level, among family members or friends the mobile phone is an effective communication tool. It also helps to promote communication among those who don't know each other and also among those who are in different age group.
- The foreign nationals often think that Majority of Japanese people have an appropriate manner and are often very polite in responding to mobile phone especially in public places.
- Most of respondents are pretty sure that Japanese people would feel uncomfortable if they forgot their mobile phone at home.
- Various roles of mobile phones are rated by the respondents as significant or very significant, including the roles as killing time, obtaining information, and providing fun etc. The respondents were

not very sure about the significance of the role of mobile phone providing safety.

- There is a common understanding that Japanese people give importance to personalize their mobile phones. There may be various reasons for this:
  - a. that could be about the expression of individuality,
  - b. or just so that you can recognize your own phone amongst your friends/family,
  - c. or to make it easier to use – straps make it easy to find it in a handbag
  - d. or it could be to make the phone more your own – as a holder of objects that relate to your own life.
  - e. to express individuality or personality
  - f. it is “important in a society where overt displays of individuality are discouraged”
  - g. To establish one’s group membership/affinity.
  - h. Decorations as a personalization tool may be seen as good luck charms or a memento; this may have roots in some sort of superstition or a long tradition of this sort of activity. Or it may just be “a simple feel-good” accessory.
  - i. To be used as a fashion statement
  - j. To enhance mobile phone’s position as a receptacle or container of the owners life
  - k. Phone may serve as part of the jewellery
  
- Overall an observed theme regarding the personalization may be that there are differences in attitude towards ‘expression of individuality’ – as this seems to be more of a personal identity issue involving ‘lucky charms’, or ‘holder for mementos’. In this way personalization becomes more about identity than it is about individuality. Identity may be more about defining and relating to ones community, than standing apart as an individual per se. If we consider decoration of mobile phones as personalization various different attitudes may be summarized:
  - a. Negative: because it’s ugly or clumsy; because it makes the phone less usable or mobile or there are negative attitudes towards the people who do it.
  - b. OK, but only for certain demographics (i.e. young girls, not boys, or not older males – infantile activity); OK, but only for a certain level of decoration; OK, but to make the phone more usable – i.e. strap to get hold of it, or to identify own phone in a group of phones.
  - c. Positive: because it’s the personal choice of phone owner; because the respondent appreciates or enjoys this sort of decoration ‘its cute’.

- An important observation is related to the reasons why mobile phones may be used so widely and in different way used in Japan than respective countries of foreign nationals:
  - 1) Cost and billing structures in Japan
    - a. Cheaper than own country
    - b. Inbound calls are free (in comparison to some countries)
  - 2) Because people travel/commute for longer and have long working hours, therefore people take advantage of travel time to stay in contact with loved ones
    - a. In particular, public transport is used much more widely.
    - b. Phone is used much more frequently – creating need for more structured conditions and opportunities about usage.
  - 3) As a way of avoiding contact with strangers and/or awkward situations in public.
  - 4) Preference for mobile over fixed line use, and over internet use
    - a. Even in office environment
    - b. Can be related to cost of fixed line / internet
  - 5) Extra functionality on Japanese phones also lead to predominance of frivolous use
  - 6) To share photos/mementos with others
- There was a significant comments on the politics / manner of mobile phones public use:
  - 1) Most of the comments were about the politeness and mannered nature of Japanese mobile phone use, particularly in comparison to own countries.
  - 2) But also much comment about exceptions and general rule breaking (unmannered use) of businessmen in restaurants or teenage girls on trains
  - 3) In relation to the group use of phones amongst younger people there were references to
    - a. People on dates “texting” others during the date,
    - b. Groups of young people interacting with non-present others,
    - c. Young people were interacting with present others using text across the room.
  - 4) The dangers of accidents, in particular when cycling or driving
  - 5) Positive effects of public use
    - a. saving time,
    - b. always being in contact,
    - c. the ‘total info-society’,
    - d. educational benefits
  - 6) Signage (posters) for proper use in public - most respondents are positive
    - a. many note that this works well in Japanese society,

- b. picture-based signage better for foreigners than words,
  - c. only some suggestions that Japanese people ignore these signs
- There were various comments about **the perceived dangers and negative impacts** of mobile phone usage:
  - 1) Mobile phones lead to social isolation / withdrawal from groups and society.
  - 2) youngsters don't learn to communicate or if they do, it is not 'proper' communication. Also cited is that communication via mobile is 'empty' and it contributes to lack of attention span
  - 3) users unaware of their environments – may become victims of crime - rise of mobile related crimes.
  - 4) youngsters neglecting their studies.
  - 5) reduction in family communication.
  - 6) enables people to appear busy and unapproachable.
  - 7) prevents other more 'worthwhile' activities such as reduced book reading or 'creative' activities.
  - 8) physical health risks such as eyesight or brain damage.
- There was also various comments related to **Positive impacts of usage**:
  - 1) Mobile phones can help "not to feel alone".
  - 2) They can have positive affects on communication, for example,
    - a. less chance of embarrassment or making a mistake if one is mailing via mobile phone
    - b. ease of establishing and maintain relationships
  - 3) They can be used for safety – particularly for parents
  - 4) They can help to create a social cohesion
  - 5) They can be used when nervous in public. A mobile phone
    - a. enables people to seem busy
    - b. enables people to be unapproachable
    - c. can create social crutch
    - d. can avoid embarrassment
  - 6) A variety of benefits for the public use such as saving time, always being in contact, making up the 'total info-society', and providing educational benefits.

Whether it is used just to pass time or to obtain sophisticated data, a mobile phone is so much part of our life and even our "body" that it is really "Hard to live without it". It is even harder to imagine not only a Japanese society but any society without the mobile phones and their influences.